

An Alum Who Keeps the Beach Within Reach p 4

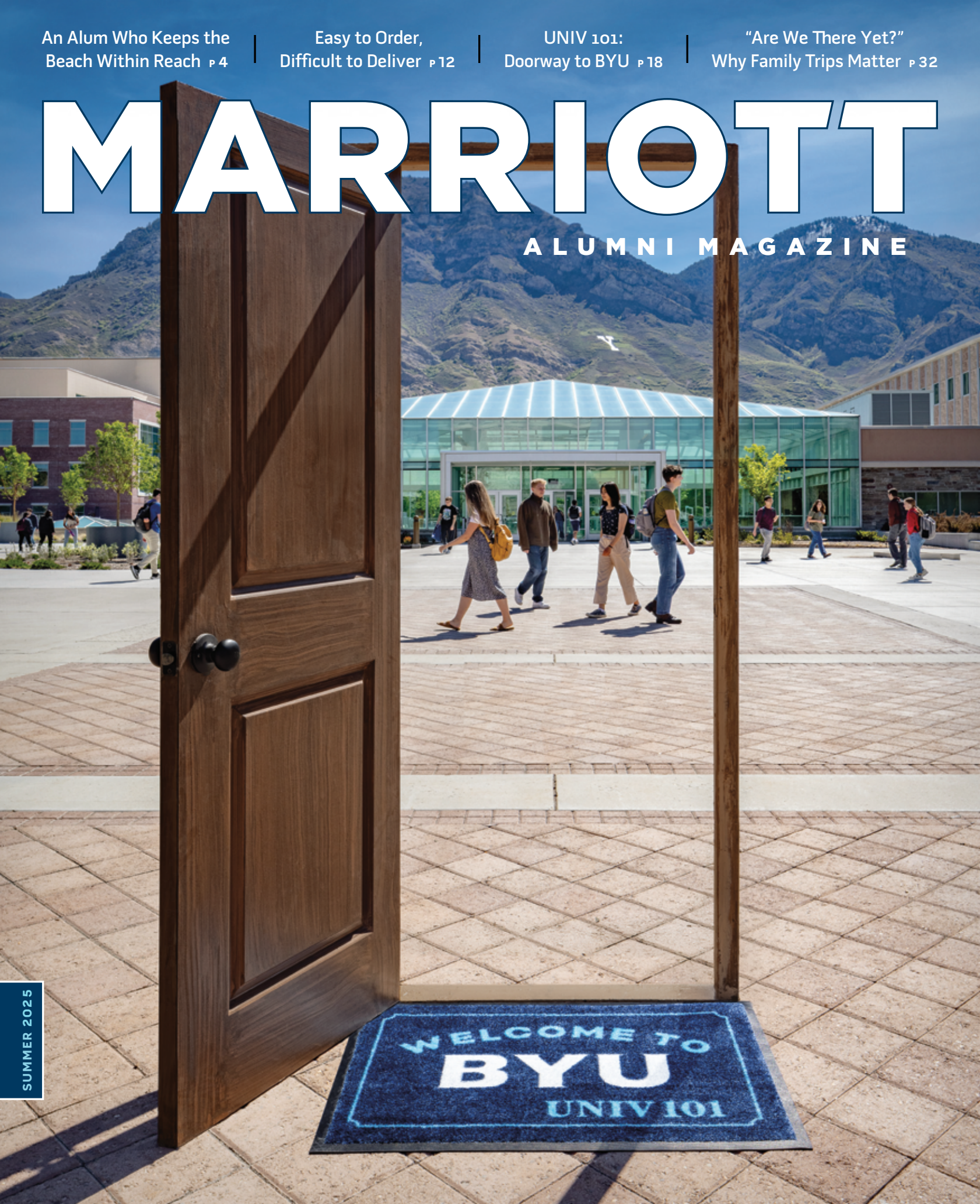
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SUMMER 2025





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PUBLISHER Brigitte C. Madrian
MANAGING EDITOR Andrew P. Cuthbert
EDITOR Shannon Keeley
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Emily Edmonds
ART DIRECTOR Jon G. Woidka
COPY EDITOR Shirleen M. Saunders

**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS, EDITORS,
DESIGNERS, AND PHOTOGRAPHERS** Sarah Griffin Anderson
Stephanie Bentley
Aubry Black
Katie Brimhall
Emmalee Collyer
Kathryn Cragun
Nicholas Day
Alayna Een
Melissa Een
Robert G. Gardner
Chadwick Little
Emma Jean Nelson
Elijah Pearce
Elizabeth Walker

MAGAZINE DESIGN BYU Brand & Creative

ALL COMMUNICATION SHOULD BE SENT TO

Marriott Alumni Magazine

490 Tanner Building

Brigham Young University

Provo, UT 84602

PHONE: 801-422-7696

EMAIL: marriottmag@byu.edu

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◀ HUNDREDS OF BUSINESS STUDENTS PULLED AWAY FROM THEIR STUDIES TO GATHER AT THE BYU MARRIOTT WINTER BALL ON FEBRUARY 1, 2025. GUESTS GRAZED ON CHARCUTERIE AND DANCED THE NIGHT AWAY AT THE WHITE SHANTY VENUE IN PROVO, PROVING THAT BEING QUICK ON YOUR FEET HELPS NOT ONLY IN A BOARDROOM BUT ALSO IN A BALLROOM.

Does anyone here know how to lure a squirrel? *Maybe there's a type of music that would disorient the squirrel.* • It's a great meal, **but it gives medieval-peasant vibes.** • If your professor ate paper, would that freak you out? *Honestly, I don't think that would get much of a reaction from me.* • **I have a whole pocketful of tiny Norwegian flags.** • You should make him make you cookies. • I'm scared of how I stretched absolutely nothing to fill two and a half hours. • Mary Jane is actually such a cute name. **It's a shame that it's a shoe.** • How morally wrong is it... wait, I probably shouldn't start a sentence that way. • **I hardcore judge people on Canva.** • It makes me highly uncomfortable when he's speaking because I don't like anything he has ever said. • **Do you guys ever feel weird about odd years?** I'm set to graduate in 2027, and that kind of gives me the ick. • Unless you are literally on your deathbed with a doctor's note, he won't care. • **So the superpower that you want is, like, a metaphysical secretary?** • Who are these chocolate-covered cinnamon bears from? *I don't know, but I ate them.* • **I wanted to be a spy when I grew up.** *How'd that go for you?* You'll never know. • Brilliant! I need to ground my children from cereal! • **Boomers love bread bowls.** • Every time I put on this perfume, I'm like, "Do I smell like an old lady?" But then again, I've always liked how my grandma smelled. • **It feels weird to eat fish in a landlocked state.** • I have managed to pull on my string cheese in such a way that it looks like plastic. • I just ordered a sandwich from the Blue Line, and I'm stoked. ***My best wishes to you and your sandwich.*** • The first one's good, the second one is entertaining, the third one... isn't really either of those. • **On a scale of one to ten, is your sense of humor at least a seven?** Because we only take sevens and above around here. • Without Costco I don't know if I'd even be alive. • I'm sorry, is that an indoor forest? • Aww, they're using trash for shells. The housing market is affecting the hermit crabs, guys. • **I try not to think about grapes that often.** • He had a lot of interesting data, but I didn't understand half of his graphs. • I am hoping to get more information about asparagus farming and cultivation. • **I love being annoying to recruiters.** I've literally emailed this guy so many times. • It was supposed to be right after you said that, but then you kept talking. • **I'm really just a track star on the side.**

**OVERHEARD
IN THE
TANNER**

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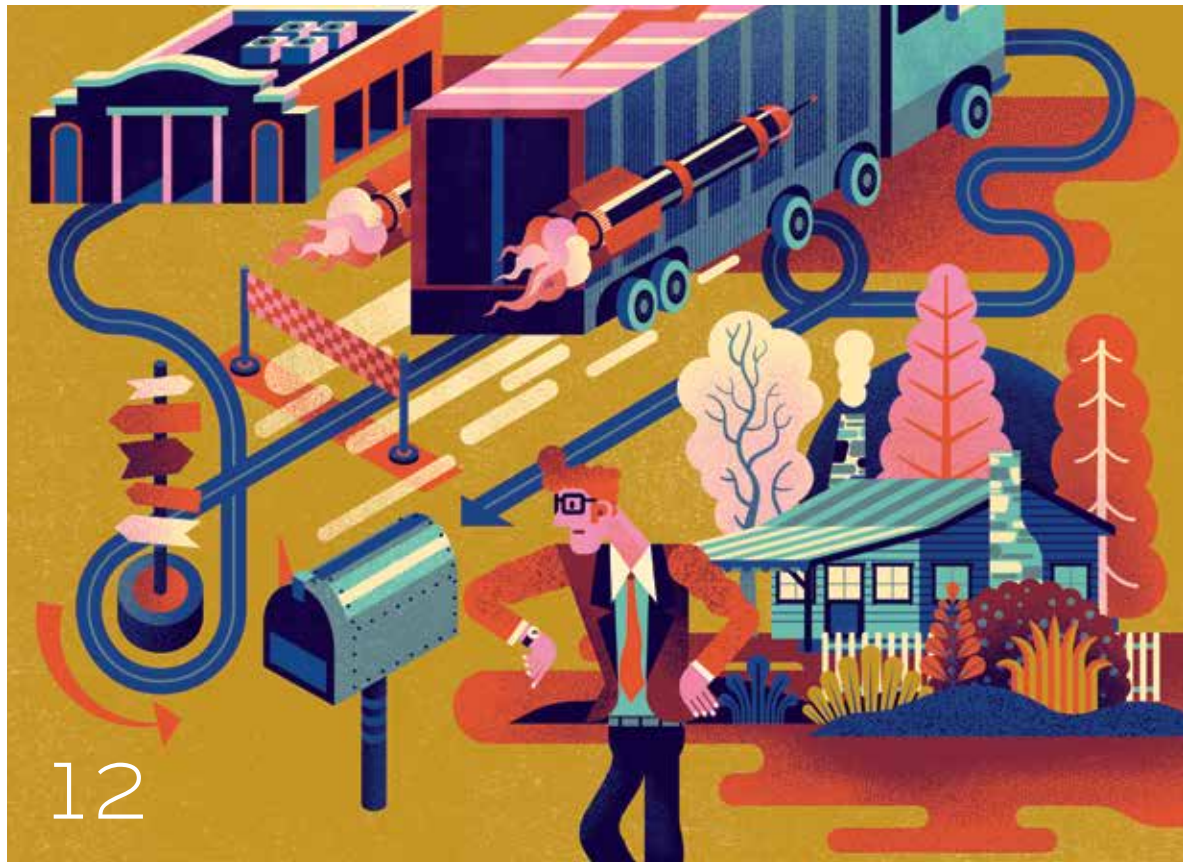
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SEAS THE DAY

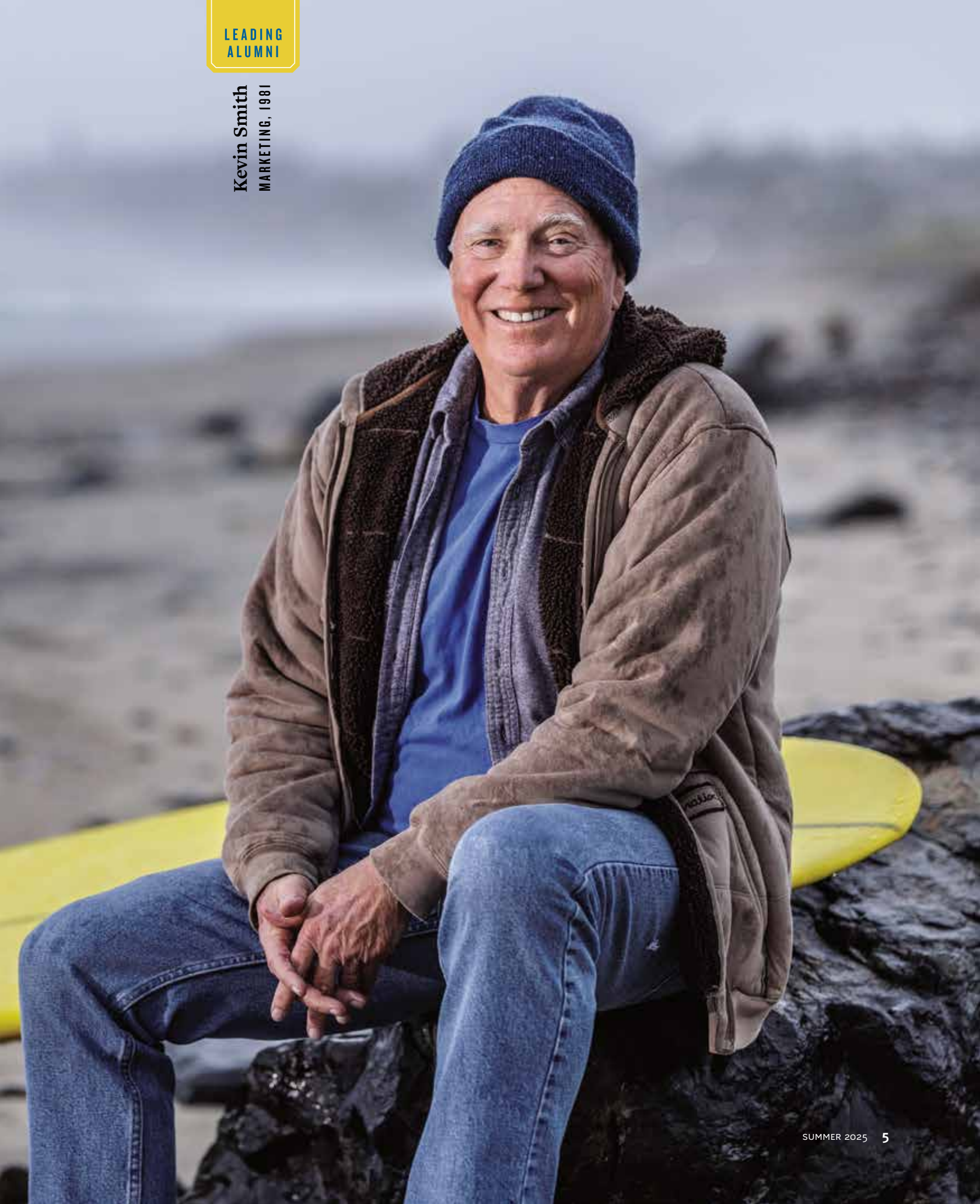
BY SARA
SMITH ATWOOD

PHOTOS BY
BRADLEY SLADE

BYU attracts students with its highly ranked academic programs, commitment to undergraduate teaching, blend of study and faith, and opportunities to follow in the footsteps of parents and grandparents.

But for Kevin Smith, something else drew him to Provo from California: “There was really good skiing,” he says with a laugh. “When you’re 18, you don’t make rational decisions. You just make decisions based on what feels like the most fun.”

Kevin Smith
MARKETING, 1981



He did find fun at BYU—plus friends, family, faith, and new skills from his marketing degree. These components ultimately helped him craft a flexible career that allowed for family time and plenty of skiing, mountain biking, and especially surfing.

“My philosophy throughout life has really been about balance,” says Smith, who retired in 2021. He spent his career entirely at AT&T, much of it working from his home in San Diego, with a front-row seat to the telecom industry’s evolution from dishwasher-sized fax machines to smartphones. He moved from sales to marketing to customer experience, always adapting his skill set so he could stick with one employer and keep his family rooted. “Even though I was at one company for almost 40 years, I feel like I had five different careers,” Smith says. “My job was the means to an end. And the end was family, faith, and fun.” In that order.

Longtime friend and fellow surfer Jeff Odom admires Smith’s ability to get work done while focusing on his priorities. “I’ve always known Kevin to excel at his job,” Odom says, “but it didn’t define him.”

Smith has never shied away from working hard—or playing hard. “A famous surfer once said that the best surfer is the one who is having the most fun,” Smith shares. “I have just about always been the best surfer in the water.”

Shoring Up

No one taught Smith, who grew up in Malibu, California, how to surf. Surfing was just the kind of thing you learned on your own with a beat-up board, he says, trying until you got it right. Smith got into skiing on a family trip to Park City, Utah. After he received his driver’s license, he was known to drive six hours from his home to ski at Mammoth Mountain. “I also played soccer and got into bluegrass, and I just had way more fun than any adolescent should be allowed to have,” he says.

These passions came with him to BYU. Smith bought a Sundance season pass his first day in Provo and “skied my brains out” almost every afternoon. He made the BYU soccer team and formed a bluegrass band by advertising with a 3" x 5" index card on the Ride Board in the Wilkinson Student Center: “Bluegrass flatpicker looking for a banjo player.” Amid the skiing, soccer, and jamming,

did he get any studying done? “Enough to keep me off of probation,” Smith says with a laugh. “Let’s put it this way—I was not on academic scholarship.”

His bandmates were all returned missionaries, and their testimonies nudged Smith toward a mission himself. “They were a good influence on me when I needed a good influence,” he recalls. The group played for the BYU International Folk Dance Ensemble, touring Europe with the dancers for six weeks. “I was actually in England when I got my mission call,” Smith remembers. “My parents sent me a telegram saying where I was going: Argentina.”

Smith’s priorities ironed out again when he met Laurie, a BYU–Hawaii student, at a young single adult dance in California soon after his mission. He was shocked to run into her again in Provo—she had transferred. “After that, I don’t think we left each other’s side,” Smith says. “We were engaged and then married just four months later.” At first, he had

rose-colored glasses: *By golly, we’ll just live on love*, he thought. But after the honeymoon, it became clear that he needed a plan.

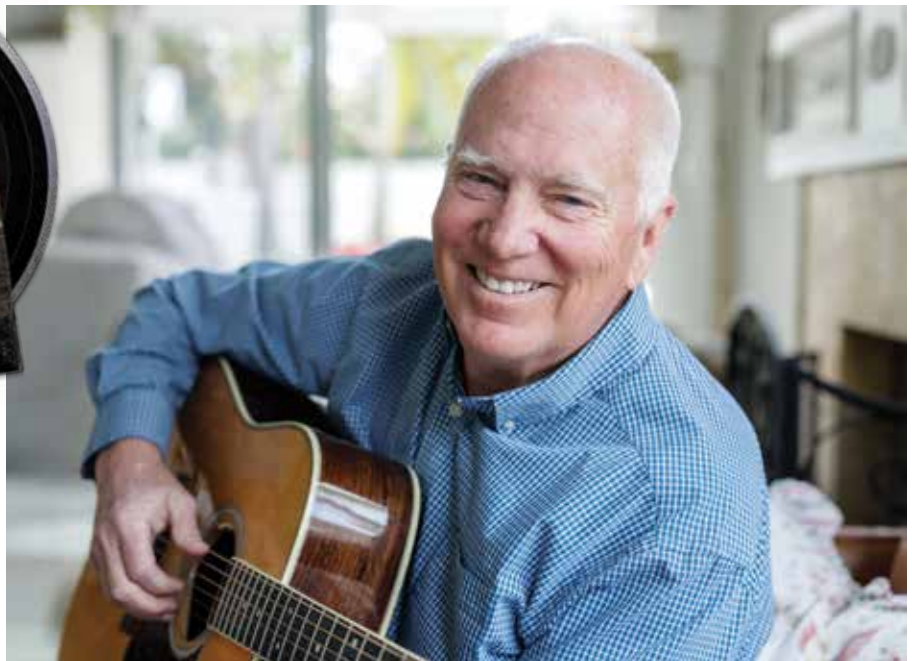
“I wasn’t going to be a professional skier,” Smith says. He wanted a career that would not only allow room for his hobbies but also support Laurie in her goal to stay home with their kids when they started a family. Smith asked his brother-in-law, a CPA, which career he would pick if he could choose again. He said marketing. “That was good enough for me,” Smith says. He hung up his skis for a time and hit the books.

Testing the Waters

The ocean soon called the Smiths back to their home state. Skiing was too expensive for the young family, which now included two children. “Surfing is cheap,” Smith says. “And that’s the honest answer to why we ended up in California.”

After his graduation, Smith took a job selling attic insulation door-to-door in





“A FAMOUS SURFER ONCE SAID THAT THE BEST SURFER IS THE ONE WHO IS HAVING THE MOST FUN. I HAVE JUST ABOUT ALWAYS BEEN THE BEST SURFER IN THE WATER.”

Los Angeles. “It was great motivation to go back to school,” he says. He attended California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo for his MBA with an emphasis in finance. “That school is one of the best California state schools,” he says. But after his rigorous undergrad at BYU, “the graduate program seemed easy. I felt very well prepared.”

An institute teacher connected Smith to the company where he would spend his entire career. Smith’s first gig with AT&T was selling private branch exchange systems—internal telephone networks for businesses. He kept his surfboard in the back of his car as he drove between customers, stopping at beaches during lunch breaks.

After about a year, “an opportunity came up that would require us to move to the Bay Area, which we were not happy about,” Smith says, noting that the waves were colder up north. “But they made me a great

offer to work in finance.” He took it—the position aligned with what Smith had studied in graduate school—and the job shifted his career trajectory.

At the time, the Bell Telephone Company, led by AT&T, held a monopoly in the telephone industry. The US government broke it up, and Smith worked in restructuring capital management for AT&T, reprioritizing its budget for a new competitive environment. “I became a strong contributor to that whole effort,” he says.

The project opened doors for Smith. After three years in the Bay Area, he found an opening in project management within the company and was able to move his family to Encinitas in San Diego County in 1987—and they never left.

Developing a good reputation within a large organization “allows you to sometimes dictate the circumstances under which you will work,” Smith says. He was granted remote work arrangements for the rest of his career, even at a time when it was mostly unheard of. “I was able to raise my family without moving them all over the place.”

A solid personal brand, Smith says, is something that he’s carried from one part of the company to another. The brand Smith built is “to always pitch in and help,” says Catherine Gibson, a former supervisor. “He’s very much a team player—collaborative,

competitive, fun to be around. He takes his work seriously, but he doesn’t take himself seriously.”

Staying Afloat

After a few years as a project manager, Smith moved into corporate sales: first as sales manager, doing much of his business along the Mexico–US border, then eventually as sales director for business services over Latin America. In both roles, his Spanish skills came in handy.

At one point, a colleague at AT&T Mexico was slated to give a speech at World Trade Center San Diego; when she had to back out, she tapped Smith to cover for her. He hesitated but figured that if he “blew it, they’d never ask me back. No biggie.”

Instead, it went so well that Smith was asked to participate on a committee; a year later he was appointed to the board, and after a few more years, in 1996, he was elected chair of World Trade Center San Diego. “I had five little kids at home, and my quota didn’t go away,” he says. “It was a busy time, but it was so cool.” His work solidified him as a leader in the local business community.

In 2005, Smith moved from managing sales to leading customer advisory councils, bringing AT&T’s biggest corporate accounts together to discuss their needs and seek feedback. Smith took charge in Canada and Latin

◆ HE JUST GOES AND GOES, AND HE LOVES HIS FAMILY; HE'S ALWAYS TRYING TO HELP THE GRANDKIDS FEEL INVOLVED AND ACTIVE. ◆



America. “He was so easy to talk to, so good at getting the customers to open up, and then good at resolving concerns,” Gibson says.

Smith often brought his guitar to customer advisory councils, breaking up long, multiday events by leading the customers in song. “Which is not what you’re thinking of when you’ve got gigantic brands like Mastercard and Kimberly-Clark together—sitting around and singing in a hotel in São Paulo,” says Gibson. “But that just exemplifies Kevin. He wanted to bring everyone together as a true community.”

The role as director of customer advisory councils, Smith says, was his best gig at AT&T. But in all big organizations, things change. Gibson explains, “There’s a reorganization every year. Kevin has had to take steps back in his career.” After Smith’s customer advisory role was dissolved, he took a role as marketing lead, technically down a rung on the so-called corporate ladder. However, he was excited to stay on the cutting edge of the industry in working with mobile

products—and to stay in a role at AT&T that preserved his personal priorities.

According to Gibson, Smith’s career move reflected his commitment to maintaining a well-rounded life centered on his family. “What was really important to him? That he could go surfing, that he was active in his church,” Gibson recalls.

For Smith, climbing the corporate ladder was not worth the sacrifices. “It’s not what I wanted,” he says.

After a year, Smith did move back up to a director position when the regional vice president for Latin America asked him to manage a partnership with América Móvil, the largest telecom company in Latin America. “It was very rewarding,” Smith says. “We were able to really grow that business; we’d doubled it in a year.” But the politics of international business eventually shattered the alliance in 2015, and “all of a sudden, I’m looking for a job,” Smith remembers.

He wasn’t ready to retire, so he scrambled to find another role inside AT&T. After

reaching out to everyone in his network, Smith landed a position in customer experience, “which was something new to me entirely. But they liked that I had so much experience in the company.” Smith reviewed customer processes and noted superfluous and expensive service calls for technicians. Instead of sending in the big guns for minor equipment issues, suggested Smith, why not create technical training videos for salespeople? A day or two later, he got a call from his boss: “How soon do you think you can have the videos ready?”

Smith downloaded some editing software and got to work. Eventually he built up a video-production team that made trainings on topics such as new products or installations. “There was a definite learning curve,” he says. “But I hired some very creative people and just made sure I didn’t hold them back.” Smith became the head scriptwriter. “By the time I left, we had made well over 400 videos,” he says. “It was a crazy way to finish my career at the company.”

Lifting Where You Surf

When Smith’s longtime friend Odom was a teenager growing up in Encinitas, Saturdays started at daybreak. Smith, Odom’s Young Men leader for a time, saw to that. Odom recalls, “I could tell you story after story of him dragging me out of bed at five in the morning to go surfing.” Smith taught Odom how to surf, tracked him down when he missed church, and “was involved in my life in such a positive way.” Odom also credits Smith for helping him prepare for a mission, career, and parenthood.

Odom’s parents had sacrificed relationships with them when they joined the Church, and the Smiths became Odom’s extended family.

“For me, being on the straight and narrow, even later in life, was because of Kevin’s influence,” says Odom, now a lawyer in Seattle.

Surfing brought Smith and Odom together through the years as they traveled with friends through Latin America, seeking out quiet beaches and tall waves. Surfing has always been social for Smith; he’s taken colleagues, friends of his kids, and new acquaintances out to the waves. When his daughter Calli brought her then-boyfriend, Matt Kelsay, home for the first time, Smith welcomed him to the family by inviting him to surf. “Kevin enjoys sharing what he loves with other people,” says Kelsay. Eventually, Kelsay took the missionary lessons and joined both the Church and the Smith family, becoming a son-in-law. “Kevin was always there to answer questions and be helpful and share his testimony in short, simple ways,” Kelsay says.

When Smith paddles out in the ocean alone, the waves are meditative. “The exhilaration, being close with nature—some of the best prayers I’ve had in my life have been when I’ve been out somewhere surfing by myself, not unlike Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove,” Smith says.

Smith’s most-treasured surf spot remains pristine and untouched, mostly because of its remote location in Baja California, six hours south of San Diego across the Mexico border. “The waves are great,” he says. After finding the location with friends, “I started taking my family camping there every year for Christmas.” Eventually, Smith and his surfing buddies leased the land and built a beach house. “We have great surfing in our front yard and nobody else around,” Smith says. “That’s my happy spot.”

Smith built connections in the local branch of the Church in San Quintín, the closest city

to the beach house. Kelsay describes giving a family a ride home from church one Sunday in Baja California and dropping them off at a tarp propped up by pallets over a dirt floor. “It was the roughest display of poverty you can really imagine,” Kelsay recalls. Smith grabbed the family some groceries, and when he returned to California, he coordinated an Eagle Scout project to build them a home.

On another trip, Kelsay helped Smith build a playground on the seashell-strewn lot outside a cinder block school. For several years, Smith enlisted members from his home stake to donate clothing and toys for people in San Quintín for Christmas. He also found a way to help an underfunded San Quintín fire station. A friend of Smith’s happened to be a fire captain, and Smith learned that California law requires fire stations to replace equipment every 10 years. “We filled my Yukon to the brim with firefighting jackets and hoses and stretchers and nozzles and all kinds of stuff,” Smith says, hauling it down to be used in San Quintín.

None of Smith’s service was formal. “Lift where you stand, help where you can,” Kelsay says to describe Smith’s efforts.

“It’s our way of giving back,” Smith adds. “By blessing the lives of the people who actually live in San Quintín, I think we’ve done a lot of good over the last 30 years.”

Enjoying Endless Summer

After reviewing their finances, Smith and his wife decided it was time to retire from AT&T in 2021. Smith dabbled in consulting work for a year and a half before settling fully into retirement. Now, “the first thing I do when I wake up is take a look at the surf cameras,” he says. Or he’ll get out his mountain bike, often taking along a grandkid or two. All five of his children and 13 of his grandchildren live within 15 minutes.

“Kevin is the Energizer Bunny,” Kelsay says. “He just goes and goes, and he loves his family; he’s always trying to help the grandkids feel involved and active. He’s a good example to my children by displaying his faith and helping them grow theirs while doing all these fun things together.”

Smith and his wife now volunteer as stake service missionaries at a hospital in Encinitas. They check in with patients who list The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as their preferred religion, helping them get the sacrament or a blessing, if needed. “We’re just there to let them know that somebody cares,” Smith says. “Every Sunday we leave there with big smiles, knowing that this is what we’re supposed to be doing.”

A few times per week, Smith joins local bluegrass jam sessions. “It keeps my mind sharp,” he says. “Once the music gets in your blood, you’re always going to play it.” In November 2024 he reconnected with two former BYU bandmates who flew in for a bluegrass competition.

His greatest friendships and joys, Smith says, have come from being an active member of the Church, serving several times as the kind of bishop who was right there moving boxes with the elders quorum and bringing meals with the Relief Society.

Smith’s retirement reflects the kind of life he’s tried to carve out for himself ever since he and Laurie began their journey together: faith, family, service, and outdoor adventure. “That fun component made me a better, well-rounded person,” Smith says, “and gave me opportunities to serve in creative ways.” **M**

About the Author

Sara Smith Atwood is an associate editor at Y Magazine. Though she now lives in Orem with her family, she grew up in San Diego and loves the waves—but has not tried surfing.



around the COOLER

BY EMILY EDMONDS

1. KEEPING TABS

We've all been there. You're closing excess browser tabs, and you get a little—or a lot—carried away. The good news is that there's an easier way to recover those websites than retracing your virtual steps. If you're using MacOS, selecting "Command + Shift + T" will restore sessions that were previously closed. For a Windows system, "Control + Shift + T" will get the same result. You won't regret memorizing this game changer.



Cougars Do Cut Corners

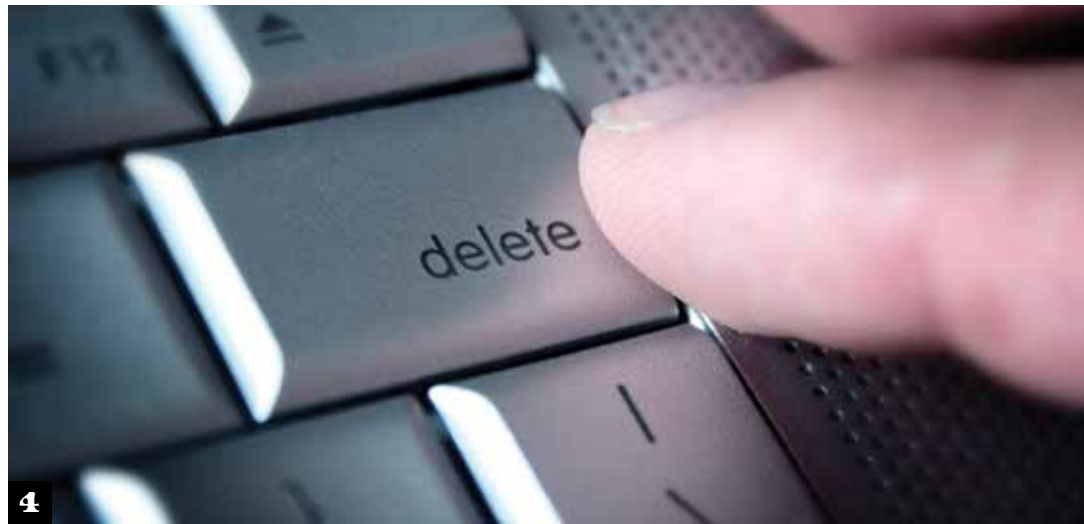
As a BYU student, you may have been pressured into believing that Cougars don't take shortcuts—across the lawn or otherwise. But today is the day to revisit that adage. You can—and should—become familiar with tech shortcuts that will not only save time but also boost organization.

With the same enthusiasm as a recently returned missionary looking for a first date, you can seek easy ways to streamline your efficiency. Start by implementing these simple hacks and see where they take you. (Just don't ruin the grass in the process, okay?)



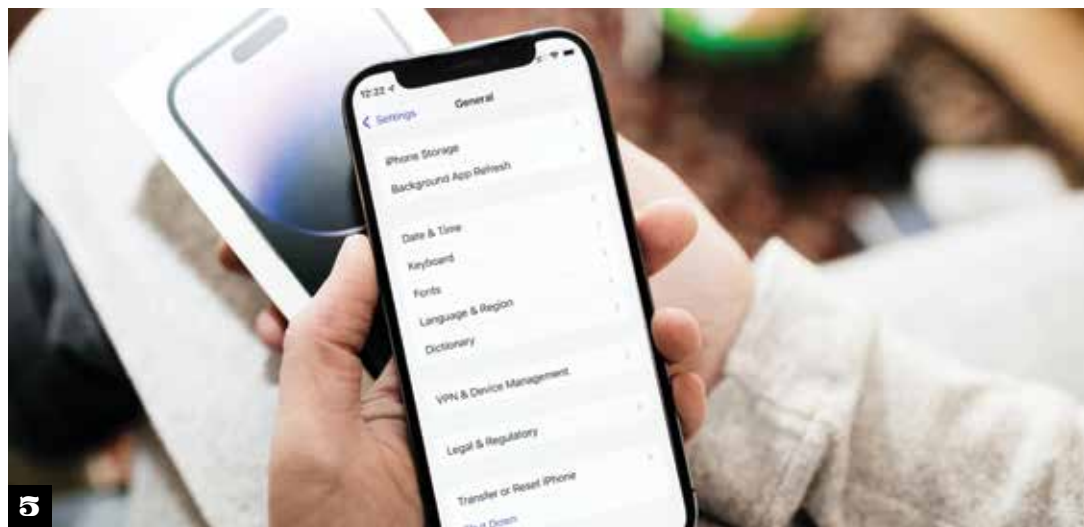
2. GMAIL GURU

Gmail has several handy desktop shortcuts, but you first need to visit Settings > General > Keyboard shortcuts and then enable shortcuts. Once you do that, simply pressing “c” will create a new message—and the magic doesn’t end there. Type “r” to reply, “a” to reply to all, and “f” to forward. A slash (/) takes you to the search bar, and “Command + Enter” sends an email. You can even toggle between messages by typing “k” to go to a newer email or “j” to visit a previous message.



4. BEST BYE

It’s probably time to take some emails to the virtual trash. To permanently remove Outlook messages, highlight the email(s) then press “Shift + Delete,” and they’ll be gone for good. If you simply want to move messages to the “Deleted Items” folder, highlight them and hit “Delete.” Beware: With some computer systems there’s no easy recovery option when you permanently delete items, so practice this method on unimportant emails before you purge your inbox.

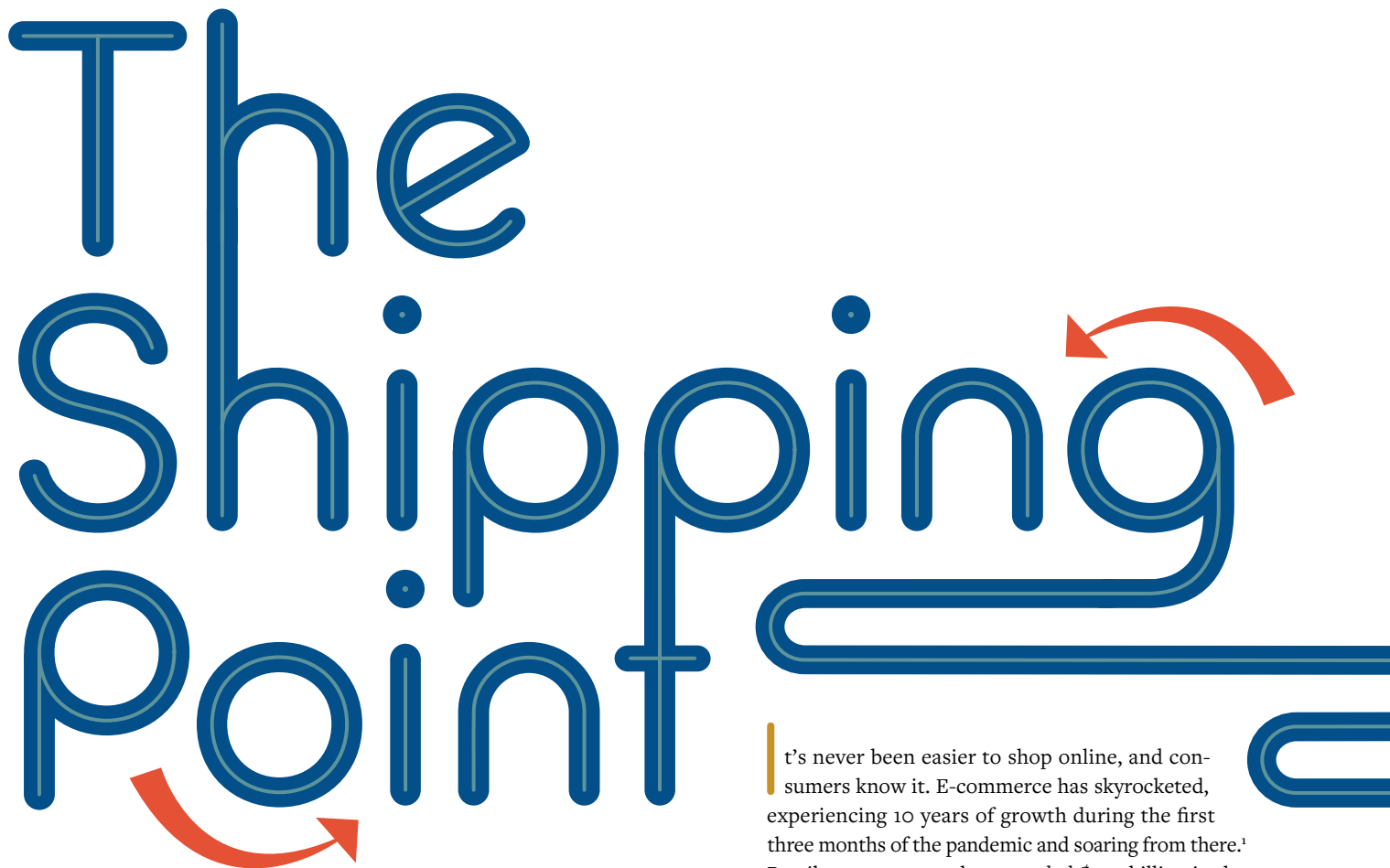


5. QUICK SENDS

Does entering your email address on an iPhone cause your carpal tunnel to flare up? Or maybe you lost out on tickets to an event because it took so long to type your email. Here’s a nifty little time-saver to help when filling out forms. On an iPhone, go to Settings > General > Keyboard > Text Replacement. Create a new replacement by hitting the plus sign, typing your email address in the “phrase” line, and then entering shortcut text (such as @@).



The Shipping Point



GOING THE EXTRA (LAST) MILE

By Todd Hollingshead
Illustrations by Gwen Keraval

It's never been easier to shop online, and consumers know it. E-commerce has skyrocketed, experiencing 10 years of growth during the first three months of the pandemic and soaring from there.¹ Retail e-commerce sales exceeded \$300 billion in the United States alone in the third quarter of 2024—a staggering 7.4 percent increase from the previous year.²

Further fueling that explosion is the introduction of two-day (or less) shipping by the world's largest online retailer, Amazon. It's turned into “the land of yes” for online consumers, but it's never been harder on the companies and people working to ensure those packages get to doorsteps. Last-mile delivery—that final e-commerce step where a package is physically loaded from warehouse to truck and driven to its destination—is an industry struggling to deliver.

Consumer expectations have shifted from the standard 3–7 business-day delivery window to two-day, next-day, or even same-day delivery. This accelerated timeline, combined with increasing delivery costs (last-mile now accounts for more than half of total shipping costs),³ means that retailers, and particularly their last-mile delivery companies, are feeling the crunch.

“In the industry, they call it the Amazon effect—the idea that delivery should be really fast, and it should be free,” says Scott Webb, a teaching professor in BYU Marriott’s Department of Marketing and Global Supply Chain. “Customers absolutely love it, but the truth is, it’s always been an unsuccessful business model.”

The result is that last-mile delivery is at a tipping point. Unable to absorb the massive losses like Amazon can, more last-mile delivery companies are struggling to break even, keep up with staffing needs, and deliver packages on time, ultimately leading to more dissatisfied customers. And while all this is happening, the global economy is ballooning, and the demand for last-mile delivery services is increasing exponentially.

Webb and other BYU Marriott faculty and alumni aren’t simply watching the chaos unfold with a bowl of popcorn in hand. They are some of the forces researching, innovating, and shaping the future of last-mile delivery, providing the wisdom and experience needed to help guide both consumers and companies through the speed bumps ahead.

First-Class Frustrations

FedEx is one of the few last-mile delivery companies that can keep up with Amazon, but its business model is changing fast to stave off rising industry costs. In a major shake-up in June 2024, the company merged two of their three subentities, FedEx Ground and FedEx Express, in a \$4 billion cost-cutting initiative.

The shift is about to hit home for Grant Rasband, a BYU Marriott graduate and FedEx Ground subcontractor who owns two last-mile delivery companies in northern Delaware. Between Rasband’s companies, he has the rights to all FedEx Ground deliveries and pickups for several zip codes in the state. As he puts it, if you live in Wilmington, Delaware, and you order a table from IKEA, his company will be delivering it to you.

Right now, Rasband is dispatching 16 of his 20 trucks daily and generating about \$2 million in annual revenue. That level of revenue doesn’t translate into much profit after factoring in rising fuel, vehicle, and labor costs, not to mention failed deliveries. “Two million sounds great, but margins are razor thin in the last-mile delivery industry,” he says.

Rasband says it’s been a rough couple of years for FedEx contractors, but he’s hopeful that the merger will play out in his favor. The integration of the FedEx

Express unit into FedEx Ground will provide more delivery opportunities for FedEx subcontractors, which will translate into more revenue. But Rasband’s companies will now also have to grapple with the pressures and logistical challenges that come with the precise delivery-time windows FedEx Express offers.

“Contractors that can handle timed delivery should make out pretty well,” says Rasband, who—together with his brothers, Neil and Paul, as well as his mother, Cecily—has owned and operated last-mile companies Mudd City Inc. and Jordan River Logistics Inc. for three years. “I’m excited by FedEx’s response to changes in the industry,” he notes, “but this will be a real challenge.”

FedEx, UPS, and the United States Postal Service all still outrank Amazon in revenue, but just like Rasband’s smaller companies, they’re all navigating the effects of Amazon’s movements in the last-mile world. So are big-box retailers like Target and Walmart, which have each beefed up delivery services in recent years to keep up with consumer expectations.

Some of those last-mile adjustments are becoming more manageable with new technology—more on that later—while other approaches are already causing some rethinking from retailers. The overarching challenge is twofold: First, consumers expect to receive products immediately, and second, they expect those products to have free shipping. According to surveys, the number-one reason online shopping carts are abandoned is that there is no free shipping.⁴

But the numbers don’t lie: Instant delivery with free shipping is simply unsustainable.

The Amazon Effect

Even Amazon is being forced to adjust to the Amazon effect. Shoppers who don’t subscribe to Amazon Prime are often prodded to spend at least \$50 to qualify for free shipping—in addition to being pressured to sign up for Prime. Throwing in a candle seems like no big deal to get free shipping, so most customers do it. But what they don’t know is that the “free shipping” is really just shipping costs baked into the cost of the products they’re buying.

It’s a tiny psychological manipulation with a significant impact on consumer behavior in the e-commerce landscape—something that seemed worth studying to BYU Marriott Assistant Professor Bekki Brau. Her

DEPENDING ON WHO YOU ASK, FIRST-DELIVERY ATTEMPTS OF PACKAGES FAIL ANYWHERE BETWEEN 10 PERCENT AND 40 PERCENT OF THE TIME.



expertise is primarily in the impact of human-machine collaborations (think analytics and AI) on supply-chain dynamics, but a few years ago she teamed up with a colleague to study the impact of shipping charges on the last mile.

Brau along with Jordan Barker, now an assistant professor at Michigan State University, tested how people would feel about a late package if they had to pay for shipping versus getting “free shipping.” Brau and Barker’s lab experiments showed conclusive results. If there is going to be a delivery disruption—an increasingly common experience—it is better to consolidate all the costs into one price, leaving the consumer feeling that they didn’t have to pay extra for shipping.

“When you introduce this partitioning and show consumers they’re paying this much for shipping, they have an expectation that the shipping will go well,” Brau says. “It’s far better to consolidate and have the upfront price all in one and then offer ‘free shipping’ in name. People tend to give retailers a little more grace when they feel like they didn’t have to pony up extra for shipping.”

The driving factor behind the research is the reality that disruptions are happening more and more often in last-mile delivery, leading to an increase in failed deliveries. In some ways, the last-mile delivery industry has been backed into a corner, fueled by an impossible conflict between consumer expectations of lightning-fast delivery and a host of other factors that can be outside of deliverers’ control.

Miles of Obstacles

Depending on who you ask, first-delivery attempts of packages fail anywhere between 10 percent and 40 percent of the time. In 2015 one last-mile company founder told *TechCrunch* that 20 percent of package deliveries fail on the first attempt in urban areas, and some zip codes see failures as high as 50 percent.⁵ A survey from UK-based software company Loqate found that a quarter of companies admit first-attempt failure on more than 10 percent of deliveries.⁶ That’s a massive number of items not making it to doorsteps, considering that package deliveries are projected to surpass 100 million a day by 2026.⁷

According to a *Harvard Business Review* analysis by Michigan State researcher Stanley Lim, there are three major reasons deliveries fail: poor urban planning, fluctuations in driver motivation, and stressful working conditions with related safety concerns.

“When drivers venture into certain areas, they worry about the security of the packages, their vehicles, and themselves,” Lim writes. “Speed is of the essence, and it’s easy to make mistakes when you’re in a rush. When you don’t have health insurance, when your vehicle



is owned by your company—or it’s your only major asset—and you’re carrying thousands of dollars’ worth of products, being robbed is a real concern.”⁸

Rasband estimates that each of his drivers delivers between 180 and 200 packages on a typical day, making between 130 and 150 stops. Drivers dispatch around 9 a.m. and log an average of 55 miles on what he describes as very urban and dense routes before returning to the dispatch terminal between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. Rasband mentions that these routes cover fewer miles than those of competitors, yet each driver is using upward of nine gallons of fuel per day in trucks that get roughly six to eight miles per gallon.

Fortunately, Rasband’s delivery-failure rate remains low, but—thanks to the merger—the rollout of timed delivery stops for FedEx contractors looms large.

“For the drivers, it’s going to be a big adjustment, and I do foresee turnover when we fully implement it,” Rasband says. “But it’s just the way things are going, and we’re going to have to figure it out. Unfortunately, there’s not really any other option.”

Brau agrees that the road ahead for the last-mile delivery industry will likely be a bumpy ride. While more and more companies like Rasband’s will be

compelled to handle next-day shipping or even same-day shipping, Brau foresees larger challenges that will impact everyone in the industry: breakdowns in supply chains, booming e-commerce demands in locations with poor urban planning, unreasonable conditions for drivers to meet those demands, and volatile fuel costs.

“When consumers order something and say they need it now, what if there are no other people in that neighborhood to batch items?” Brau asks. “What happens when deliverers have to change all of their routing to meet these expectations? All of this flexibility and quick adaptability for what a consumer is asking for is expensive, inefficient, and demanding.”

Brau also believes that as more and more consumers go online for items previously purchased in brick-and-mortar locations, anticipating consumer needs will be paramount. With current supply chains being global and the worldwide economy being so interconnected, natural disasters bring significant disruptions that prevent last-mile deliverers from getting products to consumers on time.

“The supply chain is only as strong as its weakest link. What happens when a hurricane or an earthquake hits the East Coast and products are not in a

warehouse close by?” Brau says. “When items are housed offshore in China, Vietnam, or Europe, you’re facing extreme logistical tests.”

The rethinking of warehouse operations further complicates the matter. Before the e-commerce revolution, most warehouses operated in a business-to-business context in which it was relatively easy to forecast product needs for existing business clients. Now warehouses are shifting to serve heightened business-to-consumer demands—an exponentially more challenging logistical operation with widely varying product orders. All of this amounts to a perfect storm for the organizations trying to find solutions for last-mile delivery and for the people who actually drive the trucks. But there is hope.

Robots to the Rescue?

Webb, Brau’s colleague and coauthor on several publications, says robots are coming to the rescue. More specifically, companies are taking advantage of more sophisticated robotics to help automate the process of sorting products at business-to-consumer warehouses. Webb also says routing software is rapidly improving. According to Verified Market Research, the routing software industry was valued at \$2.3 billion in 2023 and is projected to reach \$3.5 billion by 2030.⁹

But all the routing software and warehouse robotics in the world can’t solve the physical and mental strain on truck drivers who still have to get packages on doorsteps—unless robots do the delivery part too.

The world’s first robot package-delivery system, Starship Technologies, launched in early 2018 in Milton Keynes, England, a city about 50 miles outside of London. Later that year, Starship rolled out its services to select California locations. Since then, Starship’s stroller-sized delivery robots have driven (mostly on sidewalks) more than 8 million miles and completed 7 million deliveries of groceries, take-out food, and industrial supplies to 100 cities, campuses, and industrial sites. Other companies, such as Cleveron and Nuro, have shifted from delivery robots to larger-scale autonomous, driverless vehicles. But the major players in last-mile delivery have struggled to establish autonomous delivery at the largest scale.

Amazon announced an autonomous robot delivery unit, Scout, back in January 2019 but shelved the service in October 2022. UPS started a partnership with autonomous vehicle company Waymo for package delivery in 2020 but ended the partnership in August 2023. FedEx announced its last-mile delivery robot, Roxo, in 2019 before pulling the plug in the fall of 2022. And the biggest last-mile deliverer of all, the Postal Service, tested autonomous trucks for delivery back in 2019 but never moved beyond trials.



NOW LAST-MILE DELIVERY IS SO EASY ON THE CONSUMER—IT TAKES ONLY ONE CLICK OF A BUTTON—SHOPPERS THINK THEY NEED A LOT MORE STUFF THAN THEY ACTUALLY DO.

Even experts in the last-mile industry can't agree on the future of autonomous vehicle delivery. Webb thinks it's just a matter of time before the technology becomes reliable enough to be used on a mass scale, while Rasband just can't see a future filled with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) dropping off pizzas.

"I don't think Americans are going to want drones flying around suburbs," Rasband says. "I don't foresee that happening any time soon."

Even though Amazon, FedEx, and DHL continue to test drone delivery, Brau isn't convinced that UAVs are the answer to what ails the last-mile delivery industry. In her opinion, the biggest change that needs to happen is an adjustment in consumer behavior.

Being a Better Consumer

Thanks to free return policies, regular e-commerce shoppers often buy several different sizes of the same item, knowing they'll only keep one. Consumers might also purchase an item they will only use once and then return it when they are done with it. These practices—while seemingly harmless to consumers—further strain truck drivers and also create financial loss for retailers who foot the bill.

Return costs have grown so exorbitant—17.6 percent of \$247 billion in online merchandise was returned in 2023¹⁰—that it's often cheaper for companies to throw the product away than to process the return. Or, in the case of inexpensive items, retailers might simply send the money back to the consumer and tell them to keep the unwanted product. According to a survey from ReturnPro in 2023, nearly 60 percent of retailers, including Amazon and Target, offered "keep it" policies.¹¹

While this practice helps cut down on last-mile delivery strains, Brau says it's pretty terrible for sustainability.

"From a consumer's perspective, you need to be a smart shopper; the cost is so much higher than the product you purchase," Brau says. "We can't have this culture of consuming, consuming, consuming. We should stop and think, 'What impact am I having on the planet and on future generations?'"

Brau says that now last-mile delivery is so easy on the consumer—it takes only one click of a button—shoppers think they need a lot more stuff than they actually do. Consumers are ultimately the ones who

are creating the demand, and businesses are responding to that demand. "If, collectively, we have a reawakening on how much we buy, there can be a lot of good that can take place," she says. "Consumers hold a lot of power." **M**

About the Author

Todd Hollingshead is a media relations manager in BYU's University Communications office, where he primarily writes about faculty research. He and his wife, Natalie (a fellow BYU grad), live in Springville, Utah, with their four children. His last order from Amazon was a pair of noise-canceling headphones for Natalie. He didn't return them!

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Launching UNIV 101

How BYU Marriott Faculty—and Pre-Business Students—Are Embracing the University’s Newest Venture

By Emily Edmonds Photos by BYU Photo

BYU wasn’t on Avery Sherman’s radar. Although her parents graduated from Weber State University, Sherman had set her sights on her grandparents’ alma mater: Utah State University. But during Sherman’s senior year of high school, she toured several Utah college campuses, and BYU stood out. “Not only was the campus beautiful, but there was also a different feeling among the students,” says the Parker, Colorado, native. “It just felt like the right place for me.”

As part of Sherman’s first semester, she enrolled in UNIV 101: BYU Foundations for Student Success, a new course required for all first-year students. With lessons on BYU’s prophetic mission combined with overviews of university services, UNIV 101 helps students like Sherman—who weren’t familiar with BYU

before becoming a student—build a strong footing. Classes max out at 25 to foster close-knit friendships.

“I was a little skeptical of UNIV 101 at first,” admits Sherman, who landed in a section taught by BYU Marriott Professor Aaron Miller. “I’d heard it was a homeroom type of class, but I ended up really loving it.”

Students learn about campus resources, says BYU President C. Shane Reese, and they’re also mentored by a dedicated faculty member and a peer mentor while being integrated into a group of fellow students who are all looking out for one another. The curriculum, Reese says, “helps students understand the profound spiritual and educational mission of BYU and how it can help them on their journey of becoming disciples of Jesus Christ.”

Space for Impact

Fitting more than 7,000 first-year students into classes of 25 required 285 professors during fall semester 2024. Of those, 27 were BYU Marriott professors.

Bonnie Anderson, an information systems professor and associate dean at BYU Marriott, was one of the faculty members tapped to teach the course last fall. As she met with other BYU Marriott UNIV 101 faculty, she was impressed with their devotion to the undertaking. “Everyone was dedicated to making it the best experience for our students,” says Anderson. “We were all really committed to our students and cared for them as individuals.”

As faculty navigated new territory, they leaned on and learned from other colleagues. The professors who teach UNIV 101—all tenured—follow the same course outline, with a green light to plan specifics. “We’ve had opportunities—both within BYU Marriott and across the whole campus—to share best practices and talk about challenges,” says Troy Nielson, a professor of organizational behavior and human resources.

Nielson’s appreciation for his campus colleagues grew as they swapped ideas and as he noticed their desire to “help incoming students have a fantastic experience and to feel closer to the Savior,” he says. “We’re becoming more like Him as part of this process.”

Adds Reese: “We are all learners at BYU, and we as faculty are learning right alongside our students.”

A Fresh Network

Reese empathizes with students who are acclimating to college and its accompanying challenges. “I was once that intimidated freshman far from home, and this class would have been a game changer for me,” he says. “UNIV 101 is revolutionary for its potential to foster belonging with our students.”

For Sherman, her UNIV 101 course felt personal. “All of my other classes had 100-plus students. It was nice to have a class where you knew everyone’s name and you actually felt seen and heard,” says Sherman, a pre-business student. “It really helped with feelings of belonging.”

Because sections are small, everyone knows one another by the end of the first few weeks, Reese says. Assignments include

attending events together, such as a campus concert or a football game, or hiking the Y. “The classroom feels like a mini community,” he says.

While it requires a lot of professors to make the smaller UNIV 101 classes possible, Nielson says the ratio is right. “Students have a better overall experience in a smaller class. They get to a place where they can feel comfortable developing and sharing their talents and can be authentic more quickly,” he says. “My UNIV 101 students knew there would be some great experiences in college and there would be some challenges, and we were there to help one another with those.”

Nielson, who taught an 8 a.m. section, observed how his class came together as the weeks progressed. Some mornings it took a few minutes for his students to get warmed up, but “they were engaged in our discussions and activities. They developed a good camaraderie.”

Anderson similarly observed how her section provided a built-in way for students to become friends. The part Anderson loved the most, however, was seeing her students’ efforts to make sure every individual was cared for. “There was no falling through the cracks,” she says.

Reese, who has taught UNIV 101 twice, remembers when a student didn’t show up for class: “Our peer mentor let me know that a handful of students had already texted this student to say, ‘Hey, we missed you today,’” Reese recalls. “Another example I witnessed was a student sitting alone at a table. After a minute or two, another group of students motioned for her to join them at their table and added an extra seat.” These may seem like small things, Reese says, but they make a big difference for students.

Invested in Students

While connections among UNIV 101 students lay a strong foundation, the mentorship provided by teachers is the icing on the mint brownie. On the first day of Anderson’s class—held in the Kimball Tower before it switched to the Tanner Building—she took her students on a quick excursion. “I said, ‘I’m going to show you where my office is so you can come visit me,’” she recalls.

James Dewey was a student in Anderson’s class in fall 2024 and distinctly remembers

BYU Marriott Faculty Who Have Taught UNIV 101*

Brad Agle
Bonnie Anderson
Darron Billeter
John Bingham
Glenn Christensen
Robert Christensen
Kim Clark
Michael Drake
Ryan Elder
John Garfield
James Gaskin
Paul Godfrey
Timothy Gubler
Brian Hill
Steve Liddle
Neil Lundberg
Brigitte Madrian
Craig Merrill
Tom Meservy
Aaron Miller
Bruce Money
Taylor Nadauld
Troy Nielson
Cody Reeves
Kurt Sandholtz
Tim Seidel
Bill Tayler
Jake Thornock
Mark Widmer
Jeff Wilks
Colby Wright

*Those who taught during winter 2024, fall 2024, and/or winter 2025.



that walk across campus. “Many professors tell you about their office hours, but when Dr. Anderson took us to her office, it felt like that door was opened a lot more widely because we were able to see where she was,” says Dewey, a pre-business student from Highland, Utah. “It made Dr. Anderson seem more real and more accessible.”

Once the class moved closer to Anderson’s office, students would stop by to snag a piece of candy or to just say hi. Anderson says that during her first year of college she never went to any of her professors’ offices. “I didn’t even know where their offices were—and I would have been intimidated,” Anderson admits. “But I wanted my students to know I’ve got an open door and that there

was somebody on campus who knew them and cared about them.”

In addition to showing students her office, Anderson doled out succulents and spider plants she had propagated so students “could have something green and alive in their apartments,” she says. “If it died, they could come back and swap it out for a fresh plant.” But if it stayed alive, then it was something a little hopeful. Anderson also shares plant cuttings with the undergraduate students she mentors. “It’s good to have some greenery for mental and physical health,” she says.

As students continue their college careers, Nielson hopes they remember talking about Christ as well as the friendships they formed



in UNIV 101. “I think they’ll also remember that they had a professor who cared about them, who they could go to if they needed advice or a recommendation letter,” he says.

A Mission Statement

For Sherman, lessons on BYU’s heritage and mission were eye-opening. “Before the course, I didn’t know about the mission at all.



But now I feel like I fully understand why I'm here, what BYU's goals are, and how to be a disciple-scholar," she says.

One of the course's main objectives is to deepen students' knowledge of BYU through readings, class discussions, and writing assignments. "As we studied the articles in the curriculum, I felt even more strongly that BYU is guided by living prophets and that the Lord cares about the university in a unique way," Nielson says. "UNIV 101 helps students really understand the uniqueness of BYU's mission and aims."

Dewey says that while the course offered him an overall perspective on the university, BYU's values were best demonstrated by Anderson herself. "You could tell she truly cared about what she taught. She cared about our well-being. She wanted us to go forth and serve."

Field Studies

Another one of UNIV 101's chief purposes is to help students become familiar with BYU's resources—an opportunity that Nielson, who has taught at BYU for 17 years, also benefited

from. "Ninety-eight percent of my time on campus is spent in the Tanner Building. I've heard about many of the campus resources but haven't used a lot of them," he acknowledges. "Teaching UNIV 101 has forced me to explore more of campus and better understand what's available."

Nielson's students completed a scavenger hunt in the Wilkinson Student Center to learn about resources housed there; they also explored the resources in the Richards Building, the Kennedy Center, the university library, and the Rollins Center for Entrepreneurship and Technology.

All sections embark on similar ventures around campus. "Our field trips were impactful because we were able to see places, not just talk about them," says Dewey.

In addition to campus outings, Anderson's class also benefited from its unique meeting time. Held on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 9 a.m., Anderson's section preceded BYU's weekly devotionals. After class, students would walk to the Marriott Center, and groups of classmates would sit together.

"It is nice going to events with people you are already associated with," Dewey says. "When you're sitting alone, you can be worrying about the people on either side of you. You don't know them. You're in a foreign place. But if you are surrounded by classmates or friends, it can create an environment where you're more comfortable and open to listening."

Venturing Out

Students in UNIV 101 are required to complete certain out-of-class activities with their peers: a sporting event, a cultural event, and an academic event. But many of the students spent time together beyond the required excursions. "There were lots of activities and invitations posted on our class GroupMe," Anderson says, noting that messages ramped up on the weekend.

Sherman remembers that the first few weeks of her UNIV 101 class were quiet, "but once we started doing the activities together," she says, "we were talking all the time."

Going to BYU football games, a Vocal Point fireside, and a game night at Miller's house were all highlights of Sherman's time in UNIV 101. "I had a lot of general classes," she says, "so UNIV 101 was a good break from all the super-intense learning."

Business Models

Since UNIV 101 professors are pulled from departments across campus, students get a different experience based on their teacher. Nielson, for example, didn't hesitate to add a business flavor to his UNIV 101 section.

"I'm a big fan of LinkedIn and professional networking," he says, "so I've talked with my students about the importance of using the free LinkedIn membership, whether you're going into business or something else."

Nielson also provided an optional career assessment ("a little taste of BYU Marriott")

with questions carefully designed to get students thinking about different aspects of their professional goals. “I want them to be more intentional and better prepared for their careers as they move through college,” he explains.

Anderson’s section also had a distinct BYU Marriott feel. Her class heard from the school’s mental health and wellness specialist in addition to guest lecturers from the Rollins Center, ROTC, the Business Career Center, and Undergraduate Advisement. As Anderson planned classes on different pockets of business expertise—such as personal finance, AI, and negotiations—she reached out to other BYU Marriott UNIV 101 professors to collaborate. These “experts in the building helped me frame and select the key aspects to highlight since we could have spent a whole semester on each of these topics,” Anderson says. “I wanted my UNIV 101 course to be a valuable experience for the students, so I invested the extra time.”

A Roaring ROI

Sherman’s UNIV 101 class is now over, but it still yields lasting impacts. “I learned so much about BYU’s mission and how to be a disciple-scholar,” Sherman says. “I love running into a UNIV 101 classmate on campus and seeing a familiar face. I consider all of them as friends and will carry those friendships throughout the rest of my time at BYU.”

As the innovative course buoys students, it also strengthens the instructors who, in turn, help advance the university. “As I’ve taught UNIV 101—and I think this is true for all the faculty teaching this course—I get fresh inspiration every week about BYU’s incredible mission and our dual spiritual and academic heritage,” Reese says. “UNIV 101 is certainly first and foremost about our students, but there’s no doubt for me that our faculty are being inspired as well.” **M**

Note

1. See Peter B. Gardner, “Learning the Y,” *Y Magazine*, summer 2024, 33; magazine.byu.edu/article/univ-101-byu-foundations.



Scan this QR code to read or listen to the articles that UNIV 101 students study.

A Glimpse into UNIV 101

Clouds overshadow BYU with a blanket of gray, but the warm familiarity among students in Neil Lundberg’s UNIV 101 classroom contrasts with the chilly weather. As these first-year students shuffle into the tiny Maeser Building classroom, they chat about jobs, dates, and even clothes (“I love your shoes,” one student tells another).

After a prayer, class begins as the section’s peer mentor, Rosie Stoddard, leads students in an ice-breaking activity. Following that, she shares announcements about an upcoming essay, a service scavenger hunt, and a movie meetup. Then Lundberg jumps into the topic for the day: disciple-scholarship.

Lundberg, a BYU Marriott professor of experience design and management, describes to the students the heavy teaching load he’s carrying, particularly with instructing an EMBA class on Saturdays in Salt Lake City. After a long week, Lundberg shares, he found himself struggling one weekend with a topic for an upcoming class.

“I prayed for help,” he relays, “and immediately, an idea came to mind: Do an external audit with the class. I realized it would be the perfect application and opportunity to demonstrate that concept.”

The activity worked seamlessly, Lundberg continues. “This experience was an example of why we shouldn’t hesitate to include the Lord in any of our endeavors. He wants to share His light in all we do, and He is eager to help.”

Students—sitting at desks arranged in a circle—then share how the Lord has helped them in school, personally, or even in finding part-time jobs. “The more we practice discipleship and scholarship, the bigger the overlap,” Lundberg says, as he projects a Venn diagram of the two spheres. “There’s no need for them to be distant realms.”

Culturally, BYU has an ethic of joy and happiness, Lundberg tells the class as it wraps up. “It can be hard when you don’t feel that way, but the university wants you to know that you’re not alone.”

BY EMILY EDMONDS

by the NUMBERS

In Your Wheelhouse

RV enthusiasts often tout “Home is where you park it” to highlight the flexibility a house-on-wheels provides. RVing also offers adventure—but with added elements of small spaces, potential malfunctions, and sewage connections. If you’re toying with the idea of buying a motor home, you’re in good company: RV ownership surged 62 percent between 2001 and 2021.

Source: www.rvia.org/news-insights/2021-year-rv



16%

PORTION OF RV OWNERS AGES 18–34.

For decades, the stereotypical RVer was a retiree, but recently there’s been notable growth in RV ownership among Gen Z and millennials. Younger travelers are drawn to #vanlife and—thanks to telecommuting and satellite internet—being legitimately remote is more doable than ever. Although traveling in an RV offers flexibility, popular campgrounds and RV resorts (yes, that’s a thing) are typically booked months in advance, giving wanderlust a reality check.

Source: rvia.org/system/files/media/file/2025%20Owner%20Demographic%20Profile%20-%20Public_1.pdf

1 MILLION

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF AMERICANS WHO LIVE IN AN RV FULL-TIME.

Of the 11.2 million US households that own an RV, about 1 million people reside year-round in their motor homes. Whether these “full-timers” have remote jobs or are retired, they all share a penchant for the variety that living on the road affords. Most RV parks offer discounted rates for travelers



staying long-term, and some full-timers are hired to be camp hosts in exchange for discounted—or even free—stays at certain campgrounds.

Source: washingtonpost.com/business/2018/11/12/million-americans-live-rvs-meet-modern-nomads/

\$140 BILLION

ANNUAL IMPACT OF RVING ON THE US ECONOMY.

RVs don't only drive adventure—they also drive the travel industry. The \$140 billion impact is generated from RV sales, services, campgrounds, manufacturers, and suppliers. The RV industry supports nearly 680,000 jobs and \$48 billion in wages. It takes a lot of money to accommodate modern nomads, but the views travelers get waking up next to a serene lake or a national park—those are priceless.

Source: rvia.org/rvs-move-america-economic-impact-study



6-10



MILES PER GALLON AVERAGED BY CLASS A MOTOR HOMES.

Life is a highway, and if you're gonna ride it, don't forget to gas up. Class A motor homes—the largest type—guzzle a decent amount of fuel. Price-watching apps, such as GasBuddy, come in handy when drivers are filling up 100-gallon tanks. While the gas mileage can be hard to stomach, calculating the cost of flying your family somewhere might provide a little perspective on the price tag. (There are no luggage fees in an RV, either!)

Source: cruiseamerica.com/trip-inspiration/rv-gas-mileage



30

MEDIAN NUMBER OF DAYS RV OWNERS ARE ON THE ROAD ANNUALLY.

Whether you're on a weekend escape or a cross-country adventure, RV excursions provide perks that traditional travel can't always match. While some RVs are built for short-term getaways, others boast amenities such as residential-size fridges, dishwashers, full bathrooms, and laundry appliances. Other features—solar panels, radiant floor heating, Wi-Fi boosters, and satellite TV—make it easy to have the niceties of home no matter where you roam.

Source: rvia.org/2025-go-ripping-rv-owner-demographic-profile



27,409

NUMBER OF RV CAMPGROUNDS AND PARKS WITHIN THE US.


While there's no shortage of destinations, here are a few things to keep in mind when deciding where to park. RV facilities near highways or busy roads can be loud, even at night. In the summer, campgrounds with shade—and swimming pools—are ideal. Review RV slot descriptions before you book, as they range in size, amenities, and price. And remember: It's the unexpected twists and turns that often create the best road-trip memories.

Source: rvia.org/system/files/media/file/RVIA%20Campground%20Industry%20Market%20Analysis.pdf



BY BRADLEY P. OWENS

ILLUSTRATIONS
BY JULIAN RENTZSCH

**“LET US RUN
WITH PATIENCE
THE RACE 
THAT IS SET
BEFORE US”**

Really!

Who's that?

544 MILES



DAYS
HOURS



In my role as a business ethics professor, I have the blessing of teaching about 350 students a year, and I absolutely love it. One of my core goals is to help my students prepare to thrive by increasing their ability to make gospel- and principle-based decisions about work and life. Because the course is so focused on decision-making, I have met with many students one-on-one to talk about major life choices and challenges. Some feel that the pace of life is way too fast and that they can't keep up. Some have questions they can't currently answer, and others feel frustrated because they have waited a lot longer than they had anticipated for righteous desires to be fulfilled.

These life concerns can seem all the more overwhelming during the young adult years—what Elder Robert D. Hales called “the decade of decision”¹—during which the choices a young adult makes will have a significant impact on how the remaining decades will unfold. I have prayerfully thought about how to help my students—and anyone else who feels weary in their mortal journey—to find the renewed strength they need to keep going with faith and patience. To frame some key principles, I want to relate a true story I heard a few years ago that still surprises me to this day.

THE CLIFF YOUNG STORY

In 1983 a 61-year-old farmer contacted the organizers of a 544-mile ultramarathon from Sydney to Melbourne, Australia, and asked to be registered for the race.² Since the other entrants were well-known and proven ultrarunners—with some holding records³ and others bearing sports sponsorships—this farmer's request was met with skepticism.

“Do you know how long this race is?” the officials asked. “What makes you think you can complete it?”⁴

The farmer insisted that he understood how long the race was and that he believed he could finish it. Being from a poor farm family who couldn't afford horses or four-wheelers, he had often run in his knee-high gum boots to round up nearly 2,000 sheep over a very large area in advance of a storm, sometimes running for three days to round up the entire flock.

On the first morning of the race, the other runners showed up with experienced support teams in mobile homes with showers and nice beds. In contrast, this farmer drove up in a rusty old van, with an inexperienced road crew and one pair of running shoes.⁵ Though viewed with curiosity, no one took this old farmer seriously as a contender.

However, to the shock of the entire nation and the global racing world, this 61-year-old farmer named Cliff Young not only won the ultramarathon but also beat the previous record by two days, finishing the 544 miles in 5 days and 15 hours.

How did this happen?

Based on my reading of Cliff's biography and other articles detailing this astonishing result,⁶ a key reason Cliff Young won was that almost nothing went right for him the first day of the race.

So what went wrong?

First, during the initial hours of the race, due to a poorly marked section of the course, Cliff got lost following another runner who didn't know the way.⁷ This experience galvanized Cliff's resolve not to mimic what other racers were doing, but rather to run this race by doing what *felt right* to him.

Second, to make up for getting lost and running slower than his competitors, Cliff ran a couple more hours on the first night than he had originally planned. His road crew was already asleep and failed to have dinner ready for him, so Cliff just ate something cold out of a can and then collapsed in exhausted sleep.⁸

Third, Cliff's crew chief, Wally, was responsible for waking Cliff up at six in the morning to get an early start. But when the alarm went off, Wally nodded back to sleep. He then awoke with a start, ran to the vehicle where Cliff was sleeping, and said, “Cliff, get up. I've slept in. It's past six!”

Cliff bolted upright, put on his shoes, and tore down the road, thinking his competitors were already running. But when the sun didn't come up for what seemed like hours, Cliff finally asked Wally what time it was.

Embarrassed, Wally said it was four in the morning. He had accidentally set the alarm for two thirty rather than six. Cliff had barely slept two hours that night.⁹ But instead of getting upset or calling it quits, he just kept moving forward one step at a time. He found that he could run all day just fine with two to three hours of sleep while eating very simple food out of a can. His resilient response helped maximize his running time each day. The unanticipated difficulties he experienced during the first part of the race led to unexpected advantages and drastically changed the outcome of the race—and made Cliff a symbol of Aussie grit and determination.

In a very real way, our lives are much like an ultramarathon that tests the limits of our spiritual endurance. The apostle Paul taught,

**EMBRACING THE
ROLE OF JOYFUL
REPENTANCE
AND CONSTANT
REALIGNMENT TO
THE COVENANT
PATH WILL HELP US
RUN WITH PATIENCE
THE RACE THAT IS
SET BEFORE US. >>>**



“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.”¹⁰ This mortal experience, which has been carefully designed as part of our loving Heavenly Father’s plan, is meant to help us develop as disciples of His Son and reach our fullest potential. However, this experience can feel overwhelming at times.

Just as no one believed Cliff Young could finish—let alone win—the race, we may also have doubters—other people, the adversary, sometimes ourselves—who try to get us to believe we cannot make it successfully through life. But through scripture, the Spirit, and patriarchal blessings, you know you are a child of God. Heavenly Father believes in you. Your wise choice to come to this earth and run this all-important race, along with your many good choices since then, can give you growing confidence that you can complete this mortal race and do so in a magnificently successful way. The key for all of us is to fully yoke ourselves to the Savior. To more fully yoke ourselves to Him, I invite us to consider four essential decisions—especially those of you in your decade of decision—that will help us to run with patience this mortal RACE that is set before us.

R: REPENT and REALIGN REGULARLY

First, decide to repent and realign with the path regularly. Like Cliff Young, we can sometimes get lost, veer off course, or follow someone who doesn’t know the way.

President Russell M. Nelson has taught us to embrace repentance as a joyful daily habit, emphasizing that “nothing is more liberating, more ennobling, or more crucial to our individual progression than is a regular, daily focus on repentance. . . . It is *the key* to happiness and peace of mind. When coupled with faith, repentance opens our access to the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.”¹¹

I also love the perspective Elder Weatherford T. Clayton shared in a BYU devotional several years ago on the realignment aspect of repenting: “Every time we turn more to Christ, we are repenting. . . . When

we do things that make us better, kinder, gentler, more sensitive, more spiritual, more virtuous, and truer, we are repenting. . . . [We are] turning [or returning] to Him.”¹²

A few months after I returned home from my mission, someone who I knew well and who was older and more educated than I was at the time took me aside and tried for hours to fill me with doubts about my faith. I felt as if I were in a spiritual cloud, but I continued my habit of reading the Book of Mormon and praying daily. It didn’t feel right to stop these daily habits—even if during this period it was harder to feel heaven’s light—because I knew they had brought answers and blessings to me in the past.

A few weeks after this experience, while reading the Book of Mormon, I had a strong

impression to open my mission journal and read about guidance and comfort I had received and lives that I saw changed during my missionary service. As I read, I felt the spiritual cloud begin to lift. Great peace and clarity returned as the power of my own witness from my own “spiritually defining memories”¹³ reaffirmed the truth of the restored gospel.

Embracing the role of joyful repentance and constant realignment to the covenant path will help us run with patience the race that is set before us.

A: ANTICIPATE and ACCEPT ADVERSITY

Second, decide to anticipate and accept adversity. One of my core goals as an ethics professor is to keep my students out of jail. Every Friday morning at the Central Utah Correctional Facility, inmates file into a small chapel for a devotional. As a guest speaker, I have asked, “If I could take you with me to my ethics classes and have you share the most important lesson you’ve learned from your life’s journey, what would it be?”

One said, “Develop positive coping habits. After my divorce, I turned to things I shouldn’t have to deal with my loneliness.”

Another said, “Diligently cultivate your core significant relationships. I didn’t, and when life went south, I didn’t have the support structure that I needed.”

Another mentioned honoring covenants and said, “I treated my church membership like a mess of pottage, and I really regret it.”

The thing that unifies their stories is that most of these inmates acknowledged they had not responded well to some significant form of adversity.

While we can’t know in advance the specific challenges we will face, each of us will experience significant forms of adversity in our lives—financial difficulties, divorce, chronic illness, the untimely death of a loved one. We can prepare now by accepting this reality, practicing

positive coping mechanisms and resilience, and setting our hearts on eternal things that do not change.

Our sense of adversity is closely tied to our perception of the degree to which our *experiences align with our expectations*. One way to “think celestial”¹⁴ about the future is to try to replace expectations with hopes. It has been said that “expectations are premeditated resentments,”¹⁵ but hopes entail a future-oriented sense of gratitude. While hopes are centered in God and eternal promises, expectations are based on people and circumstances. While hopes are tied to an eternal identity, expectations are tied to mortal roles and identities.

By seeing our lives through this lens of hope, we are more able to anticipate and accept adversity as a vital, meaningful part of the journey. This helps us run with patience the race that is set before us.

C: CLEAVE unto CHRIST and COVENANTS

Third, and most importantly, decide to cleave to Christ and to the covenants He makes possible. In contrast to Cliff Young’s inexperienced road crew, Jesus Christ has been leading and empowering souls to successfully complete this mortal race for a very long time.

We have been taught that we can be endowed with this Christ-centered covenant power through the temple.¹⁶ I learned this lesson during one of the most difficult periods of my life when I, like some of my students, felt weary and totally overwhelmed.

When I began my PhD in organizational behavior at the University of Washington 20 years ago, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. Very dense reading and an intense class schedule caused deep fatigue and stress. Though I was praying for strength, I felt a crushing sense of inadequacy and quiet desperation that lasted for months.

“I can’t do this,” I said to my wife, Cathy. “I can’t keep up. This is way harder than I thought it would be.”

Around the time that these self-doubts and my weariness peaked, I had an impression that said, “I can help you if you spend more time with me.”

I felt that the best way to spend more time with Him—with the Lord—was in His house. Initially it seemed that adding frequent temple trips to my busy schedule was impossible; time was the critical resource I thought I didn’t have. But I knew what I was currently doing wasn’t working, and I felt assurance that blessings would follow if I tried to fulfill my covenants to put the Lord and His work first. So I made a personal commitment to attend the temple several times a month.

As I began spending more time in the temple, things started to change significantly. My intense fears about my ability and the future began to melt away. The peace I felt in the temple spilled into other areas of my life. I started to see my path more clearly and to feel hope. In gentle ways, like Lehi’s family, I felt as if I were being led in a more direct course through my graduate school wilderness.

While most of the time this added strength manifested itself in subtle ways, there were some very obvious blessings, including a dissertation sample that fell miraculously into my lap.

When I had told my dissertation advisor that I wanted to study the role of humility in leadership, he said, “That’s fine, Brad, but I have no idea where you’d find a real-life sample to gather data about that.”

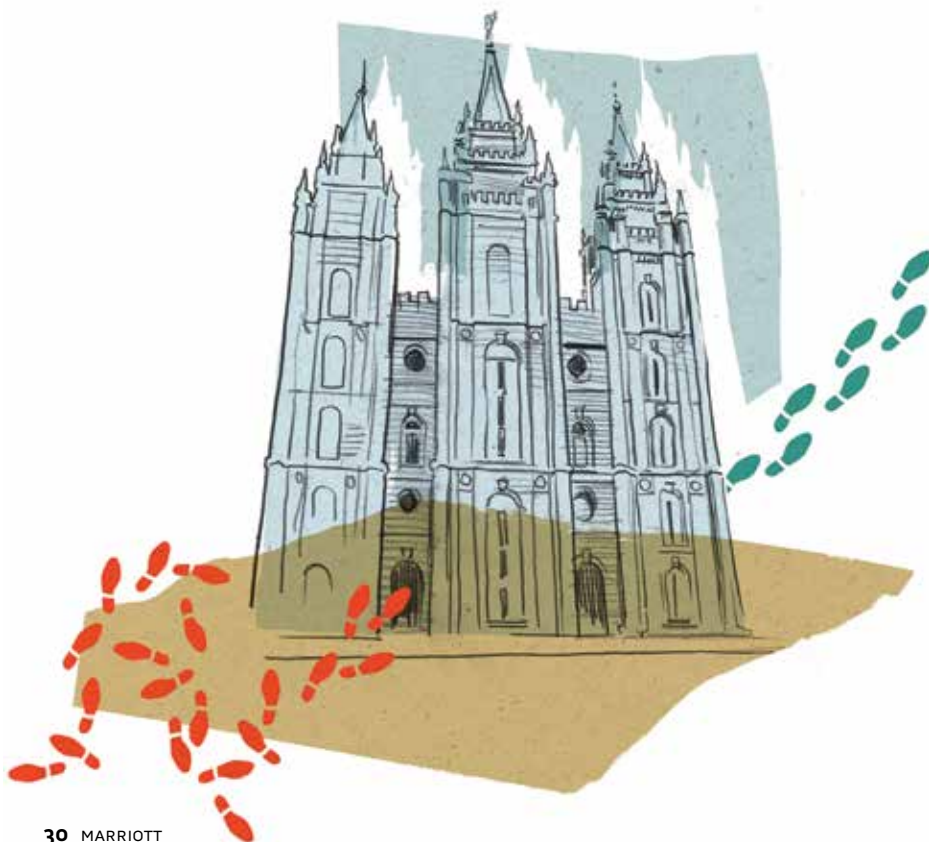
However, a couple of weeks later he called me into his office, and with a confused look on his face, said, “Brad, this has never happened to me before. Yesterday a local leadership coach contacted me and said he was interested in having a scholar examine his approach to leadership training. He said that his main goal was to teach leaders to embrace humility.”

My advisor, a very well-known scholar and an agnostic, said, “Brad, what’s going on? This doesn’t just happen.”

Then he kind of squinted, pointed at me, and said, “Have you been . . . praying?”

This sample was a huge tender mercy to a struggling doctoral student and formed the foundation of the research I have been doing for 15 years. Despite my slow start in my PhD program, I finished one year ahead of the rest of my class, and *I know* I could not have done this without the added strength that comes through Christ and covenants.

Cleaving to Christ and covenants, especially through seeking Him in His holy house, will help us run with patience the race that is set before us.



AROUND THE
TIME THAT THESE
SELF-DOUBTS AND
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IMPRESSION
THAT SAID, >>>
“I CAN HELP YOU
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TIME WITH ME.”

E: ENDURE to the END

Fourth, decide that you will *never, ever give up*, that you will endure to the end.

When asked about his strategy for the race, Cliff Young simply said it was “to run to the finish line.”¹⁷ He told his crew that if he began this race, there was no way he was going to stop until he reached the end.¹⁸

Taking steps—one foot in front of the other, over and over—in a race seems rather simple and repetitive, yet these steps accrue across long distances and lead to impressive and inspiring accomplishments. Similarly, making continual spiritual progress in our mortal marathon happens through simple and repeatable steps that include heartfelt prayer, scripture study, joyful repentance, service, and renewing and striving to live covenants. Any one of these steps enacted in isolation results in spiritual momentum. But when we combine all these steps together, our strength and our momentum really begin to build, and we begin *to love the race*.

These sanctifying steps and holy habits help us endure or survive spiritually and represent the individual work President Nelson has pled for us to do in order to have the Spirit with us in our daily lives.¹⁹ The word for *spirit* comes from the Latin word *spirare*, which means “to breathe.”²⁰ Just as runners are able to increase their lung capacity over time to enhance their physical endurance, President Nelson, in effect, is asking us to get ourselves in spiritual shape for what is coming by increasing our spiritual lung capacity to receive the divine breath of the Spirit in a daily, ongoing way.

Resolving to endure to the end by daily embracing the renewing power of the gospel’s sanctifying steps that invite the Spirit’s daily companionship will help us run with patience the race that is set before us.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I bear witness that because of Jesus Christ we can not only complete this mortal marathon, but we can also do so with magnificent success. Resolutely making the decision in our own hearts to repent and realign regularly, to anticipate and accept the role of adversity, to cleave to Christ and covenants, and to endure to the end will yoke us to Christ in a relationship of continual renewal.

And so “let us run with patience [and with Jesus] the race that is set before us” and let Him, who is “the author and finisher of our faith,”²¹ help and renew us every step of the way. I testify that He lives. I testify that He loves each and every one of us and that this is His work. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. **M**

Adapted from a BYU devotional speech Bradley P. Owens, a professor in the Romney Institute of Public Service and Ethics, delivered on June 11, 2024.

NOTES

1. Robert D. Hales, “To the Aaronic Priesthood: Preparing for the Decade of Decision,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 48.
2. See Julietta Jameson, *Cliffy: The Cliff Young Story* (Melbourne, Australia: Text Publishing, 2013).
3. See Jameson, *Cliffy*, 60.
4. See Jameson, *Cliffy*, 57. This conversation is inferred from documentation that race organizers originally viewed Cliff as “some old geriatric” who could ruin the whole event by dying during the race.
5. See Jameson, *Cliffy*, 89.
6. See Jameson, *Cliffy*; Terrell Johnson, “Cliff Young Gave Us a Whole New Way to Run Long Distances,” *Half Marathoner*, October 10, 2023 (reposted from 2021), www.thehalfmarathoner.com/p/cliff-young-gave-us-a-whole-new-way; Genevieve Carlton, “The Incredible Story of Cliff Young, the Potato Farmer Who Miraculously Won a 544-Mile Marathon at Age 61,” *All That’s Interesting*, July 2, 2023 (updated February 23, 2024, edited by Maggie Donahue), allthatsinteresting.com/cliff-young.
7. See Jameson, *Cliffy*, 96.
8. See Jameson, *Cliffy*, 103, 105.
9. Jameson, *Cliffy*, 106–12.
10. Hebrews 12:1.
11. Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” *Ensign*, May 2019, 67; emphasis added; see 2 Nephi 9:23; Mosiah 4:6; 3 Nephi 9:22; 27:19.
12. Weatherford T. Clayton, “Rock of Our Redeemer,” BYU devotional address, March 14, 2017. See also Thomas S. Monson, “Choices,” *Ensign*, May 2016, 86; Dale G. Renlund, “Repentance: A Joyful Choice,” *Ensign*, November 2016, 121–24.
13. Neil L. Andersen, “Spiritually Defining Memories,” *Ensign*, May 2020, 18–22.
14. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!” *Liahona*, November 2023, 117–20.
15. Saying quoted in Holly Hudson, “Managing Unrealistic Expectations,” *Life Skills, YA Weekly*, Week 2, April 2021, churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ya-weekly/2021/04/managing-unrealistic-expectations. See also Neil Strauss, *The Truth: An Uncomfortable Book About Relationships* (New York: Dey Street Books, 2015), 255: “Unspoken expectations are premeditated resentments.”
16. See Anthony Sweat, “We Need an Endowment,” BYU devotional address, April 5, 2022.
17. Paddy Upton, “Slow and Steady Wins the Race,” *Sports Coaching*, January 27, 2020, paddyupton.com/2020/01/27/slow-and-steady-wins-the-race.
18. Cliff Young had firm resolve. On the first night of the race, he fell and injured his shoulder to the point that he couldn’t lift his arm to put on a rain jacket. When this happened, he still had more than 400 miles to run—yet he stayed in the race (see Jameson, *Cliffy*, 101–2, 111, 151).
19. See Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2018, 93–96.
20. This insight was brought to my attention by my friend and mentor Barry Rellaforde; see Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “spirit” (n.), etymonline.com/word/spirit.
21. Hebrews 12:2.



Transform- ative Travel:

Students Unpack the Memories
That Shaped Them

By Shamon Keeley

While BYU has been ranked number one for students studying abroad,¹ the trips students take with their families hold their own kind of magic—no matter how many times “Are we there yet?” is asked along the way.

Shad Morris, director of BYU Marriott’s Whitmore Global Business Center and a professor in the Department of Management, has seen this firsthand. As the parents of five children, Morris and his wife, Mindi, have taken their family across the globe. “Travel represents captured time with your children,” says Morris. “You have their attention completely without competing activities, friends, and even church responsibilities.”

Morris’s own upbringing proves that family adventures don’t need to be expensive to be impactful. “Utah was my playground,” he says, recalling a childhood filled with family camping trips and exploration near his home in Riverton, Utah. Morris’s first airplane ride didn’t come until he left for his mission, but his earlier, simpler experiences broadened his horizons and stitched his family closer together. “The key is to go anywhere that shows something different than your day-to-day life,” he explains.

Whether you take your family around the block or across the ocean, Morris believes the same rewards await: resilience, growth, and family unity. We asked BYU Marriott students to share family travel experiences that stuck with them long after the journey ended. Here’s what seven undergrads recall about the transformative power of traveling together.



▲ Elijah Ellsworth, Marketing

Where We Went:

Palmyra, New York, to visit the Sacred Grove.

Who You Were Then:

I was 21 years old at the time. This trip with my family took place a couple of weeks after I returned from serving in the Georgia Atlanta North Mission. It was also right before I started my first year at BYU.

What We Did:

At the Sacred Grove, we walked along paths and looked at the breathtaking beauty. We had the opportunity to see the area where Joseph Smith knelt down in fervent prayer to God. We also visited the home and farm where he and his family lived.

Why It Matters:

While walking through the grove with my family, I decided to leave the group and venture off down a different path. A few minutes later, I knelt down to pray just as Joseph Smith did more than 200 years ago. In that moment, I asked God to help me know that the Church is true and that what I had been teaching the last two years will help others come unto Him. I felt comfort and peace about my purpose on earth: to help gather Israel.



▲ Elaina Marriott, Accounting

Where We Went:

The iconic Pacific Coast Highway. We rented an RV and drove from our home in Los Angeles up the coast to Vancouver, Canada. Along the way we stopped to see the California redwoods; the Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle; Pismo Beach, California; John Steinbeck's house in Salinas, California; Powell's Books in Portland, Oregon; and even Castroville, California, the "Artichoke Capital of the World."

Who You Were Then:

I was 18 years old and about to be the first child in my family to leave for college.

What We Did:

One adventure was our coastal foraging tour with "Captain Clameron." He taught us to harvest mussels, mushrooms, sea salt, and clams, and we made our very own fresh seafood dinner back at the RV. In Vancouver we took a gondola up Grouse Mountain to see a lumberjack show and grizzly bears. The best part was getting our bikes off the back of the RV at each stop and riding around the cities.

Why It Matters:

With six people in close quarters for two weeks, the trip was chaotic. We had mishaps with the mechanics of the RV plumbing, held a last-minute birthday party for my dad, and sought out local libraries so my siblings could finish summer school. Even with all the challenges, these were some of the best times. It meant so much to spend those special summer weeks with my family—like one last hurrah for us kids before I began a different season of life. It also reminded me how grateful I am for a family who loves adventures.

▼ Alli Jarman, Business Management

Where We Went:

Boston, Massachusetts, and Sharon, Vermont. The most memorable moment for me was climbing the Bunker Hill Monument, a spire that stands 221 feet tall and has a spiral staircase.

Who You Were Then:

I was just eight years old and had gone through a month-long stint of pneumonia, so I was very weak. About 30 steps into our trek up the Bunker Hill Monument, I didn't want to go on, so my dad put me on his back and carried me up to the top. Being at the top was unreal. It was so beautiful overlooking the city of Boston. I'll never forget my dad's kindness, which to me also represented people's efforts to fight for our country.

What We Did:

Our main purpose was to visit my grandparents, who were serving as directors of the Joseph Smith Birthplace in Sharon, Vermont. My grandpa took us on a tour of the visitors' center, where we watched the film *Joseph Smith: The Prophet of the Restoration*. Then my grandpa gave us each a notebook and invited us to go find a spot to pray about Joseph Smith. I'd never done something like this before, but I remembered the feeling of just knowing that what we had seen was true. I just knew it.

Why It Matters:

In such a physically weak state, I was able to build some of my strongest foundations. I gained an appreciation for our country and a knowledge of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ at such an impressionable time in my life.





▼ Deven Gogarty, Finance

Where We Went:

American history sites in Virginia, North Carolina, and Washington, DC. Our trip was during spring break, so we were in Washington, DC, for the National Cherry Blossom Festival, which was so beautiful!

Who You Were Then:

I was eight years old and in third grade. I had just finished a school report about the Wright brothers, so seeing the exact place where they made their historic flights in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, was fascinating.

What We Did:

In Virginia we visited colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown, Yorktown, the naval museum in Norfolk, a few plantations, and Arlington National Cemetery. In North Carolina we saw the Wright Brothers National Monument. In DC we visited the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, the National Mall, the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials, the World War II and Vietnam Veterans Memorials, and the Holocaust museum.

Why It Matters:

This was one of the first times I can remember when something I had learned about in school became real. I had always loved learning about history from my dad, so seeing sites that commemorated events he taught me about was so interesting. It cemented in my brain, for the first time, that historical events actually happened and affect us today. It stood out to me how amazing this country is and what a rich and interesting history we have.



▲ Lauren Hales, Marketing

Where We Went:

Hells Canyon, on the border of Oregon and Idaho, for a wakeboarding and wakesurfing trip.

Who You Were Then:

I was a freshman at Eagle High School in Idaho. I was on the cheer team and enjoyed spending time outdoors with family and friends.

What We Did:

We camped by the water, and I had so much fun waking up to the heat each morning and jumping into the refreshing water. Each day, my family surfed from sunrise to sunset.

Why It Matters:

One night huge wind microbursts came out of nowhere, collapsing our tent and blowing our boat into the dock. We had to pack up and leave since the storm was getting so crazy. My siblings and I were sad to leave what seemed to be our perfect trip. Leaving the campsite in the middle of the night turned out to be a tender mercy for my family, however. After we did our final campground check, we spotted a baby rattlesnake right where our tent had been. I know that God helps each of us in ways we may not initially understand, but ultimately, He knows much more than we do. He is always working out the details.



▼ Tanner Nakamoto, Global Supply Chain

Where We Went:

Provo. BYU's Homecoming week lined up with my school's fall break, so we came to Utah, and everything we did was centered around BYU. I remember Utah being drier than my home in Hawaii, which, of course, is pretty humid. The mountains also reminded me of home.

Who You Were Then:

I was 14 years old. I had just started high school and was beginning to think about college. I was also very impressionable and looked up to my two older brothers who were attending BYU at the time.

What We Did:

My parents took me to the Tanner Building to take a picture since I'm named after N. Eldon Tanner. When my mom and dad were BYU students, they started dating during football season, so we went to a football game. The Major Fair was also going on, which opened up the world of BYU Marriott to me. We also hiked the Y, something we've done on every family trip since.

Why It Matters:

I always thought that I would follow in my brothers' footsteps in attending college. But after visiting BYU as a freshman in high school, it started to feel like a reality to me. I was determined from then on to do what I needed to do to get into my dream school.



▲ Toby Alder, Information Systems

Where We Went:

Gilbert, Arizona, for a summer family reunion at my uncle's house. We started in Stansbury Park, Utah, so it was a long road trip in the sweltering heat with six kids and my parents packed into a small car.

Who You Were Then:

I was seven years old at the time, the fourth of six children. Our family had never traveled this route before, so everything felt new and unfamiliar.

What We Did:

The trip took an unexpected turn when our car broke down in the summer heat near Page, Arizona. We waited for hours on the side of the road, trying to figure out if the car could be fixed. To keep us entertained, my mom played games such as "I Spy" with us. We laughed so much even though we were hot, tired, and stuck. Eventually the car was towed into town—with all eight of us in it. We made it to a motel late at night and went straight to bed, exhausted.

Why It Matters:

While managing high emotions, extreme heat, and tired children, my parents turned a stressful situation into a bonding experience. My mom's laughter and creativity taught us to make the best of any situation. The car was fixed the next day, and we were back on the road. We arrived in Gilbert and took a much-anticipated swim in the pool and a soak in the hot tub, which made the journey feel even more worthwhile. **M**

Note

1. See "Leading Institutions by Study Abroad Total," *Open Doors* US Study Abroad Data, academic year 2021/22, opendoorsdata.org/data/us-study-abroad/leading-institutions-by-study-abroad-total/. See also Todd Hollingshead, "BYU Has a New No. 1 Ranking: University with the Most Students Studying Abroad," *News, BYU University Communications*, November 30, 2023; news.byu.edu/byu-has-a-new-no-1-ranking-most-students-in-study-abroad-programs-in-the-country.



School News

Bilingual Business Skills: High School Competition



The Spanish-language team from West High School took first place.

Fifty-eight high school teams from across Utah put their language skills to the test at the 2024 High School Business Language Competition hosted by BYU Marriott's Whitmore Global Business Center (GBC). Teams were given three weeks prior to the competition to develop a marketing plan for the Busankam Wola Foundation, a nonprofit that supports women in Ghana. Students then presented their strategies to judges and competed for prize money. The challenge? None of their work could be in English.

The competition has grown significantly since its start in 2010 when eight teams competed in Spanish. At the 2024 competition, presenters spoke in Spanish, French, Chinese, Arabic, and German. With only one heritage speaker allowed in each of the 58 teams, most participants showcased their skills in a language learned outside the home.

Ryan Wells, a teacher for one of the two Spanish-speaking teams from Taylorsville High School, shares, "The competition helps the language come alive for my students."

One Taylorsville High School student experienced that firsthand while competing on one of the school's two Chinese-speaking teams. "I didn't know any business terms in Chinese before this competition, and now I have a whole new set of vocabulary," she says.

Teams from West High School took first place in Spanish, Arabic, and German; Timpview High School won the French competition; and Mountain Ridge High School secured a victory in Chinese.

GBC Managing Director **Jonathon Wood** hopes students gained a greater appreciation for how language skills provide a competitive edge in a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected. As he puts it, "We need to be thinking global."

President Lund Honored at ROTC Presidential Review

On November 7, 2024, Steven J. Lund, Young Men general president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was presented with the 2024 Patriot Award as part of BYU's ROTC Presidential Review.

Before President Lund received the award, Air Force and Army ROTC cadets marched into Brigham Square, a quartet of cadets sang the national anthem, and BYU President C. Shane Reese spoke. Lieutenant Colonel **Travis Bailey**, professor of military science, then explained that the Patriot Award is given to individuals whose service reflects faith, leadership, and patriotism. "President Lund has shown an unwavering commitment to uplifting others and serving with integrity," Bailey said.

President Lund joined the US Army after returning home from the Netherlands Amsterdam Mission and receiving the impression that he should delay his education to serve in the military. He served in the army for three years. He later served in the Church as an area seventy, mission president, and coordinator of the Provo City Center Temple dedication committee.

For President Lund, the cadet uniform is a powerful symbol of a covenant made upon commissioning in the military: "When we swear to defend and protect our country . . . we make promises to look out for each other," he said. "Wearing that uniform set me apart and gave me obligations and duties, not just to our country, not just to the Constitution, but to each other."

He connected this sense of duty to a greater purpose, highlighting church leaders' teachings that today's generation is especially prepared to gather Israel.



Lieutenant Colonel Travis Bailey presented President Steven J. Lund with the painting entitled "Covenant of the Fathers, Faith of the Sons."

"Your military service will be as great as it can be under all of the measurements of military service—and that's a lot," President Lund explained. "But it can be amplified in ways that will carry you through the rest of your life with a sense of accomplishment for having been carriers of God's banner."

In closing, President Lund testified of the impact of military service—both on the cadets and on those they will serve: "You as soldiers—soldiers of the covenant—are going to make a difference in the world."

Women in Business Conference



Conference attendees and organizers gathered to celebrate women's accomplishments and contributions in business.

The 2024 Women in Business Conference, hosted by BYU Marriott's MBA program, saw a fourfold increase in attendance from the inaugural 2023 event. The all-day conference brought together students, alumnae, and faculty to discuss the unique contributions women make to the workplace as well as the challenges they face.

Assistant Professor **McKenzie Rees** and Associate Professor **Liz Dixon** were two of the faculty presenters at the conference. Rees emphasized the professional “superpowers” that women bring to the workforce, such as fostering humility and collaboration. Dixon urged women to be courageous and to share their insights in the workplace.

The conference concluded with a keynote address from Sarah Davis, president and chief commercial officer of re-commerce company Fashionphile. Davis shared her journey of growing a multimillion-dollar business from selling secondhand items as a law school student and finding a niche in the used handbag market. She encouraged attendees to embrace their passions, get started instead of waiting for things to be perfect, and prioritize long-term values such as faith and family to achieve fulfillment both personally and professionally.

Attendees shared positive feedback about the event’s community-building and mentoring opportunities. BYU Marriott EMBA graduate **Laura Cook** said she appreciated the chance to receive mentorship from other professional women. **Val Fulton**, an MBA student on the event’s planning committee, found inspiration in hearing from women navigating similar decisions about balancing family, faith, and career. “We need to hear these stories of women,” she noted, “and I wanted to help create as much of that connection as possible.”

Romey Institute Presents Alumnum of the Year Award

The MPA program presented the 2024 Alumnum of the Year Award to **Robert Carver**, director of NASA’s Workforce Strategy and Transformation Office in Washington, DC. The award recognizes individuals who demonstrate extraordinary service and leadership in the public sector and in their communities.

Carver began working at NASA headquarters as a presidential management intern in 1992, fresh out of the MPA program. Before his current position, he was director of the Mission Support Resources Management Office, where he oversaw a \$3.8 billion budget for NASA. Outside of his professional leadership roles, Carver has served as a school board



Robert Carver received the 2024 MPA Alumnum of the Year Award.

member, coached youth soccer teams, and held numerous church callings.

Speaking at a luncheon held in his honor, Carver emphasized how meaningful relationships and the support of others have shaped his success. “As I have continued to reflect on this award, I have realized this isn’t an individual achievement,” Carver said. “It’s about the relationships I have been blessed with and how individuals have helped me along the way.”

Carver, who earned a bachelor’s degree in international relations from BYU in 1990 and an MPA in 1992, recognized several BYU Marriott faculty members for their impact on him as a student. He praised **Dale Wright**, a former MPA program director whose kindness and encouragement made a strong impression, as well as **Michael Thompson** and **Larry Walters**, who taught Carver writing, communication, and analytical skills.

“As we can see by simply turning on the news, we live in a world in dire need of leaders who will lift the world through Christlike leadership in public service,” Carver remarked. “It is my firm faith that as we look to Jesus Christ, our faith will give us the capacity to envision a better future, the confidence to make that future happen, and the courage to act in the face of challenges.”

FACULTY NEWS

A Textbook Investment

Barrett Slade knows real estate inside and out—and he wants his students to know it as well. Slade, the James M. Passey Professor of Finance at BYU Marriott, recently wrote *Real Estate: A Household Wealth Perspective* to lower textbook costs and to provide relevant material for students in Finance 413: Real Estate Finance and Investment.

The book’s topics were primarily determined by student interest and the skills Slade found most practical, such as buying a home, financing a mortgage, or investing in real estate properties. Slade has also authored numerous academic articles on real estate as well as the book *The Valuation of Office Properties: A Contemporary Perspective*, which was commissioned by the Appraisal Institute, an international association of real estate professionals.

Slade’s journey to academia was unexpected. After earning a bachelor’s degree in economics from BYU, he took a research job in commercial real estate appraisal and was captivated by the different types of properties and their valuations. “Because no two properties are exactly the same, there’s always a kind of mystery at work,” he says.

That experience inspired Slade to earn a master’s degree in managerial economics from BYU Marriott. He worked as a chief appraiser and bank vice president and then ran his own consulting business. At the height of his career, Slade shifted gears and earned a PhD in real estate from the University of Georgia, which led him to join BYU Marriott’s finance faculty.

Slade and **Troy Carpenter**, a BYU Marriott associate professor of finance, are in their fifth year of overseeing the BYU Global Real Estate Conference.



Barrett Slade with a former student at the BYU Global Real Estate Conference.

Although professionals come from places including New York City, San Francisco, Hong Kong, and London to attend, Slade's favorite conference attendees are his former students. "It is very gratifying to see the successes of students I helped get started," he shares. "That's what it's all about."

A Place of Dreams

After years of preparation and faith-driven steps, **Jeffrey Pickerd** returned to BYU Marriott in 2024 as an associate professor in the School of Accountancy (SOA). His return marks the fulfillment of a longtime goal to teach and mentor



The Pickerd family dressed up to celebrate Jeffrey Pickerd's new BYU faculty position.

students at the university that shaped his own journey.

Pickerd earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in accounting from BYU Marriott in 2011 and then attended

the University of Massachusetts Amherst for his PhD. He met his wife, Britny, during this time.

After they married, Britny found a note from more than eight years before complimenting her piano playing—signed by Jeffrey Pickerd. "Somehow we had met years before at BYU, and I wrote her a note and she kept it," Pickerd says. The reappearance of the long-lost note confirmed the newlyweds' faith that God had a hand in their lives.

Pickerd leaned on that assurance while he taught at the University of Mississippi for eight years. Collaboration with BYU Marriott faculty on AI in accounting kept

John Pence Named 2024 International Executive of the Year

John Pence, founder and president of Sunrise Technologies, received the 2024 International Executive of the Year Award from BYU Marriott. In a lecture hall packed with prospective and current business students, Pence explained how saying yes early in his career eventually led him to start and run his own company.

Pence earned a bachelor's degree in economics and mathematics from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1979 and then accepted a job as a consultant at an econometrics firm. On his first day on the job, Pence was asked to step into a programming role, as the firm's only programmer had quit. "I said, 'Yes, if that's what is needed, then I will do it,'" Pence recalled.

Saying yes that day changed the entire scope of Pence's career and launched him into tech. "You have to thrive wherever you're planted," Pence said. "You just never know when a door is going to open, especially early in your career. So just walk through it."

Eventually, Pence moved to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and accepted a computer programming job at Sara Lee Corporation, where he spent the next 14 years. When Sara Lee acquired Coach Leatherware, Pence was sent to New York City to manage the IT department. The company was small at the time—its operations and manufacturing were housed in four floors of a Manhattan building. Being able to see the company's supply chain in this space "was a big break" for Pence's career.

Pence spent a few more years working in technology for various large companies before a day on the job triggered a self-described midlife crisis: He was tasked with firing 30 employees because of the company's poor financial quarter. "And at the end of that day," he recalled, "I knew I was going to go do something else because I never wanted to have to do that again."

For the next two years, Pence built Sunrise Technologies from the ground up. Since "modern-day companies really are computer systems," Pence explained, Sunrise Technologies implements large-scale



Award recipient John Pence sat down with the dean of BYU Marriott, Brigitte Madrian, for a Q & A with students.

technology solutions by either replacing the company's current computer systems or by applying technology to make the company more effective. "We live on that boundary between implementing technology and making it work for a company," he said.

Looking back on accepting that first programming job and founding Sunrise Technologies, Pence emphasized he wouldn't change anything about his career in tech and supply chain. "When I fell into technology, I fell into what I was meant to do," he said. "I've been doing this for 45 years, and it is still as fascinating and interesting and evolving today—more so than it's ever been."

Matching Service with Organizational Behavior



Students in Peter Tennis's course accumulated more than 1,300 hours of service, which helped raise about \$4,000 in humanitarian aid.

Knowing how to serve is essential in a tennis match. Serving was also an essential element in **Peter Tennis's** fall 2024 organizational behavior course, but instead of serving on a court, his students were serving their community.

Tennis, an adjunct professor of management, incorporated service projects into his two sections of Human Resource Management 391: Organizational Effectiveness. This approach—which Tennis says came from a stroke of inspiration—allowed students to analyze real-world concepts through the lens of service. “Learning comes through experience,” he points out, “and I wanted to create a unifying experience.”

The course was divided into three phases that correlated with levels of analysis—individual, group, and organizational—and Tennis assigned corresponding service requirements. “Service was something I could string through all of the levels,” he says.

As students studied how individual traits and group behaviors impacted organizational effectiveness, they saw those dynamics play out in their service projects. “We talked about how to analyze organizations to see where we might improve effectiveness—what’s working well,

what’s not working well—which students also applied to their service experiences,” Tennis says.

During the third phase, Tennis’s 170 students set service-hour goals as a class and ended up exceeding their goals by accumulating 1,340.78 hours. To sweeten the experience, for every service hour completed, a donor offered to match the hours with Giving Machine purchases. The net result: nearly \$4,000 of humanitarian aid donated.

Gracie Quinn, an ExDM student from Pleasanton, California, was initially surprised when she heard about the service assignments, but “as the semester progressed, I realized the magnitude of the entire class engaging in service projects,” she says. Quinn’s service hours included an individual project baking pumpkin muffins for her sister, a small group project writing letters to seniors at Provo Rehabilitation and Nursing, and a class project picking up trash at Deer Creek Reservoir. Quinn also participated in other volunteer opportunities provided by BYU and was able to include one temple session in her service hours.

Since HRM 391 is required for all BYU Marriott undergrads, the group projects in Tennis’s class helped connect students across different majors. “Everyone brought a diverse set of skills to the table,” Quinn says. “We learned how to work with people who approached things from a different perspective, which made our projects well-rounded and prepared us for the real world.”

The class’s unique spin helped students create new habits, Tennis notes. “Students’ everyday outlook changed as they started to see opportunities to help others everywhere,” he says. “Instead of looking for a service project, they were just looking for people who needed something.”

Tennis also noticed a “positive, cohesive vibe” as the students shared their experiences through reflective writing assignments, status meetings, and presentations. “For me, ‘Enter to learn; go forth to serve’ is not just a motto but a blueprint for experiential education that also makes a difference in people’s lives right now,” he says. “Teachers often orient students toward the future, but students’ lives are occurring right now, right here, and they have so much to offer.”

While the term *love* may mean *nothing* in tennis, love was everything to Tennis and the undergrads in his class. “What I wanted the most,” he explains, “was for them to know that they’re loved, that their Heavenly Father loves them, and that they’re never alone.”

him connected to his alma mater until he returned to BYU Marriott last year.

In this new role, Pickerd plans to incorporate service and continual improvement into his research and teaching. “This is a place where things will be accomplished that can’t be done elsewhere,” he says. “This is a place of dreams.”

From Impostor Syndrome to Inspired Leadership

Richard Gardner doesn’t just study workplace challenges—he helps people

overcome them. In 2023 he joined BYU Marriott as an associate professor of management, bringing insights that bridge academic research and real-world solutions.

Previously a faculty member at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Gardner researches unethical behavior, abusive supervision, and the impostor phenomenon. His 2019 study on impostor feelings went viral, shedding light on how even highly accomplished individuals struggle with self-doubt.



Richard Gardner

“I have really enjoyed my research on the impostor phenomenon. Part of this has been ‘me-search,’ as I think of times when I have felt like an impostor,” Gardner explains. “I have been able to apply my findings and provide people with tools to cope with impostor feelings.”

“I have really enjoyed my research on the impostor phenomenon. Part of this has been ‘me-search,’ as I think of times when I have felt

Gardner's transition to BYU Marriott included a new job, a new city, and a new-born—changes that help him relate to his students, some of whom are also new parents struggling with sleepless nights. Having married later in life, Gardner also relates to students navigating singlehood.

Bringing gospel insights into the classroom has allowed Gardner to deepen discussions on leadership and ethics. When teaching about charismatic leadership, he challenges students to examine how Jesus Christ exemplified these traits. "We see Christ as being meek, which seems like the opposite of charisma," he explains. "And yet He engaged in a lot of these charismatic tactics."

Although much of Gardner's research focuses on the darker aspects of business, he finds truth and light within it. "It's fun to see when research confirms and articulates things we've always known," he says.

The Business of Buying Businesses



Reid Tileston

BYU Marriott's Rollins Center for Entrepreneurship and Technology welcomed adjunct professor **Reid Tileston**, an expert in entrepreneurship

through acquisition (ETA), to its faculty in 2024. Tileston, who first became a business owner at age 16 when he took over his brother's airport shuttle business, has since built a career around acquiring and improving existing companies.

After earning his bachelor's degree in economics from the University of California, Berkeley, and working in finance, Tileston pursued his passion for ETA. He has owned, invested in, and advised multiple companies across industries while mentoring employees and fostering professional growth.

Now at Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management, Tileston teaches courses while working toward his PhD in management with an emphasis in ETA. He will complete the program in 2026. He is also a guest lecturer at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, where he earned his MBA in 2015.

Tileston is excited to be a BYU Marriott instructor because of what he sees in his students. "They have a unique entrepreneurial mindset, and they're action oriented. I'm here to teach people how to open franchises and how to buy main-street businesses and see where that takes them," says Tileston, who taught a section of Entrepreneurship 490 during the winter 2025 semester. "The sky is the limit."

When Religion Goes to Work



Paul Lambert is working with the Ballard Center to explore religious pluralism and business outcomes.

"What does discipleship look like when students go out into the world where they're not among thousands of other church members?" asks **Paul Lambert**, a BYU Marriott affiliate professor within the Romney Institute. Drawing on his research and expertise in religious pluralism, Lambert, who is also the religion initiative director of the Wheatley Institute, helps students see how faith can strengthen business growth, market expansion, and management.

Lambert's collaboration with BYU Marriott began in 2021 when he was invited to be a visiting fellow to help incorporate principles of religious pluralism into the school's curriculum and research. Since becoming an affiliate faculty member in 2023, Lambert has brought his expertise into a variety of classrooms as a guest lecturer.

This role aligns with his work at the Wheatley Institute, where he explores the broader impact of religious diversity on business and society. He is also collaborating with Ballard Center Director **Eva Witesman** on research examining how religious pluralism influences business outcomes.

Before BYU, Lambert served as assistant dean at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business and taught at the National Defense University

in Washington, DC, where he educated international leaders on the role of religion in American society. He also runs a consulting firm that helps business executives foster inclusive workplaces that respect employees' religious identities.

Whether he is teaching or consulting, Lambert focuses on helping others understand that faith can enhance leadership, decision-making, and workplace culture. One of the most inspiring parts of his job, he says, is the moment when people finally realize that "their faith is their greatest asset."

Trials and Triumphs of a Combat Rescue Officer

Only 12 out of 146 candidates completed the grueling US Air Force Pararescue selection course in 2015, including **Cameron Strawn**. Now an assistant professor of aerospace studies at BYU, Strawn teaches Air Force ROTC students about leadership and resilience—qualities he's relied on throughout his own career.

Strawn's journey began when he was studying psychology at the University of Arizona. While serving as a cadet in the Air Force ROTC, Strawn heard about Pararescue, a small special-operations unit in the air force. He set his sights on joining the unit as an officer. His peers told him that it wasn't doable, and his commander warned him of the rigorous selection process and extensive training program. Undeterred, Strawn applied and adopted a new mantra: "I'm going to show up and make *them* tell me no."

Cameron Strawn has been deployed to Somalia, Afghanistan, and the United States.



Accepted as a Paramedic candidate in 2013, Strawn faced an intense 11-week selection course that had a 90 percent dropout rate, followed by two years of technical training that honed his parachuting, counter-interrogation, and other specialized skills—all while being separated from his wife and children.

During the final apprentice program, Strawn was hit by a truck while biking on the base, leaving him with a broken leg and a concussion. Though the accident was a devastating blow, it gave him valuable time to reconnect with his family before he returned to complete his training and achieve his goal of becoming a paramedic.

Just one month into his new role, Strawn faced a devastating loss when a helicopter crashed in Iraq, killing three of his friends. As he prepared for a similar deployment to Somalia, Strawn asked his wife, “Are we sure we’re okay with this deployment?” He clearly remembers her response: “This is what we agreed to do. You’re leaving so you can bring other moms and dads home from the battlefield.” Strawn completed his five-month deployment in Somalia, followed by three more deployments to Afghanistan and the US.

Since those deployments, Strawn has continued to pursue formidable goals. In 2021 he earned an MBA from Upper Iowa University. That same year, he made it through another selective process to begin working as an assistant professor of aerospace studies at BYU. Strawn also completed premedical coursework to pursue his dream of medical school.

Now, as a BYU Marriott faculty member, Strawn draws on his own experiences to encourage his students to show up, put in the effort, and let the results speak for themselves. “It might be hard, but people can do hard things,” he says.

STUDENT NEWS

Double the Drive

José and Adela Montoya Brañez, siblings studying entrepreneurial management at BYU Marriott, have discovered that entrepreneurship isn’t just about business—it’s a way to solve problems and uplift others.

The Power of Taking Chances



Emilio Ramos Barrios (third from left on couch) with his family.

Finance senior **Emilio Ramos Barrios** has learned that determination unlocks opportunities.

When Ramos was young, he learned about business from an aunt who worked for the Mexican Stock Exchange and from his parents who were proud small-business owners. By middle school, Ramos knew exactly what he wanted to study in college. “Finance was the right path for me,” he says.

Ramos’s determination ultimately earned him a spot in BYU Marriott’s finance program. When finding an internship proved difficult, Ramos sought help across campus. Professor Teresa Bell from the Department of German and Russian identified a potential internship in Germany, and Professor Tony Brown from the same department nominated Ramos for a scholarship. Additional funding from the GBC allowed Ramos to intern with home24, an online furniture-retail company, in Berlin during the summer of 2024.

During the internship, Ramos helped home24 switch the format of its financial reporting standards after it was acquired. He worked closely with the CFO and the vice president of finance. One day after wrestling with a particularly difficult error in a balance sheet, Ramos tried a new idea, and the system snapped into place. Ecstatic, Ramos showed the solution to his boss. “He was excited—and that got me excited because I was an intern. I didn’t expect to have that much of an impact in the company,” Ramos says.

The balance-sheet experience taught Ramos the value of being bold. “Sometimes we are nervous to give insights to companies because we think we’re not experienced,” he explains. “But the lack of experience isn’t bad. It’s temporary. There’s nothing you can do about it except to be confident in what you know, what you can do, and who you can be; people around you will start to notice.”

Ramos’s internship reinforced his determination to seize opportunities and to go wherever they take him. “Sometimes something you never expect turns out being the highlight of your life or your summer. Take chances and do whatever it takes to get them,” he says.



José Montoya Brañez



Adela Montoya Brañez

José started out as a civil engineering major but found his true calling in entrepreneurship, where he could merge business with greater purpose. José experimented with various ventures, viewing each failure as a learning opportunity. “I just tried everything. I wasn’t afraid of failure,” he says.

Eventually, José founded the athletic apparel company Otishi, using its profits to help support humanitarian efforts such as building a school cafeteria and funding education for girls in Guatemalan trade schools. José and his business partners plan to expand Otishi’s support of educational opportunities for youth in Latin America.

José’s example inspired his sister, Adela, to make a similar leap and scrap her plans to study law. Her first entrepreneurship class taught her how businesses can solve people’s needs in innovative ways. “That was really stimulating for me,” Adela explains. “Entrepreneurship is a way for me to help people.”

In 2024, Adela applied to and was accepted into BYU Marriott’s Sandbox, a program that is run by the Rollins Center and helps students develop skills while building technology startups.

Both siblings are excited to grow their ventures, knowing that each step forward—whether a success or a failure—brings valuable lessons and greater opportunities to make an impact. “I’m excited to fail and to be humbled,” Adela says. “And I’m excited to build something that will help people and that will resonate with me at the same time.”

Adaptation, Ambition, and Accounting

Masahiro Hokazono set a goal to study in the US before he could even speak English. While taking his first-year classes at a university in Japan, he spent hours studying English. He also decided to pursue education in a math-related

field, knowing that numbers are a universal language.

After enrolling at Ensign College, an accounting class convinced Hokazono to pursue the field, leading him to apply and gain acceptance into BYU Marriott’s SOA. To prepare for the transition, Hokazono took time to learn about the Church and its beliefs. “A lot of people are not religious in Japan, and the people who are religious are mostly Shinto, so I didn’t really understand Christianity and having one god,” says Hokazono. After doing personal research to broaden his understanding, he also spoke with missionaries and Japanese friends who were members of the Church. “I knew I needed to understand the people and the culture here,” he explains.

Although Hokazono’s junior core professors recommended that he take as few classes as possible, he enrolled in a statistics class to give him a broader base knowledge of business analytics. He also took Spanish classes to increase his language versatility.

This strategy helped Hokazono land a summer internship at KPMG in both 2023 and 2024. “KPMG has several offices in Japan, so they’re looking for people who can speak Japanese and English,” he says.

After completing his bachelor’s degree in accounting, Hokazono started working full-time at KPMG’s Chicago office in January of 2025. “My journey for now is to become a rare person, so people start needing me more. If there are more people who need me, then there are more people I can help,” he says.

Hokazono attributes his success in school and life to his ability to adapt: “One of my strengths is adaptation. That’s what I’ve been doing since I came to the US.”



Masahiro Hokazono graduated in December 2024 and is currently working full-time in Chicago.



Diving into Experience Design

Before diving into the business world, experience design and management (ExDM) student **Aleia Allen** found herself swimming with sharks—literally. As part of a two-week field study in the Caribbean, Allen and her peers explored experience design by planning and participating in activities such as snorkeling alongside sea turtles, sailing catamarans, and immersing themselves in local markets on the island of Saint Lucia.

The purpose of the field study was to explore the theory of structured experiences through the lens of storytelling and positive psychology. While **Brian Hill** and **Patti Freeman**, both ExDM professors, led the program, the students themselves shaped much of the itinerary to put theory into practice. Students completed surveys after each experience to evaluate cost, participants’ sense of control, and group connection. The data was later analyzed at BYU Marriott by ExDM students and faculty.

Now heading into her senior year in the ExDM program, Allen says the field study accelerated her understanding of design principles. “It has really propelled me forward for my future,” she says. “It showed me that experience design specifically solves people-centric problems, not only for the people that you’re solving for but also for the world at large.”

Patti Freeman (top left) with Aleia Allen (top middle) and other ExDM students on a zip lining excursion.

Alumni News

CLASS NOTES

1990



In high school, **Shanna Blake Steed** was drawn to accounting as she watched a friend's mother enjoy an accounting career and still attend her children's activities. "I thought accounting was a profession that would provide me flexibility to not only earn a living but also support my family," she says. Steed earned a MAcc from BYU Marriott and started a public accounting career, working primarily in the retail industry. When a recruiter from The Walt Disney Company contacted Steed about a new opportunity, she and her husband decided to relocate to Southern California for the job. At Disney, Steed has enjoyed helping develop her team members. As lead tax principal, a position she advanced to in 2017, she now manages about 120 employees. This group is responsible for United States and Canadian tax compliance and global tax provision, tax consulting for international assignees, and, of course, planning for domestic theme parks. Outside of work, Steed gardens, paints, quilts, and travels. She is proud of her four daughters and three sons-in-law, her eight grandchildren, her two self-published children's books, and her recent work helping the SOA promote belonging, diversity, and professional mentorship. Steed and her husband, Nicholas, reside in Grand Prairie, Texas.

1999



After watching his father work in finance, **Tyler Banks** was inspired to pursue a business career. Banks earned a bachelor's degree in management with an emphasis in marketing from BYU Marriott, then an MBA from San Diego State University. He began his career in commercial real estate, but when his company was sold and the economy crashed in 2008, Banks

pivoted to work at Marsh, one of the world's largest risk-management firms. He eventually landed a position at Willis Towers Watson and, as CEO and North American practice leader, led a large division of the company for more than a decade. In 2024, Banks accepted a job as executive vice president at Alliant Insurance Services, where he works to help his team and his clients navigate challenges. "It is incredibly rewarding to combine creative problem-solving with risk management," he says. Banks, who lives in San Clemente, California, served in the BYU Management Society in Orange County as a board member and as president. He and his wife, Jerriann, have four children, and the oldest currently attends BYU—just like her parents. Banks enjoys staying active, going to the beach, golfing, and supporting his kids' extracurricular activities.

2004



Before **Spencer Huber Harrison** landed a position at the European Institute of Business Administration (INSEAD), which the *Financial Times* has ranked as one of the top three global MBA programs since 2021, he graduated from the University of Utah with a bachelor's degree in English. He then enrolled in the MBA program at BYU Marriott. Several of his MBA professors encouraged him to pursue a PhD, and he went on to earn a doctorate in business administration from Arizona State University. Harrison worked at Boston College and later moved to Fontainebleau, France, to teach at INSEAD, where he has instructed executives from companies including Salesforce, Google, BP, Samsung, and Deloitte. Now a full professor of organizational behavior, Harrison researches how organizations build thriving cultures, sustain creativity, and support innovation. "Organizations will win the battle for talent by creating cultures that allow people to be their best more frequently,"

Harrison said on an episode of the *Rethink Culture* podcast. Harrison also founded The Creativity Collaboratorium, a group of the world's leading creativity scholars. Harrison and his wife, Christina, have four children. His hobbies include bouldering and writing poetry.



Jared Jennings graduated *magna cum laude* from BYU Marriott with a MAcc in 2004 and began his career at Deloitte in Southern California as a senior audit associate. He enjoyed his work, he liked his colleagues, and he and his wife, Jen, loved living near family, the beach, and Disneyland. But when then-President Gordon B. Hinckley encouraged church members to get as much education as they could, Jennings couldn't shake the feeling that he should seek out additional schooling. He considered pursuing a law degree, but after reconnecting with a friend who was thinking about earning a PhD in accounting, Jennings determined that he would be interested in researching how accounting affects financial markets. He earned his PhD in accounting from the University of Washington in 2012 and became an assistant professor of accounting at Olin Business School at Washington University in St. Louis. In 2018, Jennings was promoted to associate professor. His research focuses on financial accounting topics, such as supervised machine learning, managerial disclosure, and debt contracting. When he's not at work, Jennings enjoys mountain biking, traveling, and watching European football games. He resides in St. Louis with his wife and four children.

2010



Brazil native **Wagner Dias** played basketball all the way through high school and into Brazil's professional basketball league, during which time he was introduced to the

Church. After being baptized, he decided to leave basketball and serve a mission in Houston. “This decision, born of faith, would shape the direction of my life,” he reflects. “Not only did I grow spiritually, but I also learned English—a skill that has opened countless doors.” Dias earned a bachelor’s degree in information systems from BYU–Idaho in 2007 and an MBA from BYU Marriott in 2010. He began his career at Goldman Sachs, which took Dias and his wife, Raquel, back to Brazil. He later joined Amazon as head of finance operations in Latin America, where he crafted business strategy, developed teams, and organized a finance service center in Costa Rica. Dias then returned to the US, continuing to work for Amazon until he was recruited to manage commercial finance and working capital for Honeywell. In February 2024, Dias transitioned to a position at Dematic as senior vice president of finance. He currently lives in Atlanta with his wife and four children and serves as bishop of a Portuguese-speaking ward. In his spare time, he enjoys spending time with his family.

2011



For **Talia Strong**, social impact consulting is the perfect fit: It blends her passions for business, nonprofit work, and research. “It is exciting to see how to best gather and assess available data to solve important and often ambiguous questions for organizations of all shapes and sizes,” Strong says. Strong’s BYU Marriott MPA prepared her to excel as a management consultant. She learned how public and private institutions operate, and she gained skills such as team management, business communication, and collaboration. After working for United Way of Utah, Southern Utah University, and Cicero, Strong now freelances for consulting firms. She provides research and data analysis as well as guidance on strategy, impact measurement, and engagement methodology. In recent years, she advised a nonprofit organization on how to streamline internal operations to better serve its clients—wounded US military veterans and active military. She worked with another nonprofit to assess

Transact to Transform



From left, BYU President C. Shane Reese, Jay Meldrum, Jennifer Meldrum, and BYU Marriott Dean Brigitte C. Madrian.

Jay Meldrum has spent more than 25 years shaping companies through transformational deals. Meldrum, a principal at PwC and the recipient of BYU Marriott’s 2024 Alumni Achievement Award, spoke to students about how transformation applies in both business and life.

In his presentation, Meldrum shared that 45 percent of global CEOs surveyed by PwC believe their company will not be viable in 10 years if processes remain unchanged and that only 14 percent of companies achieve significant improvement in key performance indicators (KPIs) after completing mergers or acquisitions. “If the deals are not successful in improving KPIs, why do the deal?” he asked.

Witnessing the challenges of corporate change sparked Meldrum’s realization that mere transactions are not enough. “A broader focus on transformation is necessary,” he said.

Transformative moments have shaped Meldrum’s career and life. One of those moments occurred in 1998 after he earned his BYU Marriott degree in business management with a finance emphasis and arrived in Los Angeles to begin a job in corporate finance at Arthur Andersen. Before Meldrum even started the job, the company reassigned him to work in strategy, finance, and economic consulting. His initial disappointment faded as he discovered that he enjoyed his new role. He said, “There were things that I learned that I never would have known otherwise.”

When Arthur Andersen dissolved in 2002, Meldrum once again turned an unexpected change into an opportunity to transform. He decided to earn an MBA at the UCLA Anderson School of Management; Meldrum also partnered with several colleagues to start Fulcrum Financial Inquiry, an independent consulting firm focused on complex litigation, investigation, and appraisal issues. “I loved the entrepreneurial experience,” he said.

In 2005, Meldrum joined PwC’s revamped consulting practice in Dallas, where he became a partner in 2011. “Being a partner has transformed me, not just in what I do, but in why I do it and who I do it for,” he noted.

Meldrum recognized that prioritizing growth over transactions can also deepen spiritual connections with God. An October 2023 general conference talk by Elder Joaquin Costa struck a chord with Meldrum. In it, Costa emphasized that keeping promises with God is not about securing a trouble-free life. As Costa put it, “Our covenants are not merely transactional; they are transformational.”

Sometimes with the gospel, Meldrum observed, “we have more transactional faith and less transformational faith to let God prevail in our lives. But this teaches us that our covenants have the power to transform us.”

Meldrum has found that seeking God’s guidance in his own life has opened doors for transformation: “If I’m doing my best to do what is right, I will end up being where the Lord wants me to be with the people I’m supposed to impact, transforming myself and others along the way.”

Three Degrees for Good

For **Rachel Bennion**, advocating for immigrants isn't just a professional goal—it's a personal passion. Inspired by her great-grandfather's experience as a young man immigrating alone from Denmark to the US, she now helps modern immigrants overcome challenges her grandfather couldn't have imagined. Bennion, a senior attorney at a leading non-government organization, advocates for the rights of children who were separated from their parents at the US border. Each reunited family is a testament to the power of fervent advocacy and the resilience of those Bennion serves.

Bennion's Spanish-speaking mission in Richmond, Virginia, opened her eyes to the challenges faced by immigrants. That spark followed her back to Provo, where Bennion volunteered at nonprofit Centro Hispano during her undergrad years at BYU. Her first job after completing her bachelor's degree in English was as a community organizer for AmeriCorps with United Way of Utah County. This experience reinforced her passion for immigrant advocacy and pointed her toward BYU Marriott's MPA program. "I wanted to work with amazing, brave, resilient immigrant families and help them succeed in the United States," says Bennion.

She began the MPA program in 2010 with plans to use her degree to fundraise for Latino rights. But the mentorship of MPA professors such as **Carl Hernandez** and **Aaron Miller** helped her see how earning a law degree would amplify her impact. In addition to their influence, Bennion recalls, "I felt the Lord guiding me through my morning scripture study. Law school felt like the right thing to do."

By the time she finished her schooling at BYU in 2015, she had earned "three degrees of glory," she jokes—a BA, an MPA, and a JD.

With those degrees in hand, Bennion accepted a fellowship with Catholic Charities in San Francisco, where she worked mainly with

children who had fled violence in Central America, helping them find stability and legal status in the US. Bennion soon moved to Catholic Charities in Washington, DC, to work with victims of domestic violence, help oversee the organization's pro bono program, and mentor volunteer attorneys in humanitarian immigration cases.

Bennion's colleagues felt like family in DC, and she wasn't looking to leave her position. But she had a unique opportunity to help children displaced by the immigration policies of 2017 and 2018. "I remember watching with horror as family separations unfolded," recalls Bennion. "Children were taken from their parents and placed in government custody or foster care, and parents were deported. Some of the parents I work with did not see their children for over four years due to this policy."

Since 2021, Bennion has been part of a special team of attorneys that helps reunite immigrant families. Currently based near her Bay Area hometown of Los Altos, California, Bennion feels that her BYU Marriott education continues to be an asset. "My MPA focused on nonprofit management, measuring impact, and teamwork. That training has helped me in the work I do," she notes.

That foundation has not only guided her career but has also deepened Bennion's ability to serve. "I want immigrant students and alumni to know they're not alone," she says. "People are in their corner."



its impact on reducing gun violence among youth. "I have had the good fortune of getting to work with many different types of organizations and learn from them," Strong says. She currently lives in the Midwest with her husband and two children. In her free time, Strong enjoys taking photos, spending time in the mountains, and playing racquetball.

2014



Damian Claudio Zivic wasn't planning on earning a PhD when he graduated from BYU Marriott in 2014 with a bachelor's degree in finance. He started his career at Deloitte as an advisory consultant, serving clients across the US and working on design and implementation of financial and IT controls. After being promoted to risk

and financial advisory manager, Zivic felt impressed to pursue an MBA at a local university. While completing his coursework, he became interested in research and felt prompted to pursue a PhD. Zivic struggled with the decision. At the time, he was a busy dad with three kids, and he also served as bishop of his ward. He felt he had a promising career path, but after conferring with his wife, Gabriella, he felt impressed that pursuing a PhD was the right decision. "My education at BYU Marriott, besides preparing me with professional skills, taught me to always put the Lord first," he says. Zivic now lives in Bloomington, Indiana, and is currently a PhD candidate of organizational behavior at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business. Outside of studying, Zivic enjoys playing and watching sports, hiking, reading, and spending time with his wife and their four children.

2015



Lingling Fuller intended to have a long career working in the finance industry before beginning a family, but her time at BYU

Marriott, where she earned a bachelor's degree in finance, introduced her to different life paths. "I was very hesitant, at first, to become a stay-at-home mom," she says, but Fuller and her husband, Robert, felt it was the right choice for their family. "Now I have three boys, and it's a lot of work, but it's always a blast. I feel like I'm building the world's future." Fuller is working to help her children succeed in school, form rich sibling relationships, and learn about their Chinese heritage; she also enjoys playing Chinese chess and staying active through Zumba. Before committing to full-time parenting,

Fuller worked as an operations analyst at Goldman Sachs in Salt Lake City and then participated in an internal mobility program that allowed her to transition to the company's London office. At Goldman Sachs, Fuller ensured accurate profit and loss reporting, investigated discrepancies to maintain accurate internal exchange rates, and standardized reconciliation validation for payment of invoices and future exchanges. Now she and her family reside in Kansas City, Kansas; she hopes to run a small business with her husband once her children are grown.



Sophie Hofman

Wolfe graduated from BYU Marriott with a degree in recreation management and youth leadership with

an emphasis in therapeutic recreation. She spent the next several years working at New Haven Residential Treatment Center, which helps young girls heal from past trauma by teaching them healthy emotional skills and leisure habits. As a member of the recreation therapy team, Wolfe created a hands-on, individualized treatment plan for each student and ran group therapy sessions. In 2017 she was promoted to recreation therapy director, and she worked to organize experiential approaches across the organization. In 2019 the Utah Recreation Therapy Association recognized Wolfe with the Outstanding Member Award for her work at New Haven. Wolfe kept working at New Haven part-time after having her first two children, but when she and her husband, Derek, welcomed a third child in March 2024, Wolfe stepped away from her position. "In the 11-plus years I spent in recreational therapy, I loved facing challenges, navigating them, and then growing from them," Wolfe says. She now works part-time from home managing customer service for an online jewelry company. She lives in Riverton, Utah, and enjoys teaching her children, playing board games, thrifting, and spending time outdoors in every season.

2016

After **Christie Clark** graduated from BYU with a bachelor's degree in communications with an emphasis in advertising,



she went to work at a Salt Lake City advertising agency, where she crafted campaigns and consulted on projects but didn't get to make

the final call on execution. "I realized that if I wanted to be on the other side of the table, I would need an MBA," Clark says. Her father had earned an MBA from BYU Marriott, so Clark set her sights on the program, following the marketing track after she was accepted. She also enrolled in classes from other professors she admired: "It was fascinating to see how important it is to have a more holistic mindset if you're going to be the best possible marketer or business-minded individual," she says. Clark now leverages that perspective as marketing director for Stacy's Pita Chips, a sub-brand of Frito-Lay, as she collaborates with professionals in operations, finance, and research and development to craft marketing messages and advertisements. She says, "I love that I get to learn as we represent the voice of the consumer and take that vision and that strategy and help it come to life." Clark lives in Plano, Texas.

2017



Jeremy Romrell works as a supply chain manager for airplane manufacturer Boeing, where he has strengthened recruiting from

BYU Marriott, giving students the chance to intern, network, and potentially land positions at the company—just like he did. Romrell has held several positions at Boeing during the past seven years; he's been a supply chain analyst, a procurement agent, a business process analyst, and an IT product manager. Early in his career, Romrell standardized the way his team operated, which saved employees 20 percent of their time and earned him a company award in the process. "I learned that I can have a greater impact if I look outside of the box and focus not only on what's in front of me but also on opportunities to help and serve others in my work," he says. Romrell has enjoyed the variety of his work at Boeing, and he has also valued the work-life balance of his position. "The values at Boeing

closely align with my values and BYU Marriott's values—which is to say, there's a big family-first mentality," Romrell says. When Romrell isn't working, he enjoys spending time with his wife and children, going to the zoo, recreating outdoors, and playing dress-up with his daughters. The Romrells live in Bonney Lake, Washington.



While **Nathan Shatzer** was a student studying human resource management at BYU Marriott, he attended a meeting for the

BYU chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and noticed that only a handful of students were there. Volunteering in a student leadership role for SHRM, Shatzer worked hard to increase the society's membership. After graduation, he started his career at Lockheed Martin, where he had interned during his senior year. Shatzer eventually participated in the company's human resources leadership development program, an annual rotation that allowed Shatzer to explore various HR functions, including compensation, talent management, and the implementation of workforce management and analytics as a human capital analyst. Shatzer now manages wellness initiatives and health plans as a benefit plans and strategic initiatives lead. "It's interesting to see the overall strategy and financials around health-and-wellness plans and to then apply various strategies, depending on what's best for our workforce," he says. Shatzer appreciates the work-life balance that he's found at Lockheed Martin, which allows him to watch and play sports with his two sons and spend time with his wife, Morgan. The Shatzers reside in Fort Worth, Texas.

2020



Madison Birtcher Farnsworth, a public accountant, has enjoyed providing audit services in

Chicago, Salt Lake City, and San Jose, California, while working at Grant Thornton from 2020 to 2021 and at EY, where she began working in 2021. Farnsworth was promoted to

Paving Pathways for Better Futures

As a child, **Gene Hayes** watched his mother reenter the workforce after his father left their family. "All of a sudden, she had the huge responsibility of providing for my brother and me," Hayes recalls.

His mom, an administrative assistant at the power company in Oaxaca, Mexico, also sold homemade pies and bread to supplement her income. "She didn't have a formal education," Hayes says. "I vividly remember her emphasizing, 'Get a good education; it's an investment in your future.'"

When Hayes was finishing his undergraduate degree in economics at BYU, he decided to apply to the BYU Marriott MBA program just days before the application deadline. Hayes stopped by the Tanner Building, hoping to meet **Bill Sawaya**, who was MBA program assistant director at the time.

But Sawaya was booked solid. "I told the office manager, 'If someone doesn't show up, I'll be here,'" Hayes recalls. "I love talking with people, so I got to know everyone in the office during the next few hours."

Hayes eventually caught Sawaya's attention and was invited in for a meeting. "You've been waiting a long time," Sawaya said.

"Yes," Hayes responded, "because I want to tell you my story."

After an "amazing conversation," Sawaya introduced Hayes to other members of the MBA admissions committee and connected him with an Intel recruiter who later offered Hayes an internship. "Bill Sawaya didn't need to meet with me that day. He didn't need to be as kind as he was. He didn't need to introduce me to the recruiter, but that generous act changed the trajectory of my life in every single way," says Hayes, who completed his MBA in 1996.

The encounter with Sawaya is one of many experiences that illustrate Hayes's initiative. "My drive—and some may call it grit or stubbornness—has opened a lot of doors for me," says Hayes, who's also a competitive squash player.

When Hayes was hired as founding director for BYU-Idaho's Pathway International in 2010, he was charged with launching the program internationally. Ten years later, the program had a new name (BYU-Pathway Worldwide), Hayes had a new position (director of international operations), and the program

had broken new ground (operating in 152 countries). "Moving to freezing Rexburg, Idaho, with my family was one of our best decisions," recalls Hayes, a father of five. "I saw thousands of lives changed."

Now in his role as senior vice president of regional operations at Western Governors University (WGU), Hayes leads a team that supports student acquisition, enables economic mobility for alumni, and elevates brand awareness. "Even though WGU doesn't have the gospel as a lens for what we do, we are extremely committed to human beings and their progression," says Hayes, who now lives in North Salt Lake, Utah, with his wife, Beverly.

Education, Hayes continues, unlocks opportunities—just as his mother promised. "The more you open your mind and contemplate history and the more you travel and see the kindness of people around the world," he says, "the more you will love others and align with what the gospel is all about."



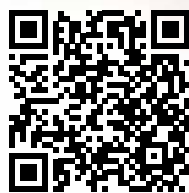
assurance manager at EY in 2023; in this role she serves clients primarily in the technology and life sciences industries, including a Fortune 100 technology company. "I really enjoy that every day I work on something different or new. Whether interacting with various clients and teams or working on a new audit area, I love that each day brings new challenges and learning experiences," she says. After graduating with a MAcc in 2020, Farnsworth passed the CPA exam, and she is grateful for the preparation BYU Marriott provided. Farnsworth likes to read and to run; one of her proudest accomplishments is running a marathon. She also enjoys spending time with her husband, **Tyler**, who graduated from BYU Marriott with a MAcc in 2023, and their son, James. The Farnsworths reside in San Jose, California.

2022



As a kid, **Scott Christensen** loved keeping track of statistics for the sports teams he played on and for his

favorite professional teams. When the time came to pick a major, Christensen chose accounting, graduating from BYU Marriott in 2006 with a MAcc. He started his career at EY and worked for Barrick Gold Corporation and Nature's Sunshine Products before landing a position as a financial reporting manager at Cricut. "I went to Cricut for the opportunity to be involved in an IPO," Christensen says. "It has been a great fit. I love the company and the people I get to work with." At Cricut he helped grow a team of 30 individuals and now directly oversees seven team members. During the height of the pandemic, Christensen and his team worked around the clock to prepare four years' worth of financial statements for the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board audit opinions. During this time, Christensen was also in his final year of BYU Marriott's executive MBA program and was serving as its 2021-22 class president. Christensen and his wife, Alison, enjoy morning runs together—a habit they picked up when they trained for a marathon. They live in Herriman, Utah, with their four children.



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