

Watch Our Penguins Walk



It's that time of year again: Preparation is underway to celebrate the achievements of the Class of 2014 at this year's Commencement Ceremony, and the college needs volunteers to make the event successful for our graduates. There are a variety of opportunities for the college community to get involved, ranging from assisting with the distribution of the faculty and staff caps and gowns to helping at the graduation ceremonies. The college invites you to participate in these activities as we celebrate the excitement of our students and honor their academic success.

Anyone interested in volunteering should email Michelle Golder as soon as possible. A Commencement Volunteer training will be held Monday, June 16, 2 – 3 p.m. in GHL 213. Supervisors have been encouraged to work with employees on their schedules to allow them to participate.

Clark College Welcomes Commencement Speaker Byron Pitts



Television journalist Byron Pitts will deliver the keynote speech at Clark College's 2014 Commencement. *Photo courtesy of Greater Talent Network.*

Byron Pitts, who overcame a childhood marked by illiteracy and poverty to become an award-winning television journalist and book author, will be sharing his story with the Clark College Class of 2014 as the college's Commencement keynote speaker on

June 19.

Appropriately for an event that celebrates academic accomplishment, Pitts' life story is a testament to the power of education. As a child, Pitts suffered from a debilitating stutter that made him so quiet and shy that the adults in his life never discovered his other obstacle: He was functionally illiterate. Only in his teens did he learn to read and write, but with the help of his mother and several kind strangers, Pitts entered a field that requires strong written and oral communication skills: broadcast journalism. Today he is Chief National Correspondent for *ABC Evening News*.

"Byron Pitts has a powerful story of overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds to get to where he is today," said Clark College President Robert K. Knight. "It was through education that his life was turned around. I believe he will make a strong connection with our students."

Pitts was originally scheduled to speak at Clark's 2013 Commencement ceremony, but had to decline in order to cover the illness of South African leader Nelson Mandela.

About Byron Pitts

Known for his thought-provoking coverage and his commitment to exceptional storytelling, Byron Pitts is a multiple Emmy Award-winning journalist. He has been recognized for his work under fire as an embedded reporter covering the Iraq War and was CBS' lead correspondent at Ground Zero immediately following the September 11 attacks. A news veteran with over 20 years of experience, other major stories he has covered include the war in Afghanistan, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the military buildup in Kuwait and the refugee crisis in Kosovo, to name but a few. Pitts was named a Contributing Correspondent to CBS' *60 Minutes* in 2009. In 2013, Pitts became an anchor and the Chief National Correspondent at *ABC Evening News*. He is also the author of a memoir, *Step Out On*

Nothing: How Family and Faith Helped Me Conquer Life's Challenges.

Pitts' many achievements are all the more extraordinary when he tells of the many obstacles he faced as a child. Raised by a single mother in a working-class neighborhood in Baltimore, Maryland, Pitts was illiterate until the age of 12 and had a persistent stutter. Capitalizing on his desire to play football, his mother mandated he receive B's or above in school in order to play. With that focus, Pitts learned to read and went on to attend Ohio Wesleyan University. With the help of his roommate and a professor, Pitts found the support and encouragement necessary to pursue a career in broadcast journalism. Overcoming both his odds and his disability, he graduated in 1982 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism and Speech Communication.

Pitts' grit and determination shone throughout his illustrious career, garnering him several prestigious awards, including a national Emmy Award for his coverage of the Chicago train wreck of 1999, a National Association of Black Journalists Award, and a second national Emmy Award for individual reporting of September 11. He is also the recipient of four Associated Press Awards and six regional Emmy Awards.

Pitts lives with his wife in Upper Montclair, New Jersey.

Honoring Excellence



On Opening Day 2013, Exceptional Faculty Award plaques were presented to, *left to right*, Darcie Thompson (accepting the award for her mother-in-law, Mickey Thompson), Patti Serrano, Bruce Elgort, Tony Chennault, and Mike Arnold.

Clark College President Bob Knight announced the recipients of the 2013 Exceptional Faculty Awards during the 2013 Commencement ceremony on June 20; they were presented with engraved plaques during Opening Day on September 11. This year, five faculty members—two part-time instructors and three full-time professors—received the award, which honors excellence in teaching.

The Clark College Exceptional Faculty Awards are presented annually to full-time and part-time faculty members in recognition of exemplary work performance, positive impact on students, professional commitment, and other contributions to the college. Nominations are submitted by Clark College students, faculty, classified employees, administrators, alumni, Board members, and Foundation directors. The awards

are made possible through an endowed trust fund established by the Washington State Legislature and the Clark College Exceptional Faculty Endowment Fund, which was established in 1993.

This year's Exceptional Faculty Award recipients are:



Mike Arnold

Mike Arnold, Health and Physical Education

Mike Arnold began teaching at Clark College in 1989 and over that time has taught everything from archery to weight lifting, as well as coaching athletic teams. His students praise him for helping them improve not only their bodies, but their minds and characters as well. "Not only does he want you to do well in his class, he wants you to do well in life," wrote one student in his nomination.

Another student wrote, "Mike Arnold is one of the most caring, respectable, honest and genuine people I have ever met. He is willing to help any student that is in need. ... He is more than a teacher; he is a friend and a mentor."

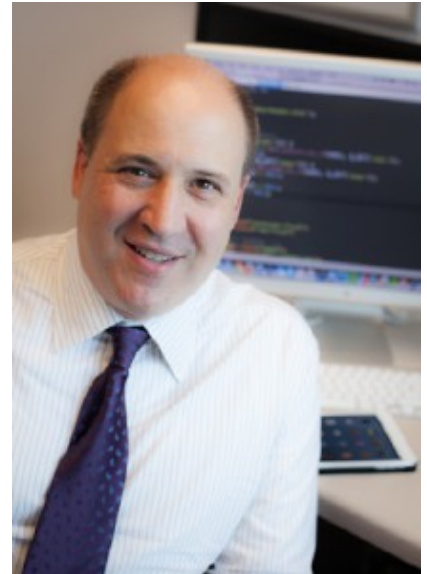


Tony Chennault

Tony Chennault, Biology

“Simply put, Tony Chennault is the best professor I have ever had,” wrote one student in nominating Chennault for the Exceptional Faculty Award. Many students praise Chennault for making a notoriously difficult series of classes—namely, Human Anatomy and Physiology—fun and understandable.

Chennault, who also teaches Human Biology, began teaching at Clark in 2008 and received tenure in 2011. He strives to make his students feel comfortable as they tackle challenging material, providing them with helpful study tips and mnemonic tricks for learning anatomical terms. “I believe this award is a reflection of having a job that I truly love and am passionate about, and I take pride in bringing that passion and energy to class every day, trying my best to make learning the science of the human body fun for the students as I have fun, too,” he said.



Bruce Elgort

Bruce Elgort, Computer Technology

Bruce Elgort has only been teaching at Clark since winter quarter 2013, but already he has made a huge impression on his students. “I was worried when I started his class that I wouldn’t be able to learn the material or properly grasp the concepts, but after I was in Bruce’s class for an hour, I felt confident and comfortable and able to learn anything,” wrote one nominator.

While Elgort is relatively new to teaching in a college setting, he has a long career in computer technology. He has worked for major technology companies, including Sharp and Underwriters Laboratories, and launched his own successful software company. When he teaches courses about programming, HTML, and PHP coding, he brings real-life experience from the work world into his classroom—a classroom that extends into the virtual realm through help sessions conducted via social media. “In today’s hyper-connected, ‘always-on’ world, the ability to extend the physical classroom is something that has become an integral part of all my work at Clark,” Elgort says.



Patti Serrano

Patti Serrano, Business Administration

Patti Serrano has had plenty of time to develop fans at Clark College—she began teaching here in 1981, beginning by teaching Fashion Merchandising before transitioning to Business Management and Marketing courses. During that time, Serrano has demonstrated leadership at the college time and again. She helped draft the college’s Strategic Plan and participated in the college’s last three accreditation efforts, as well as serving on countless committees to improve college functions; she has also served as head of the college’s Business Department and chair of the Business Division. Additionally, she is a committed educator.

“Having known Patti Serrano for over thirty years, I have personally seen the many, many hours she has devoted to helping her students with guidance in professional and personal advice,” said one coworker. “She has been a positive force for hundreds of students.”



Mickey Thompson

Mickey Thompson, Paralegal

Mickey Thompson entered the legal profession in 1977, and she brings both a depth of knowledge and a great enthusiasm about paralegal work to her teaching. Students point to the countless hours she has spent serving as the advisor to the Clark College Law Club and to her patience when guiding them through the thicket of legal terminology.

“She’s compassionate, organized, strict, and funny all at the same time,” wrote one student in her nomination. “Legal procedure is tough and complicated, and Mickey makes sure that all of her students understand the course material and have a good grasp on the concepts.”

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

All in the Family



Presidential Scholarship recipient Ramona Vercher at Clark College's 2013 Commencement.

Every last Sunday of the month, the Vercher family holds a big dinner for all its many members: Donnie and Louise Vercher, their nine children, 14 grandchildren, and assorted in-laws, relatives, and friends. The family would have plenty to celebrate at their June dinner: Ramona Vercher, the second-youngest of the Vercher children, was named the recipient of the 2013-14 Community College President's Award. The annual scholarship is given to a Clark College graduate who is transferring to a Washington State University Vancouver degree program; it provides full-time tuition for one year, renewable for one additional year, for a total of four semesters.

The whole Vercher family was in attendance at commencement, when the award is announced. As Clark College President Bob

Knight described Vercher's achievements, a massive cheer filled the amphitheater when the family realized she had won.

Vercher, who is a resident of Vancouver, graduated with honors, earning an associate degree in business administration. A first-generation college graduate, she plans to major in business administration with a specialization in finance while attending WSU Vancouver.

While at Clark, Vercher served in a number of volunteer roles both on and off campus. She was a work-study tutor at the Student Learning Center helping Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Educational Development (GED), and English as a Second Language (ESL) students in all subjects. She was also a Classroom Tutor, assisting professors in the classroom, and part of Clark's Homework Help program, where she assisted individual students. Within the greater community, her volunteer service has included work with the City of Vancouver's Urban Youth and Urban Forestry programs. Additionally, she helps run the charity begun by her family's small business, Daddy D's BBQ, providing Christmas presents to families in need, and works there as a cashier.

"Receiving this scholarship means everything in the world to me," said Ramona Vercher after the ceremony. "I am a first-generation college student, so to have this opportunity to continue my education is the biggest thing that has ever happened to me in my life."

Knight said that people who know Vercher praised her for her strong work ethic. Indeed, Vercher has often begun study sessions at 5 a.m. to fit them around her work and other activities. She and her longtime boyfriend, Dwan James (also a Clark student), have regularly eschewed fun weekend outings for "date nights" of studying.

Vercher attributes her work ethic to the example set by her parents; Donnie regularly works 13 hours a day at his barbecue

restaurant, a business he began after breaking his back doing construction work on bridges. "I never graduated high school," said Donnie. "I think [Ramona] sees what her parents went through and wants better."

Indeed, many of the Vercher children are pursuing education. Ramona's brother Sherman recently graduated from Western Oregon University, and two of her sisters received their GED diplomas at Clark's GED and high school completion ceremony on June 22.

Vercher was one of three finalists selected for the award. President Knight announced that the other two finalists, Jennifer Campbell and David Taub, would receive \$1,000 scholarships from the Clark College Foundation to continue their education. Knight said of the three finalists, "They are all sterling examples of what Clark College is about."

Vercher plans to continue being an example of both Clark College and her family. "I am going to do big things through this scholarship," she said. "This definitely won't be the last you see of me."

Photo: Clark College/Jenny Shadley