

FANTASTIC FIVE

BOISE STATE ALUMS WHO ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

“THE DIRECTION IN WHICH EDUCATION STARTS A MAN WILL DETERMINE HIS FUTURE LIFE.”

PLATO (427 BC - 347 BC), “THE REPUBLIC”

There are many marks of Boise State’s success, but perhaps the most appropriate is the direction of the lives its alumni lead. About 65,000 people lay claim to Boise State as their alma mater. They live all over the globe and do all kinds of things. It’s their success that gives a Boise State degree its growing cachet and it’s their work that helps make the world go ’round.

Each has his or her own story, with lives going in directions influenced by their time at Boise State. Reporting on all their achievements is impossible, so following are just a handful of the thousands of success stories our alumni are living – a small sliver of the world that belongs to the blue and orange.

THE REGULATOR

Name: Toni Hardesty Age: 43

Degree: BS, environmental health, 1988

Day job: Director, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Boise

For Toni Hardesty, it was the detail of science that drew her to the art of public policy. At the time, during Hardesty’s undergraduate years, the idea of an environmental health industry was a bit of an oxymoron.

But luckily for Hardesty, the present-day director of Idaho’s Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Boise State created opportunities that let her see the potential of marrying technical science to public policy long before being green was the thing to do.

“When I entered the environmental health industry it was still a fairly small and limited world. It certainly wasn’t like today, with so many opportunities,” Hardesty says. “Boise State prepared me very well on the technical side of science, but things really opened up once I learned that I could

transfer that into policy.”

She spent her first two years in college in the labs and classrooms of the hard sciences. The first inkling of a career in the making came in an introductory environmental health class. Around that time, Hardesty met Eldon Edmundson, the former dean of the College of Health Sciences.

“He was phenomenal,” she says. “He had a vested interest in people as students and spent an incredible amount of time with them to understand their interests.”

He saw something in Hardesty and helped her get in an internship at DEQ. While the implication wasn’t clear at the time, the internship solidified Hardesty’s path that ultimately lead to her responsibility for efforts to preserve the quality of Idaho’s air,



land and water for enjoyment and use today and into the future.

Words to live by: Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. – Ralph Waldo Emerson

THE EDUCATOR

As Robin Sly approached 30 she took stock of her life: She was climbing the corporate ladder professionally but getting nowhere personally.



“I realized, I’m really unhappy with what I’m doing,” she says. “And I

always wanted to be a teacher. And so I just went home and told my husband one day, I’m quitting my job and going back to school.”

Idaho’s first-grade students are better off for her epiphany — Sly recently was named Idaho Teacher of the Year by the Idaho Department of Education. She credits her lifelong love of learning with keeping her motivated as a teacher and as a person.

First grade has come a long way since she was in elementary school; her students give PowerPoint presentations and are comfortable with technology in ways that previous generations could scarcely imagine. That means that Sly has to be on her toes, too: “They had to teach

me a few things about PowerPoint,” she laughs.

Sly received both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the College of Education, and now she mentors up-and-coming educators. She also works with the state to further awareness and understanding of students who are “twice-gifted,” meaning that they are intellectually gifted along with having a learning disability.

And her work isn’t done yet: “I’m thinking that a doctorate would be a nice 50th birthday present for myself.”

Words to live by: If they can’t learn the way we teach, teach the way they learn.

Name: Robin Sly Age: 48

Degree: BA, elementary education, 1997; MA, curriculum with emphasis in reading, 2003; endorsement, gifted and talented education, 2007

Day job: First-grade teacher, Trail Wind Elementary School, Boise



Courtesy of NASA



THE PROTECTOR

Name: Anna Hawkins Age: 30

Degree: BS, mechanical engineering, 2001

Day job: Fluid design engineer, United Space Alliance, Merritt Island, Fla.

On Jan. 28, 1986, the Space Shuttle Challenger broke apart 73 seconds after launching, killing all seven crewmembers. It was an unparalleled disaster for NASA and still stands as a reminder to those involved with the space program never to be complacent.

Boise State alum Anna Hawkins is anything but complacent. As a fluid design engineer for United Space Alliance, which contracts with NASA to perform all sustaining engineering for the Space Shuttle Program, she understands that responsibility for American lives and resources is just part of the job.

“It is important that we do things carefully and thoroughly, because the smallest mishap can damage the shuttle and can

potentially cause the loss of life,” she says. “It really is a neat experience to know that you have a hand in the safety of the astronauts and the success of each mission.”

Hawkins’ niche at United Space Alliance is in sustaining engineering for all fluid aspects of ground support structures, including orbiter processing and vehicle assembly facilities, launch pads and anything else used to maintain shuttles at the famed Kennedy Space Center. She is a designer, problem solver and manager rolled into one with the singular job perk of watching several million pounds of metal leave the Earth on a massive tongue of fire.

“We launch about eight times per year. Each launch is spectacular,” says Hawkins.

“I particularly like to watch night launches; they light up the sky as if it is midday.”

In the midst of such an exciting, evolving industry, Hawkins often looks to the lessons she learned as an undergraduate in Boise State’s College of Engineering.

“My education helped me to be proficient at problem solving. It also taught a lot of teamwork, and everything we do here is as a team. I learned to persevere when things get tough,” she says, “and to look to the right people for help.”

Words to live by: Life is tough, but the results are worth working for.



“I sat in classes with other law students who did their undergraduate work at the best universities in the world. I was ready for that kind of academic rigor because of Boise State.”

For Nick Oldham, history in the making is workaday.

On this young U.S. Justice Department attorney’s desk sit files for cases swirling around one of modern America’s most controversial chapters – the status of people being held at the detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The cases he’s worked on have made headlines worldwide.

If you measure dream seasons by accomplishments, Brian King has more than a few under his belt.

As a member of the Bronco basketball team from 1986-90, King helped the Broncos nab two league championships, an NCAA tournament appearance against the University of Michigan, two National Invitation Tournament bids and a routinely sold-out arena. He played a couple of years of professional basketball in Australia then jumped into the asset management business, where his dreams just grew bigger.

“I guess I’m one of those guys who always knew what he wanted to do, and did it,” he says.

“It” was working in the world of finance, and King now calls plays as senior vice president of Royal Bank of Canada’s U.S. Wealth Management Division. Not that he

A Garden City native, Oldham (history, ’99) first attended Boise State as a slight, new-to-the-world but brilliant 16 year-old whose “mind grew strong through heavy lifting,” says Todd Shallat, professor in the History Department. It was in the corridors of the History Department that Oldham found a home on campus and a mentor in Shallat.

“Todd is among the top five if not top one or two people who influenced me in my life,” Oldham says.

As Oldham’s time at Boise State came to an end, Shallat encouraged him to go away to law school. He ended up at Harvard.

Just a few years later, Oldham himself was part of history as the lead trial attorney in the habeas corpus hearing of six detainees held at Guantanamo Bay. These detainees won the right to sue for their release in U.S. courts in the landmark Supreme Court

left behind his alma mater — he has served on the Boise State Foundation board, the Alumni Association and the College of Business and Economics advisory board — or basketball — he’s the local Hoops Dreams Foundation chairman, coaches youth basketball, and today’s Bronco basketball fans may recognize him as the color commentator for KTVB Channel 7 sports.

“My overall education at Boise State, both athletics and my finance degree, have served me well,” he says. “There’s so much that you need in business, and the communication skills and life experiences along the way certainly helped me reach my goals.”

Words to live by: Truth, loyalty, common sense, hard work.

THE LAWYER

Name: Nick Oldham Age: 29

Degree: BA, History, 1999

Day job: Attorney, U.S. Department of Justice

case of Boumediene v. Bush. The hearing was the first ever of its kind for detainees held at Guantanamo, and the first ever of its kind for aliens held by the United States outside of the United States.

And for Oldham, there’s no question it all started at Boise State.

“Once I was at Harvard, it became clear to me that I had been very well prepared by my time at Boise State,” Oldham says. “I sat in classes with other law students who did their undergraduate work at the best universities in the world. I was ready for that kind of academic rigor because of Boise State.”

Words to live by: Do what you love and do it well.



THE FINANCIER

Name: Brian King Age: 42

Degree: BA, finance, 1990

Day job: Senior vice president, RBC Wealth Management, Boise