

# THE EMBODIMENT OF IMAGINATION AND INNOVATION

By Mike Journee



WARD HOOPER

**THOSE WHO TREAD THE PATH OF IMAGINATION AND INNOVATION GO, BY DEFINITION, THE WAY LESS TRAVELED. THEY DO THE UNEXPECTED. THEY FIND A NEW COURSE. THEY ARE TRAILBLAZERS.**



JOHN KELLY

Those who tread the path of imagination and innovation go, by definition, the way less traveled. They do the unexpected. They find a new course. They are trailblazers.

Boise State's most celebrated innovators capture the imagination of their fans on the university's famed blue turf. Just as the Broncos are known for inventive, well-executed football, Boise State's continuing rise as a metropolitan research university rests on a foundation of innovation and imagination that permeates its culture and the identity of its most important product: its graduates.

They are researchers, artists, performers, authors, entrepreneurs, soldiers, policy makers, scientists, engineers and philanthropists – each making his or her own contribution to the increasing value of a Boise State degree while finding solutions to some of mankind's most important questions and challenges.

And, as innovators, many of them eschew more traditional career paths for those that let them apply what they learned at Boise State to new opportunities. For these intrepid Broncos, new directions have not only led to personal success and fulfillment, but also allowed them to leave their own marks on the world.

## **A Familiar, Old School Feel**

**THERE IS NO MISTAKING THE WORK OF WARD HOOPER** (B.A., graphic design, '87). Even if you have not seen one of his popular illustrations, the iconic images and familiar style are timeless.

Infused with civic pride, Hooper's aesthetic style is rooted in the flowing, floral lines of art nouveau and the homey narrative works of Norman Rockwell – nostalgically reminiscent of silk-screen advertisements from the early 20th century. They often feature a well-known Idaho image, like the jagged backbone of the Sawtooth Mountains, a craftsman-style bungalow from Boise's North End, or the Perrine Bridge spanning the Snake River Canyon at Twin Falls.

"I took the American spin of those styles and created art specific to this region," says Hooper. "It's simplifying icons into graphic images that trigger memories or what someone would like their classic experience at that place to be. I want it to be a walk-away experience."

It works. Hooper's illustrations have earned him a number of local recognitions, including top honors as Boise's favorite visual artist in 2007 by Boise Weekly readers.

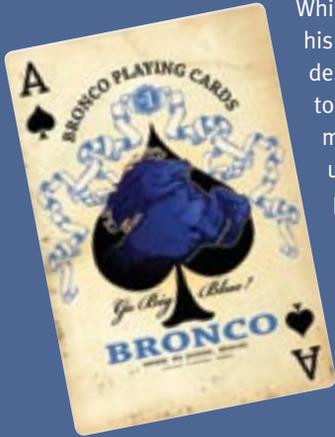
As a kid growing up in Grangeville, Hooper wanted to be a wildlife artist. But when he arrived at Boise State, he was told that the best way to make a living in art was to become a graphic designer and go into advertising. He earned his degree and learned the advertising trade.

Then, in 2003, he won the commission for the Art In Transit series, which adorned bus stop kiosks all over the city with familiar images from Boise neighborhoods and landmarks.

"That series was so successful, it gave me a chance to do a lot of things that I've always wanted to do," says Hooper, surrounded in his studio by hundreds of illustrations depicting Idaho's special places.

The series' nostalgic rendition of landmarks, like the Idaho Statehouse, downtown Boise's Idanha Hotel and the Boise train depot, spoke to people.

"Ward made a shift from doing something that was more personal for him to doing something that had more civic awareness and that, oddly, became more personal for those who see his work," says Karen Bubb, public arts manager for the City of Boise.



While Hooper's images feel old school, his process is not. Using modern graphic design software, his methods owe more to the advertising and graphic arts methods of his training as a Boise State undergraduate than to the silk-screen process of his inspiration.

His success has allowed him once again to turn to his initial love of outdoor and wildlife subjects. Today, his portfolio is filled with stylized images of Idaho's natural wonders and mega fauna like elk, wolves and salmon. And occasionally, he'll take

on a corporate commission from a company hoping to associate itself with the same kind of romance that exudes from old Coca-Cola ads of the 1920s – a return of sorts to the advertising of his young career.

"I've always been drawn to that older aesthetic that's reminiscent of an era that few people even remember anymore," says Hooper.

## A Dream and Another World

**THERESA GRANT** (B.A., political science, '98) **HOPES TO DO NOTHING LESS THAN END POVERTY.** She has started that monumental task in a corner of sub-Saharan Africa in the shadow of Mount Kilimanjaro.

Grant leads Make a Difference Now, a nonprofit organization that helps empower orphaned children and youth in Tanzania by providing programs and services that focus on education, health, job training and income generating activities.

In Tanzania, the organization operates an orphanage housing 22 children. It covers the \$1 per day cost of sending the children to a private elementary school nearby and the \$2,000 annual cost of sending them away to a private secondary school where students are boarded. In addition, Make a Difference Now helps about 2,000 children in the Moshi area of Tanzania with the costs of public primary and high school education.



"We want these children to stay as close as possible to their home villages but still

get the best education possible," Grant says. "We want them to come back and use their education among their own people – to give back and help break the cycle of poverty."

Grant says she never wanted to work in Africa when she was younger. The international relations emphasis of her political science degree set her up nicely as a Silicon Valley public relations professional with a six-figure income.

But five years ago, images of gaunt dark-skinned children suffering the ravages of poverty and sickness alone in a bleak world would not leave her. Night after night, the recurring dream nudged her closer to a reality a world away – literally and figuratively. Finally, she was resolved. She sold all of her possessions and moved to Africa to do what she could to help the continent's estimated 12.3 million children orphaned by HIV/AIDS.

"At that point, I don't even know if I knew anyone from Africa outside of South Africa," says Grant.

Ross Burkhart, head of Boise State's Department of Political Science, says Grant's experience and choice of career path isn't uncommon among graduates of his department's international relations program.

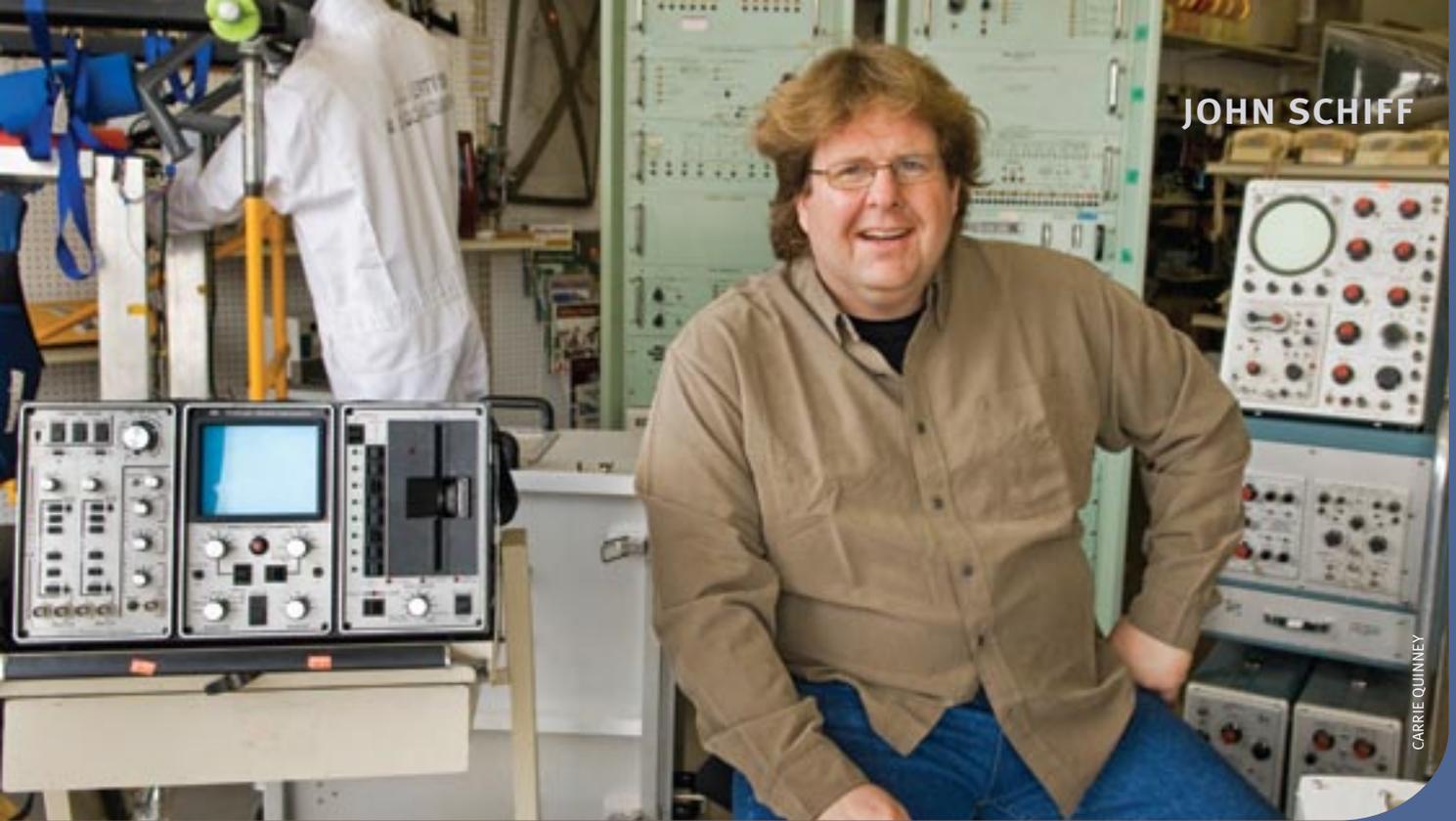


"I think for many of our students, it's not completely evident how their degrees will be relevant to what they do," says Burkhart. "It's an entrepreneurial spirit that they bring to their careers."

Grant's goal of ending poverty is gaining momentum. Since 2005, she has raised about \$500,000 for Make a Difference Now, in part by enlisting volunteers who spend from two to four weeks helping at orphanages and schools. Volunteers help fund the organization by paying \$60 per day for room and board.

A Hailey native, Grant credits her international relations studies at Boise State with planting the seed that grew into Make a Difference Now.

"It opened my eyes to the world," Grant says, not only of her daily classes, but also of opportunities to study overseas. "I not only got the chance to take classes that addressed another culture, I got to see that culture in action on a daily basis. All have been key to helping me in what I'm doing now."



CARRIE QUINNEY

## Going Green by the Pallet

**IN 1999, THE KERNEL OF A NEW IDEA SAT IN FRONT OF JOHN SCHIFF** (B.A., communication, '89) on two pallets of used audio-visual equipment. He'd bought the pallets simply to get his hands on an obsolete tape deck he needed to make tape dubs for one of his public relations clients.

After the dubs were made, Schiff quickly sold the rest of the equipment on a new Web site called eBay. It was the start of Obtainium, one of two eco-minded technology and electronics salvaging companies Schiff owns today in Garden City.

Salvaging and selling anything he can from the truckloads of technological odds and ends he buys, Schiff squeezes the last bit of usefulness from not-quite-obsolete technology, saving it from a landfill for at least one more use.

If he cannot interest Obtainium's online customers in an item, Schiff often will find a buyer for it at the Reuseum, his storefront outlet that is the only place in town to find a DARPA-NASA drone (if you're in the market) and has "Idaho's largest collection of Polaroid cameras," according to Schiff.

Schiff's Reuseum is not just for high-tech enthusiasts. It also draws artists, engineers, tinkerers and inventors seeking that just-right part or tool for whatever project they might have on their drawing boards or workbenches.

Subsidized by the profitable Obtainium, Schiff sees the Reuseum as a place to off-load things he cannot turn into profit.

"Unfortunately, here we have the mentality that we use it and throw it away," says Schiff, who sells most of the things he acquires to resource-hungry China. "Reusing this isn't just a great green idea, it's a way to grow the economy."

John Gardner, associate vice president for energy research, policy and campus sustainability at Boise State and a fan of the Reuseum, agrees. In particular, Gardner is enamored of the regular workshops hosted by Schiff and Reuseum manager David Gapen to help customers build useful items using recycled materials.

"This idea of selling industrial and government surplus isn't new," says Gardner. "But helping people understand the technology and reuse it – that is. There are an awful lot of resources invested in the things he has on those shelves and to throw it away is such a waste."

Today, Obtainium's lofty warehouse is temporary home to a lightning generator from Stanford University, pallets of air filters from the Department of Energy's Nevada Test Site and rows and rows of other unlikely items.

It's junk to most, but to those who get what Schiff is trying to do, it's gold.

"We just cannot continue to use things up and expect the economy to keep up," says Schiff, looking around at the Reuseum's shelves. "We've only just begun to think about ways to make stuff like this work for us again. It's important that people begin thinking about this on a level that really makes a difference."



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