**Proposed Commencement Speakers/Honorary Degree Recipients**

Submitted by Events Committee of the YSU Academic Senate, February 19, 2025

The names of the following persons were submitted for consideration by the Events Committee of the YSU Academic Senate as candidates for Commencement Speakers and possible Honorary Degree recipients. The Events Committee has approved this list of nominees and hereby submits the list for formal approval by the Academic Senate prior to presentation to the YSU Board of Trustees.

These nominees are in addition to those that were previously vetted and approved by the Academic Senate and the YSU Board of Trustees. This list is attached at the end of this document.

Where provided, brief biographies for current nominees are included. In addition, as indicated, some nominees were nominated specifically to address graduates of the indicated college.

**STEM**

Dr. Peyman Givi – BE in Mechanical Engineering, 1980

Dr. Peyman Givi is Distinguished Professor of Mechanical Engineering and the James T. MacLeod Chair in School of Engineering at the University of Pittsburgh. Previously he held the rank of University Distinguished Professor in [Aerospace Engineering](http://www.mae.buffalo.edu/) at the [State University of New York at Buffalo](http://www.buffalo.edu/), where he received the Professor of the Year Award by Tau Beta Pi (2002). He also worked as a Research Scientist at the Flow Industries, Inc. in Seattle. Dr. Givi has had frequent visiting appointments at the [NASA Langley](http://www.nasa.gov/centers/langley/home/index.html) & [Glenn (Lewis)](http://www.nasa.gov/centers/glenn/home/) centers, and received the NASA's Public Service Medal (2005). He is amongst the first 15 engineering faculty nationwide who received the White House Presidential Faculty Fellowship from President George Bush. He also received the Young Investigator Award of the Office of Naval Research, and the Presidential Young Investigator Award of the National Science Foundation.

Katie Glass, PhD

2003 BE Mechanical Engineering

Principal scientist at Proctor and Gamble

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/katie-kf-glass-ph-d-bb46b927/>

Ben Detwiler

2011 BE Electrical Engineering

Software Engineer at Apple (since 2014)

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/bendetwiler/>

Andy Morgan, PhD

2017, Computer Science & Computer Engineering

Research Scientist, Boston Dynamics Institute

Andy brought his AI robot Spot to campus for a recent visit

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/andrewsmorganrobot>

**BCHHS**

Colonel Sarah Robinson-Evans – B.S. in Nursing, 1998, i

She is currently dual hatted as the Commander and Medical Training Facility Director of the 82d Medical Group, Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas. As the Group Commander, Col Evans oversees operations for 335 active duty and civilian personnel, enabling 45K outpatient appointments to 21K beneficiaries yearly across two Wings, and 65K trainees annually.

**BCLASSE**

Mary Beth Messner

2000 BA English & Education

Assistant Provost at Catawba College

Has worked extensively in online learning area of higher ed – passionate about reducing barriers to education; extremely involved as a student leader at YSU; engaged in community and continues to serve, instills a value of serving in her children

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/mbmessner/>

Matt VanSuch, JD

2002 BA Political Science

Partner in local law firm

Howland township trustee

Voice of the Marching Pride (for 9 years, ending in 2023)

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/matthew-vansuch-baa1b149/>

Alyssa Finamore, JD

2002 BE Chemical Engineering

Lead Administrative Patent Judge, USPTO

After a decade of experience in private practice, started with the USPTO in 2015, becoming lead judge in 2022

Interned at Delphi Packard while at YSU before pursuing career in patent law

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/alyssa-finamore-7523585/>

**CCAC**

Bill Mullane

Bill is an artist, educator, administrator and civic leader, and recipient of the Governor’s Award for the Arts in the category of Community Development and Participation in 2022. He has served as adjunct curator and exhibition designer at the Medici Museum of Art in Warren and is on the board of the Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley; the Raymond John Wean Foundation; the Trumbull Art Gallery; the Fine Arts Council of Trumbull County; Friends of the Fellows Riverside Gardens; the Medici Museum; and the Warren Philharmonic Orchestra. Mullane has worked to connect and inspire collaboration among local organizations and has created partnerships with Warren City Schools, the City of Warren, the Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership and Students Motivated by the Arts. He has co-curated several exhibitions at The Butler Institute of American Art, including multiple Northeast Ohio Scholastic Art Exhibitions and ceremonies.

Meghan Borsic – BFA in Graphic Design, 2005

Senior Vice President of Design at The Walt Disney Company

Previous management roles at Meta, Salesforce, Amazon, Oracle, and more

Maintains connections with the Cliffe College. Phyllis Paul indicates that she is “one of our shining stars”.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/meghantrunick/>

Meghan Borsic – Senior Vice President of Design at The Walt Disney Company I Disney Entertainment & ESPN (She is stunning and composed!) She only has her BFA so she is 100% ours.

Ryan Firm -has been very successful with Taylor Swift’s Mobile App, among other impressive things as a designer – He has a UX/UI Master from Kent. His BFA is from YSU.

Dan Wegendt- He worked for the Weather Channel for nearly a decade and won an Emmy for his motion graphics. He also has a masters from Savannah and BFA from YSU.

Emily Stump has an MFA in Graphic Design from Herron School of Art and BFA from YSU. She is the program manager for experience design at Indiana University Health, an Indiana University hospital and medical school.

Erik Melvin is a rock star! He is a graduate of the photography program and has gone on to be wildly successful as a professional photographer. He photographed Michelle Obama, just one of the amazingly famous people he has photographed. He has also found his way into high fashion! Here is his website. <http://www.erikmelvin.com/>

**WCBA**

Catherine Mott – MBA from YSU

President / CEO

https://www.linkedin.com/in/catherinemott/

Catherine Mott is the founder of BlueTree Capital Group, BlueTree Allied Angels, and the BlueTree Venture Fund located in Pittsburgh, PA.  As of December 2017, the BT entities have invested $50+ million in several startup companies.  Ms. Mott is the past Chairman of the Angel Capital Association (ACA) and the Angel Resource Institute.  Ms. Mott is a member of the ACA Public Policy Committee; she also just completed a third term as one of 21 individuals selected for the SEC Advisory Committee on Small and Emerging Companies.

Robert Bole, BSBA, YSU. MBA, New York University

https://www.linkedin.com/in/robertbole/details/education/

* Director, SMBC Capital Markets (Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation – SMBC Group New York, New York, United States)
* Vice President, Innovation and New Products, Pagaya (Aug 2021 - Oct 2022)
* Executive Director, NA Head of Fixed Income Products, IHS Markit ·
* Head of Strategy and Portfolio Management for Sales, Research, and CM, Bank of America Merrill Lynch Bank , New York, United States

Heather Barnett - Chief of Staff in the Antifraud Team, Microsoft (BSBA – Marketing, 2010)

Heather Barnett is the Chief of Staff in the Antifraud team at Microsoft. In her current role, Heather is responsible for strategy and operations for team 200, focused on protecting, detecting, and responding to Nation-state actors, criminal syndicates, and common hackers who wish to cause financial and reputational harm to Microsoft, customers, and partners. As a form of cybercrime, fraud posts a serious threat to the integrity in our digital ecosystem and undermines the security, trust, and reputation of individuals, businesses, and organizations of all sizes and types, in every region and industry.

Andrew DeMaiolo

BSBA 2010

Experience Design Manager for PNC

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/djdemaiolo>

**Others**

Paul Mogg, YSU 1990 BA History

Lieutenant Colonel-Retired US Marines

School of Advanced Military Studies 2003-2004

Strategic Planner, US Central Command

Deputy Military Advisor, US Mission to the United Nations June 2007-June 2019

Carl James, Ohio Wesleyan, 1970 BA Economics

Attorney 1979-2016

CEO BI Canada 1992-present

President and CEO 2002-present

Trustee Butler Institute of American Art

Trustee Oak Hill Collaborative

Trustee Friends of Fellows Riverside Gardens

Bob Hannon, President, United Way

Dr. Brian Corbin, From Catholic Charities USA (YSU Grad)

Jeff Magada, Flying High Inc. (<https://flyinghighinc.org/history/>)

Aspasia Lyras-Bernacki and Richard Bernacki, owners of Penguin City Brewing Co.

Lt. Col. Ralph Crum, 91 alum, Arts and Sciences

Retired Lt. Colonel, US Army

<https://www.wfmj.com/story/47050202/canfield-native-one-of-the-last-soldiers-out-of-afghanistan-receives-honor>

Penny Wells

Retired YCS teacher, Founder of Sojourn to the Past, Civil Rights Hall of Fame inductee

<https://www.wkbn.com/news/local-news/boardman-news/local-leader-to-be-inducted-into-ohio-civil-rights-hall-of-fame/>

Dave Dravecky, non degreed alum

Former professional baseball player, cancer survivor, motivational speaker

<https://ysusports.com/honors/hall-of-fame/dave-dravecky/71>

Joseph Caruso, 89 MBA, YSU

President and CEO, COMPASS Family and Community Services

<https://spanningtheneed.com/2023/05/24/potw-joseph-caruso-compass-family-and-community-services/>

Barbara Orton, 80 alum, Arts and Sciences

Former Director of Equal Opportunity at YSU

**Honorary Degree and Commencement Speakers**

**Approved since June, 2016**

Dr. Amy Acton

Liberty native, was appointed director of health for the Ohio Department of Health by Governor Mike DeWine, and served through the state's initial response to the Covid-19 virus. A licensed physician in preventive medicine with a master's degree in public health. Dr. Acton has more than 30 years of experience in medical practice, government and community service, healthcare policy and advocacy, academic and nonprofit administration, consulting, teaching, and data analysis.

John Asimakopoulos

A YSU alum who retired as the CFO of Apex Paper Box in Cleveland. He was nominated because of his service to YSU and our students. He served as a committee member of the WCBA Dean's Business Advisory Panel for years, and has invited students to visit him at work in Cleveland. When students have shown up, he would spend a good portion of the day giving them a thorough tour of Apex's operations. He is a mensch -- humble, witty, engaged, generous, interested, encouraging, and friendly. He is a role model for a different image of a businessman.

Judge Carla J. Baldwin

Lifelong resident of the Mahoning Valley. She presently serves as the Administrative and Presiding Judge of Youngstown Municipal Court, and was the first African-American female elected as a judge in Mahoning County history. Prior to this appointment she worked for the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office for eight years serving as an Assistant County Prosecutor in both the Criminal and Juvenile Divisions. Judge Baldwin served on numerous boards which serve the great community of the Valley.

Suzanne Barbati

An YSU Alumna from 1995, she served as the President and Executive Director of the OH WOW! The Rodger & Gloria Jones Children's Center for Science and Technology for 14 years, before taking on the role as their Director of Planned Giving in 2021 until her retirement in March 2023. An active leader in the Youngstown community, Ms. Barbati was instrumental in developing OH WOW! into the landmark institution it is today, which serves children and families across the entire Mahoning Valley.

Eric Bella, PE

YSU Alum from 2002; principal engineer with CJL with many years of experience in power distribution, lighting and safety design, and communications Eric has been involved in many projects in the Mahoning Valley including the Mahoning Valley Hospital, WCBA Leed Certified, and assisted in various electrical upgrades for the YSU campus and buildings.

Dr. Patty Bode

A Youngstown native, artist and educator who has gained national and international recognition for her work addressing civil rights in education Dr Bode has presented extensively on diversity, equity and inclusion.

Laurie Brlas

A Florida native and a YSU alumni, who has received a degree in Accounting in 1993. Worked as the Executive VP and CFO with Newmont Mining Corp. In her employment with Cliffs Natural Resources as Executive VP and CFO she oversaw all of global finance, and at various times oversaw human resources, information technology, business development and corporate strategy.

Sophia Brooks

An 80+ year-old native of Youngstown, she attended the Dana School of Music and the Cleveland Institute of Music. She was the first African American soloist at the First Christian, First Presbyterian and Saint John's Episcopal churches. She traveled across the nation as a vocalist as well as appeared with the Youngstown Symphony Orchestra. For over a decade, she was the first local female African American to host a television show, called "Expressions" with WKBN.

Dr. Barbara Brothers

Dr. Brothers earned her bachelor’s degree in English from Youngstown University in 1958, a master’s degree from Western Reserve University in 1962, and a Ph.D. in English from Kent State University in 1973. She taught English at Austintown High School and began her career at YSU as an adjunct instructor in 1960. While at YSU, Dr. Brothers’ accomplishments were vast; she held various roles and spearheaded initiatives across campus, including state and federal grants for working with the public schools. Dr. Brothers was promoted to full professor in 1983, and from 1974-1992 chaired the Department of English. Examples of programs she significantly helped form include Professional Writing and Editing (now Professional and Technical Writing), Peace and Conflict Studies, Women’s Studies and American Studies. After serving as the acting graduate dean in 1993, Dr. Brothers became the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (now the Beeghly College of Liberal Arts, Social Sciences, and Education). In 2001, Dr. Brothers retired from YSU. In 2015 she received the University’s Heritage award for professional accomplishments and community service. She continues to remain active in civic causes and to serve on the boards of the YWCA of Mahoning Valley, Youngstown Rotary, League of Women Voters of Greater Youngstown, WYSU, Garden Club of Youngstown, Lit Youngstown, and AAUW. SMARTS was the recipient of a naming gift and Sojourn to the Past is another organization serving the youth of our community to which she has a particular commitment.

William E. Brown

A Youngstown native, William Brown entered the U.S. Air Force in 1968 and began his distinguished career providing rescue and emergency medical services to downed pilots during the Vietnam war as a Pararescueman in the U.S. Air Force Special Operations Forces. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for "heroism" for the rescue of two pilots shot down behind enemy lines in North Vietnam in 1971. In addition, he was awarded an Air Medal with 3 oak leaf clusters, Vietnam Service Medal, Expeditionary Forces Medal, Good Conduct Medal, and Expert Rifleman Medal. Following his military service, he earned an AAS in nursing and political science, and a BSAS in Nursing and Law Enforcement Administration. He served as President of Student Government and was recognized as Best-All-Around student. He earned a Master of Science degree in Health and Safety Education in 1979. He worked at Wishard Memorial Hospital Emergency Department, returned to YSU to serve as the Paramedic Program Director in the Department of Allied Health, completed two years of post-graduate education at the University of Akron and was appointed the Executive Director and CEO of the national EMS (Emergency Medical Services) certification agency, where he served for 25 years. During his service, he was appointed by the U.S. Department of Transportation to serve on many committees and lectured and presented in all 50 states. He was awarded many prestigious awards including the 2009 Rocco V. Morando Lifetime Achievement Award in EMS, the highest national recognition awarded to an EMS professional. In recognition of his service to YSU, the YSU EMS Paramedic program instituted the William E. Brown, Jr. Academic Excellence Award, given to students with the highest GPAs in the program.

Paul Brubaker

Paul Brubaker is a graduate of YSU in Political Science and Government. He has an MPA degree in Public Administration from Kent State University. He has extensive leadership experience in the private sector and government. He was nominated by President George W. Bush to serve as Administrator of the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA). Mr. Brubaker previously served as CEO of Procentrix; a firm that helps organizations plan, manage and achieve measurable performance improvement through the effective use of process and technology. Prior to this role, Mr. Brubaker served as Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer of SI International, one of the nation's fastest growing government contractors. Mr. Brubaker previously served as Deputy Assistant Secretary and Deputy Chief Information Officer at the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) where he was the Department's second highest-ranking technology official and supervised DoD's $50 billion annual Information Technology expenditure. Before serving at DoD, Mr. Brubaker held various executive positions within the public and private sectors, including Vice President of Strategic Programs for Litton PRC, Vice President of Business Development for Federal Data Corporation, and in senior positions within the U.S. Senate and General Accounting Office. He has also won numerous awards including the Association for Information Resource Management's (AFFIRM) Government Executive Leadership Award in 2000. He was named to Federal Computer Week's Federal 100 in 1996 and 2002, and was appointed to the board of the Virginia Innovative Technology Authority in 1998 where he served as chairman from 2001` to 2003. He recently ended terms as chairman of the technical committee of the Armed Force Communications and Electronics Association (AFCEA) and president of its D.C. Chapter. He lives with his family in Oakton, Virginia.

Atty. Bonnie Deutsch Burdman

An attorney, has served the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation as Director, and now Executive Director of Community Relations/Government Affairs for the past 26 years. In this capacity, Bonnie leads the Federation's interfaith and inter-group activities, as well as its social action agenda. She directs the Federation's efforts to combat antisemitism, to promote strong support for Israel, and to encourage broad-based Holocaust and anti-genocide education Bonnie also maintains strong relationships with public officials locally, in Columbus, and nationally in support of issues of importance to the Jewish community, and currently oversees the Federation's security work.

Gary Daichendt

Gary Daichendt is the founder and Chairman of the commercial real estate firm, Theory R Properties. Gary is best known for his work at Cisco Systems, Inc. during its period of highest and record achieving growth.  He served as Executive Vice President of Worldwide Operations, Cisco’s second highest ranking executive.  His career also includes the position President and Chief Operating Officer of Nortel Networks Corporation in 2005. Gary has extensive public company board experience. He has served on the Board of Directors for Juniper Networks as it Lead Independent Director, Polycom as its Chairman, NCR Corporation, ShoreTel, Inc. and Emulex Corporation.  He continues to advise multiple high-tech start-ups in the software and SaaS business.  He has also served on the boards of multiple Christian organizations including Azusa Pacific University, Walk Thru the Bible, Living on the Edge, and NAEN Ministries. Gary joined Cisco in 1994 as Vice President of Intercontinental Operations and soon became Senior Vice President of Worldwide Operations. In 1998, Gary was promoted to Executive Vice President of Worldwide Operations with worldwide responsibility for sales, support, distribution, manufacturing, and strategic alliances.  He led a team of 12,000 employees in over 100 countries, increasing operational revenues and profits by over 50% per annum. Prior to joining Cisco, he spent 10 years at IBM in various engineering, sales, marketing, and management positions and 8 years at Wang Laboratories serving as Vice President of Central Operations and Vice President of Marketing. He is co-author of the book, I-Operations. He holds a M.S. in Mathematics from Ohio State University and a B.A. from Youngstown State University. He and his wife, Cathy, reside in California.

Denise DeBartolo-York

Denise DeBartolo York began her business career working at the customer service counter at the Southern Park Mall during summer breaks while attending St. Mary’s College. A lifelong resident of the Mahoning Valley, she continued to work for The DeBartolo Corporation, founded by her father, and worked her way up to become Chairman. Denise has been an integral part of four decades of 49ers football, including five Super Bowl victories. She is also an active member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Earlier in her career, Denise served as President of the Pittsburgh Penguins hockey team. Under her leadership, the Penguins won the team’s first Stanley Cup. She is passionate about many philanthropic causes including the United Way of Youngstown and Mahoning Valley, Mercy Health, Boys & Girls Club of Youngstown, YSU, local veterans' groups and many others. Denise continues her parents’ legacy of helping local youth to continue their education with the Edward J. DeBartolo Memorial Scholarship Foundation, which has awarded over $1.6M in scholarships over the last 25 years.  (Taken from The Business Journal)

Governor Mike DeWine

Governor DeWine has demonstrated fact-based decision making, prudent, forward-thinking leadership, and informative and honest (yet empathetic) communication. Raised in Yellow Springs, Ohio, Mike DeWine and Fran (Struewing) met in the first grade and married while students at Miami University. They’ve been blessed with eight children and 27 grandchildren. Family is at the core of everything Mike DeWine does, and that’s why he has devoted his life to fighting for Ohio’s families. He knows when families are strong, Ohio communities are stronger, and our future is bright. Mike DeWine loves Ohio and cares passionately about our state’s future. He will fight for an Ohio that works for everyone – every person and every family in every corner of our state. From world class cities to some of the best small towns in America, Mike DeWine knows that to build our state into an economic powerhouse, we must have strong schools, a great quality of life, and compassion for those who need our help. Mike DeWine’s family started a seed company in Yellow Springs. Working alongside his parents and grandparents, Mike learned early the value of hard work, strong leadership, and fiscal responsibility.

Growing up, he loaded seed bags onto trucks and boxcars, shoveled wheat out of trucks during harvest, worked in wheat fields to help ensure the purity of the seed, and basically did whatever it took to get the job done for their customers. Inseparable to the end, his parents were married for 65 years and died within four days of each other. The values he learned from them still live within him today. On November 6, 2018, Mike DeWine was elected to serve as the 70th Governor of the State of Ohio. The Governor has had a long and distinguished career in public service, focusing on protecting Ohio children and families. He was previously the 50th Attorney General of Ohio and has previously been elected to serve as Greene County Prosecutor, Ohio State Senator, U.S. Congressman, Ohio Lt. Governor, U.S. Senator.

Dave Grohl

Native of Warren, Ohio, is an American musician, singer, songwriter, and documentary filmmaker He was the drummer for rock band Nirvana and founded the band Foo Fighters, for whom he is the singer, guitarist, and primary songwriter. He has a long history of advocacy and philanthropy, using his platform to speak against drug misuse, including work on anti-drug films and documentaries, and also to advocate for the promotion of civil rights for LGBTQ people.

Joseph Hamrock

Former President and CEO of NiSource Inc. He previously served as executive VP and Group CEO for NiSource's Gas Distribution segment, which included local gas distribution companies in Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Hamrock joined NiSources in May 2012 after serving in a variety of senior executive positions with American Electric Power (AEP), including president and chief operating officer of AEP Ohio, and roles in engineering, transmission and distribution operations, customer service, marketing and information technology. He began his energy industry career as an electrical engineer in transmission and distribution planning at AEP in Steubenville, Ohio. He went on to work in commercial and industrial customer services, and held leadership roles in commercial marketing and customer services, strategic development and other executive roles. Prior to becoming president of AEP Ohio, Hamrock was senior vice president and chief information officer in AEP's Shared Services organization from 2003-2007, and from 2002-2003 was senior vice president - General Services. Hamrock received a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Youngstown State University and a master's degree in business administration from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he was a Sloan fellow.

Phil Hirsch

Formerly at YSU as the Executive Director of Administrative Services, but is better known to most people as the long-time Director of Kilcawley Center. After retiring from YSU, he took a leadership position on the YSURA Board. Mr. Hirsch has a lasting and notable legacy of service to the University, including the Hirsch-Satrum Leadership Scholarship.

Ron Jaworski

Ronald Vincent Jaworski (born March 23, 1951), nicknamed "Jaws", is a former American football quarterback who played in the National Football League (NFL) for 17 seasons. He played college football at Youngstown State and was selected by the Los Angeles Rams in the second round of the 1973 Draft. After spending four seasons mostly as a backup for the Rams, Jaworski was traded to the Philadelphia Eagles in 1977, where he would lead the Eagles to four consecutive playoff appearances, including a division title and the franchise's first Super Bowl appearance in 1980. After ten seasons with the Eagles, Jaworski signed with the Miami Dolphins, where he would spend two seasons as a backup. He then spent one season with the Kansas City Chiefs as a backup before retiring after the 1989 season. After his playing career, Jaworski worked as an NFL analyst on ESPN from 1990 to 2017. From 2004 to 2019, he served as an executive of the Philadelphia Soul franchise of the Arena Football League, where he also briefly served as the league's Executive Committee Chair from 2018 to 2019. He is also the founder and CEO of Ron Jaworski Golf, which owns and manages several golf courses across the Delaware Valley region.

Nils P. Johnson

Johnson, of Canfield, graduated with honors from Dartmouth College and in 1976 graduated from Boston University Law School. Nils has served as a local Bar Association Trustee, as a member of the Ohio Supreme Court's Board of Grievances and Discipline, and as a member of the Ohio Supreme Court's Baord of Bar Examiners. In addition to his legal career, Mr. Johnson is something of a renaissance man - he is an active session musician in local ensembles and has recently been commissioned to create a large-scale mural for the Ohio Supreme Court.

Brenda Kimble

Recently completed her bachelors at YSU and is a community nominee, in recognition of the difficult journey she took to achieve her education. To quote, "achieving her degree is representative of the resilience of so many YSU students, of YSU itself, and of Youngstown and the region around it." Ms. Kimble's education was placed on hold due to the tragic loss of her husband. As a widowed mother, she put her children through school, served as an elected school board member, worked, and completed her own degree.

Rex Lee

Warren native, born to immigrant Korean parents. He has gone on to start in numerous series, including Entourage, Suburgatory, and Young & Hungry.

Shirley M. Martin

Received a degree from YSU in Home Economics in 1973. Vice President of Grants U.S. Soldiers Foundation, Served 12 years in the active Army as an enlisted soldier and an officer and 24 years in the Army Reserve, She was deployed to Germany to support contingency ops in Bosnia and mobilized for 14 months for Operation Iraqi Freedom. She is currently the Louisiana Department President of the Reserve Officer Association to advise legislative officials on military issues. Lives in New Orleans, LA.

Maria Mitchell-Cichon

Received her degree in Criminal Justice from YSU in 1981. She worked as a professor/director at Thomas M. Cooley Law School. She was director of the Cooley Innocence Project which works to secure the release of factually innocent Michigan prisoners through the use of post-conviction DNA testing. She also works closely with the Access to Justice Clinic to assist individuals with the collateral consequences related to their involvement with the criminal justice system and family courts. She has received the Justice for All Award from the Criminal Defense Attorneys of Michigan in 2014.

Melissa O’Connor

Graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology and Bachelor of Applied Science degree in Forensic Science in August 2012 from YSU. After achieving her masters and engaging in cutting-edge research, Ms. O'Connor took on a position as a forensic scientist with the Philadelphia police department. While there, she has engaged in community outreach with grade-school children, created science webinars, and represented her new city as Miss Philadelphia in 2020.

Austin Pendleton

Warren native, is an American actor, playwright, theatre director and instructor. His work on and off Broadway has netted critical acclaim, including a Tony Award nominee and multiple Drama Desk and Obie Awards. His six-decade spanning career also includes work in film (Short Circuit, My Cousin Vinny, Amistad, et al), television (Oz, Homicide: Life on the Street), and new media. his role in A Beautiful Mind earned him a Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture nomination.

Marc Routh

This theatrical producer, entrepreneur, and professor from Girard cut his teeth at the Youngstown Playhouse before going on to success on Broadway and London's West End. He was the producer for such notable, award-winning hits as the original Broadway productions of The Band's Visit, Amelie, and Anastasia. These shows are only part of his extensive and successful resume. Mr. Routh holds two Tony Awards, and is the founder of Broadway Asia and the R/F/B/V group.

Heather Saniskowski, Ph.D.

YSU Alum. Received a Ph.D. in statistics from Duke University with an emphasis on health and environmental studies. As an Assistant Professor at Clemson University, she continued her research on the application of prediction and normalization methods in life sciences and health care. In 1998, she co-founded INCOGEN, where she served as the principal statistician, concentrating her research on clinical applications of gene expression microarray and protein mass spectrometry data toward diagnosis and prognosis of breast, prostate, and renal cancers; heart disease; and diabetic retinopathy. In addition to her background in statistics, Dr. Saniskowski holds a Master of Science in Operations Research from The College of William and Mary and served as INCOGEN's COO, running the company's day-to-day operations. Dr. Saniskowski has served on numerous boards, including the Center for Excellence in Aging and Geriatric Health in Williamsburg, VA. In 2015, she co-founded VIRUS Health, a non-profit organization to inspire healthy living in the U.S.

Maciek Saniskowski

YSU Alum, Author, physician-scientist, educator and entrepreneur with over 20 years of experience in: bioinformatics; clinical and basic research, algorithm development; establishing and leading multi-institutional, interdisciplinary teams; software engineering and commercialization; clinical diagnostics; HEOR; clinical affairs; business development; and grantsmanship.

Neida Sims

Graduate from Youngstown City Schools, then went on to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Education. She graduated from YSU Cum Laude in 1998 and later went on to become a special education teacher and earn a Master of Education. She became the only black female high school principal in Howard County Public School System, one of the top performing school systems in the USA. Nelda eventually retired from the school system in 2020 and became an author. She is one of ten authors in a book titled "Discovering Strength, Hidden in Sight - An Educators Perspective". Her chapter, "Unlimited Possibilities" shares her journey as an educator. In honor of her parents, she also established the TJ and Annie Ruth Rushton Legacy Scholarship, awarded to minority students at YSU majoring in Education. Nelda attributes much of her success to adhering to her parents' principles and strong foundation. Now, Nelda is a travel agent and enjoys traveling and spending time with her family and friends. Her goal in life is to be a positive role model, encourage, inspire, and motivate others.

Sue Thomas

From Boardman, Ohio, is an author and former FBI agent. Profoundly deaf from the age of 18 months, she used her skills in lip-reading to work as part of an undercover surveillance team. Her career inspired a television snow (Sue Thomas: F.B.Eye) and she has published two memoirs on her experiences.

John Paul Vincent “Sonny” Vaccaro

A former sports marketing executive. Vaccaro is best known for his tenure with Nike, Inc, where he signed Michael Jordan to his first sneaker deal. Vaccaro left Nike for Adidas, then Reebok. He founded the ABCD Camp, an elite showcase of high school basketball standouts, which ran from 1984 to 2007. It featured furture stars Kobe Bryant, Dwight Howard, and LeBron James. Vaccaro cofounded the first national high school All-Star game, The Dapper Dan roundball Classic, with concern promoter and boyhood friend Pat DiCesare in Pittsburgh in 1965 The game endured for 43 years and its alumni includes such greats as Calvin Murphy, Shaquille O'Neal, Kobe Bryant, Chris Webber, Alonso Mourning, Kevin Garnett, Vince Carter, Tracy McGrady, Patrick Ewing, Rasheed Wallace and Stephon Marbury. Vaccaro's story is featured in the film "Air," where he will be portrayed by Matt Damon.

Gary Wagner

Gary Wagner is the vice president and senior regional officer of the Cincinnati branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland. Wagner serves as the bank’s senior official in the Cincinnati region, with responsibility for managing relationships with regional stakeholders, monitoring the region’s economic environment, and conducting economic research and analysis. “Gary brings with him significant expertise on issues such as regional economics, state tax structures, and municipal pension systems, expertise gained through his work at the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia and in academia,” says Mark Schweitzer, senior vice president of the Cleveland Fed’s External Outreach and Regional Analytics Department. “Gary’s appointment is part of our ongoing commitment to outreach and engagement in the region, allowing the bank to gather information regarding economic developments in the Cincinnati region and to better inform our decision making.” Since 2015, Wagner has served as the Philadelphia Fed’s regional economic advisor, conducting applied research on regional and public finance issues. Prior to his work at the Philadelphia Fed, Wagner was a professor of economics for 15 years, most recently at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. During his tenure there, he served as associate director of Old Dominion’s Economic Forecasting Project and as co-editor of the State of the Region Report (2013–2014). Wagner has been a visiting scholar in the research department of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, as well as a member of the Governor's Council of Economic Advisors in Arkansas from 2008 to 2011 while serving as professor of economics at the University of Arkansas. Wagner holds a doctorate and a master's in economics from West Virginia University and a bachelor's in economics and political science from Youngstown State University.

Mel Watkins

Born in Memphis but raised in Youngstown, was the first African-American editor of the NYTimes book review. He has a notable career as an author, historian, and essayist. Some of his notable books include Stepin Fetchit: The Life and Times of Lincoln Perry; Dancing with Strangers, a Literary Guild Selection; and the highly acclaimed On the Real Side: A History of African American Comedy.

Kelly Ziccardi

Is an engineer at Honda of American Mfg., Inc. (HAM), and currently serves as a New Model Project Leaders in the New Model Department at Honda's Marysville Auto Plant (MAP). Born and raised in Ohio, Ziccardi grew up in Mineral Ridge and attended YSU on a valedictorian scholarship. She was named YSU's Engineering Woman of the Year for the graduating class of 2007, based on scholarship, service, and engineering achievement.