NU Mourns Passing of Tim Ward

Timothy Emerson Ward, 69, of Niagara Falls, N.Y., entered into rest on Sept. 3, 2006, at his residence while under the care of Niagara Hospice. Born on June 23, 1937, in Evanston, Ill., he was the son of the late Thomas and Frances (Emerson) Ward. On Feb. 29, 1988, he married the former Rebecca Stickney.

Tim received a B.A. in theatre arts from Stanford University and San Francisco State College. He worked with the San Francisco Actors’ Workshop as director and production stage manager. Later he joined the Vivian Beaumont Theatre in New York City, where he was a director and production manager for the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center.

Tim began outreach programs in the New York State Prison System and the Niagara Summer Fine Arts Program. He was a member of the Actors’ Equity and was inducted into Niagara University’s President’s Honor Society, Sigma Alpha Sigma, in 2005. He was an avid sports fan with a concentration on golf in the past several years.

In addition to his beloved wife of 18 years, Tim is survived by one stepdaughter, Anne (David) Dreiling of Franklin, Tenn.; three children, Benjamin and Nathan Zindle, both of Niagara Falls, N.Y.; three grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Tim is also survived by one sister, Faith Ward of New Herald, N.Y.; one brother, Michael (Alexandra) Ward of Santa Fe, N.M.; and two stepsons, Lukas and Katherine Ward, both of Niagara Falls, N.Y.

Celebrating the Life and Legacy of an Extraordinary Man

At the Sept. 11 “Celebration of the Life of Timothy Emerson Ward,” a number of touching tributes were shared by Tim’s students, family and colleagues. From Mozart to Donavan, beautiful music that Tim loved added unspeakable grace to the evening. A slide show shared precious moments from Tim’s life, celebrating his deep love of family, friends and his sacred devotion to his students and the theater.

Hundreds of people filled the auditorium at Niagara Falls High School, and many were former students who had flown in from Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., New York and other cities. Distances traveled didn’t matter. What mattered was that those who cherished Tim could join together and share stories about the impact this remarkable man had had upon their lives.

Rebecca Ward, Tim’s wife, noted that Tim would have loved the memorial service and she said that all friends, colleagues, alumni and students are encouraged to continue to share their fond remembrances of Tim Ward.

The Ward family asks that all e-mail messages be sent to: TimWard@adelphia.net. Tim’s
N.M.; and several nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by one brother, John Ward.

A prayer service led by the Rev. John Maher, C.M., was held at Niagara University on Sept. 7 and a celebratory memorial service coordinated by two of Tim's former NU Theatre students, Joe Christopher, ’06, and Ryan Murphy, ’04, along with the Ward family and NU alumni, faculty and students, was held on Sept. 11 at the Performing Arts Center of Niagara Falls High School.

Memorial offerings may be made to the Tim Ward Scholarship Fund, c/o Niagara University Office of Institutional Advancement, P.O. Box 2008, Niagara University, N.Y. 14109. Online donations can be made at www.niagara.edu, Niagara University’s home page. Just scroll down to the bottom and double-click on “Make a Gift to Niagara University.” Please refer to the instructions on the site to specify that your gift is a tribute in honor of the Tim Ward Scholarship Fund.

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—Rebecca Ward

sons, Lukas and Zak, will be creating a “My Space” Web site in his honor in the near future. Condolence cards may be sent to Mrs. Rebecca Ward and the Ward Family at 741 Fourth St., Niagara Falls, N.Y. 14301.

What follows is a sample of the many tributes that have been written and shared with Tim’s family over the past several weeks. Due to space limitations, only a few of the tributes appear in this article, along with a few quotes from the Ward family.

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—Dr. Sharon Watkinson, chair, Department of Theater and Fine Arts

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seven years earlier, our conversations were now more balanced—two passionate individuals talking about the theater, about the process of teaching, the process of learning, about young performers, about playwrights, about movements, and, perhaps most fascinating of all, about Tim’s personal experiences in the American theater. Believe me, one would be hard pressed to compete with stories that come from one whose life experience included director and production stage manager of the San Francisco Actors’ Workshop, director and production manager for the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, managing and artistic director for the Comedy Stage Company, the New York Film Festival, general manager of Artpark, coordinator of outreach programs in the New York State Prison System, creator of the Niagara Summer Fine Arts Program, and director of literally hundreds of productions at Niagara University. I feel so privileged to have known this extraordinary man!”

—Brendan Powers, ’96, artistic director, Niagara University Theatre

counsel and comfort in Tim because he reminded me of Professor Dumbledore from ‘Harry Potter.’ Tim’s rare spirit was warm, full of wit and wisdom, and, in several ways, magical!”

—Kelly Konecko, ’09

“Tim taught me a lot about theater: actions, verbs, beats, and intentions. All things integral to a performer’s craft. But most importantly, he taught me how to absorb and appreciate everything and everyone around me, which is integral to leading a better life.”

—Katie Swimm, ’06

“Tim will always be the only person who can call me “Mo” and have me respond happily.”

—Maureen Stevens, costume designer

“I was one of the first students at Niagara to cross his magical path … When I told him I wanted to write, he said ‘write the damn thing.’ When I told him I wanted to direct, he said ‘why not?’ When I told him I was lost, he said ‘open your eyes.’ I shall deeply miss this man. The greatest of all mentors. My beloved friend. I find it strange that his passing happens just as I begin my first year as assistant professor of theater at Southern Utah University. Tim will always be with me. Rest assured his memory will be honored in each class I teach.”

—Peter Sham, former student

“Tim Ward was comfort. His guidance and openness in and out of the classroom provided me with the confidence to make choices, make changes and believe in what I could become.”

—Jim DeVivo, ’99

“Our beloved daughter Tara Laurie, who passed away two years ago, often told us how fortunate and blessed she was to have Tim Ward as her acting professor. Tim and Tara are surely in the land of actors and playwrights … all the greats who have gone before us are now in their illustrious company.”

—Don and Janice Laurie

See LEGACY, continued on page 4

“Tim: rocking back and forth on his clogs, hand on chest, letting out a sigh, followed by a big smile and a burst of deep laughter—what more support could one young performer need? What am I thinking? He not only was validating my work but my very existence!”


“I will always remember Tim’s advice to his actors: ‘As an actor you have a job to do. That job is to tell a story.’ As a choreographer, I will always remember this and always try to use dance as a means of telling a story. Thanks, Tim.”

—Gracie Schupp, choreographer

“It may be a strange comparison, but in retrospect, I think I found

Tim Ward, center, enjoying a luncheon with his dear NU Theatre colleagues Brother Augustine Towey, C.M., and Dr. Sharon Watkinson.
“I feel like Tim had a way of making everyone who shared time with him feel the way you feel when receiving a huge hug—loved and safe. Safe to make decisions both on and off stage, safe to trust your instincts, safe to share how you felt and express your opinion. He may not have always agreed, but soon enough he’d sweep you back into that hug feeling, because he genuinely believed that each person had unique gifts and talents to share.”

—Kristen Smiley, ’07

“When I was about 10 years old, Tim Ward was my neighbor … He surmised I was a little ham and loved theater, so he invited me to see a dress rehearsal of ‘Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat’ at Artpark with my family. From then on, I always looked at Niagara University Theatre as my destiny … When you were a student at NU, you’d creep up to Tim’s office door, take a peek, and laid-back ‘Brother Tim’ would usher you in like he had all the time in the world to discuss where your character was headed in rehearsals or the progress on the one-act you were directing. He’d rev you up with a constructive pep talk and would send you on your way. You’d always feel confident and capable with the choices you made.”

—Lona (Geiser) LaChiusa, ’93

“One of the most important things Tim ever told me was that theater should be shared with everyone, and that anyone who had a passion for it should follow that passion wherever it leads. At that time, he was guiding me and a fellow student through the arduous process of opening our own theater. This led me to follow my dreams of stage management and tech work. I’ll never forget Tim because he was more than a teacher and a friend. He was an inspiration.”

—Dan Schmidt, ’05

“Tim cast me in my first and last shows at NU Theatre. He saw the talent in everyone, saw what they had to give. He didn’t try to make you any better than you were, you just became better because of him. I think it was his spirit, his passion, especially his intoxicating laughter. When Tim directed, you became magical. There was no show, no set, no actors. There was just this special character you became and it was easy to believe. I really will miss him.”

—Amanda Tech, ’05

“Tim Ward was one of the coolest guys I’ve ever known. I can’t say it any more plainly than that.

“I’ll never forget the first time I met him. ‘Wow, who is this guy?’ I thought to myself. I smiled as soon as I laid eyes on him. ‘Who is this strange, tall man with a ponytail, wearing a poncho and sandals (with socks)?’ He also had one of the biggest, warmest, most welcoming smiles I’d ever seen.

“He introduced himself as Tim. He went around the class and welcomed everyone individually. ‘Well welcome, Brother Robert.’ ‘Welcome, Sister Robin.’ ‘Welcome, Brother Doug.’ And finally, pointing at me, with his hip cocked out, ‘Welcome, Brother Brendan.’ I was hooked.

“I walked out of that classroom thinking, ‘Man, that Tim Ward is just about the coolest guy I’ve ever met.’

“Tim was simply the best and most influential acting teacher I’ve ever had, and I’ve had plenty. Tim’s advice was very simple; be yourself and have fun. Have fun. It’s so simple. He always stressed that. I can’t overstate how much that advice has sustained me as an actor and writer over the years. If you choose show business as a career, it’s often very, very easy to forget why the hell you’re doing this in the first place.

“Tim left an impression on all of us that went well beyond the classroom. As a testament to that, whenever a group of theater alumni get together, much of the discussion is spent sharing Tim Ward stories and impressions. Tim Ward has to be the most quoted and imitated teacher in the history of NU. The guy was a walking soundbite.

“I like to think that as we speak, in the big theater department in the sky, Tim is directing Brando and Olivier in ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream.’ And right now Tim is wearing a down jacket, with duct tape covering the holes, pointing at Brando, hip cocked out, and saying ‘Brother Marlon, your soliloquy was delightful, real great fun.’”

—Excerpted from tribute by Brendan Connor, ’94

“To me, Tim was my champion. If he was in his office I could never pass without being hollered at to come back and talk. He made sure I knew I was special and that I really did matter. But that was just it. Tim made sure everyone knew they were
special. That’s what made him matter to me.”

—Charlotte Colby, ’08

“I am so unspeakably grateful for having the opportunity in my life to know and work with a human being of that greatness and quality. He taught me so much about how to be a good artist, student and person.”

—Victoria Kuper, ’06

“It was a profound blessing to know Tim and his wife, Becca, and to become good friends with this dear, loving couple. Tim will never be forgotten not only because of his legacy as a great teacher, director and loving husband and father, but also because he found goodness in everyone. He had kind words for all—from students to staff, faculty to cleaning ladies. We all were ‘dear hearts’ or ‘sweet peas’ in Tim’s eyes. And that laugh! Hearing Tim’s irrepressible laugh immediately transported me back to my days at WNED-TV Public Television in Buffalo. Each time he laughed, he sounded like a close relative of the ‘The Count’ on ‘Sesame Street’ Tim’s hearty laughter always made everyone smile, and remember how good life is. Without question, Tim was an artist and inspiration—not only in the theater and in the classroom, but also in every facet of his life. His consistently passionate, inquisitive, joyful, kind, and colorful approach to life, I believe, is reflected in a quote from the late Danny Kaye, one of the musical stars Tim told me he so enjoyed:

“Life is a great big canvas and you should throw all the paint on it you can.”

—Ann Heuer, ’78, Secretary and Media Coordinator

“As an instructor of mine back in the 1980s, Tim Ward was the finest of the fine. He was always able to bring out the best in an actor and he did so in a manner that never made us take ourselves too seriously. That wonderful man always tried to keep things ‘light’ while still instilling in us the benefits of his vast theater experience.”

—Jean Pettit, former student

“For me, Tim was the epitome of goodness, the essence of selflessness, and the exemplar par excellence of everything I long to be. The understated patience in which Tim absorbed life has become an acquired virtue of mine. I have learned to be many things but none will compare to the ability to listen as Tim listened. I believe I am not only a better person for knowing Tim but also a very different person: a kinder person, a more patient person, an invested person in the life I lead and with those I come in contact with. Tim will live on in my creative spirit both instinctually and intrinsically for he will continue to shape my character both on stage and in real life. I am forever grateful to Tim’s family for sharing this wonderful man with the world, and most especially for sharing him with me.

—Joe Christopher, ’06

“What kept Tim kind and brave and at peace to the very end? What sustained ‘Brother Tim?’ Water was his sanctuary. Rehearsals were his temple. Revealing humanity through plays was his covenant. Working the soil was his meditation. Discovery was his rapture. Respect without regard to station was his god. He was a disciple of the wounded, the overlooked and the lonely amongst us.”

—Excerpted from “A Spiritual Man,” a tribute to Tim Ward, written by a Ward family member

“The Russian novelist Feodor Dostoyevsky once said, ‘If you wish to glimpse inside a human soul and get to know a man … just watch him laugh. If he laughs well, he’s a good man.’ Tim Ward, professor and adviser, leader and listener, father and friend, has an unmistakable laugh. Like all that Tim offers, it is strong and resounding, stemming from true generosity and sincerity. I know I am not alone in saying that Tim Ward truly defines the Vincentian spirit of love and service. Selfless and genuine with all he does, he is a man that ‘laughs well.’

—Katie Mallinson, ’05
Productions Directed by Tim Ward

The Cherry Orchard
Agnes of God
The Miracle Worker
Guys and Dolls
Macbeth
Blithe Spirit
The Skin of Our Teeth
The House of Blue Leaves
Lysistrata
Stage Door
Women Times Women
The Common Room
Alice in Wonderland
The Country Wife
Merry Wives of Windsor
South Pacific
Of Mice and Men
Private Lives
A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum
Charley’s Aunt

Artpark
Big River
Bye Bye Birdie
Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat
Put On a Happy Face
Nunsense
The Fantasticks
Annie
Idols of the King

The Bristol Valley Playhouse
The Nerd
The Unexpected Guest

Niagara Summer Performing Arts
Li’l Abner
Oklahoma!
Carousel
Bye Bye Birdie
South Pacific
Hello Dolly!
Guys and Dolls
Anything Goes
Children of Eden
Always Patsy Cline
Swingtime Canteen
Peter Pan
Chicago

**San Francisco Actors’ Workshop**
The Rooming House
The Dumbwaiter
The Chalk Garden
Ten Nights in a Barroom
The Collection
The Sandbox
Comedy Through the Ages
Tragedy Through the Ages

**Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center**
The Year Boston Won the Pennant
Repetto in Action
Natural
Lorca’s Songs and Poems
Antigone

**Theater for the Forgotten (New York State Prison System)**
Light Up the Sky
No Place to Be Somebody
My Sweet Charlie

**The Comedy Stage Company**
The Doctor in Spite of Himself
The Relapse
The Servant of Two Masters
The Wakefield Noah
The Miser
The Birthday Party
Loot
The Real Inspector Hound
A Marriage Proposal
Bags of Rags
Everyman
Act Without Words I
A Day in the Death of Joe Egg

**The Boston Shakespeare Company and other theaters**
She Stoops to Conquer
Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?
The Mousetrap
The Alchemist
Spring at Marino
Alladin
The Prince Who Couldn’t Laugh
The Miser

According to Tim’s family, “rehearsals were his temple.”
Arenas, Clunes and LeCuyers to Chair 22nd Annual Gala

By Ann Heuer, ’78

Michael and Maria Arena of Clarence, N.Y., will serve as co-chairs of the 22nd Annual Friends of Niagara University Theatre Gala, along with last year’s Gala chairs, Robert J. Clune, Esq., ’58, and his wife, JoAnn G. Clune, of Ithaca, N.Y. The event will be held on campus on Saturday, April 21, 2007.

This year’s auction chairs are William and Pamela LeCuyer of Getzville, N.Y. Their daughter, Lisa, is a junior in NU’s theater studies program, while the Arena’s daughter, Lauren, is an alumna of the program.

Last spring, the Clunes, together with their daughter, honorary chair Elizabeth Clune, and the Arenas, auction chairs, hosted the theater’s most successful Gala to date with the help of the Friends board and more than 150 guests.

At last year’s Gala auction, Elizabeth Clune bid on—and won—the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to play a walk-on role in the 2007 Gala matinee production of “Fiddler on the Roof.” Passionate about the theater and musicals, Elizabeth is delighted to be part of the cast for the Gala performance of this Broadway hit.

This year’s Gala will include a 4 p.m. matinee of “Fiddler on the Roof” at the Leary Theatre, followed by a cocktail hour, silent auction, elegant dinner and a visit from the cast and crew of the NU Theatre production at the Castellani Art Museum on Niagara’s campus.

For tickets and information, contact Gala coordinators Peg Lacki at 286-8483 or Ann Heuer at 286-8480.
Casey Returns as Interim Professor, Director

By Ann Heuer, ’78

Professional actor Neil A. Casey, ’91, has returned to his alma mater for academic year 2006-’07 to serve as a faculty member, teaching several courses in the department of theater and fine arts, and directing “Vincent in Heaven” by Brother Augustine Towey, C.M., the opening production of the season.

“The Niagara University theater department holds a special place in my heart and I am absolutely thrilled and delighted to return as a member of the faculty,” Casey said. “When I look back at my time at Niagara, many fond memories come to mind. The education I received as a student was unsurpassed and I look forward to the opportunity to pass along my knowledge and life experience as a professional actor to the current students in the program.”

Casey has also studied acting at the London Academy of Performing Arts under David Perry. He has taught acting at The University of Massachusetts in Boston and has been an active member in the Boston theater community for a number of years. As a professional Equity actor, he has worked at a number of Boston-area theaters including the Huntington Theatre Co., The Lyric Stage Co. of Boston, SpeakEasy Stage, North Shore Music Theatre, Jewish Theatre of New England and The Stoneham Theatre. He is also a company member of the long running comedy, “Shear Madness,” and has performed in both the Boston production and the Washington, D.C., production at The Kennedy Center. Other credits include a national tour of “The Diary of Anne Frank” and a European tour of “42nd Street.” His television work includes a number of national and regional commercials including AT & T, Independent Insurance Agents, Comcast, Tennessee National Bank, and the New Hampshire Lottery.

Costume Technologist Deighton Joins Theater Department

By Ann Heuer, ’78

Marilyn Deighton knows firsthand that second careers can fulfill dreams. A former dental hygienist, Deighton taught herself to sew at age 16, creating her own wardrobe and creating costumes for her local 4H Club in Florida. As an adult, she volunteered to make costumes for over 200 productions in the Florida Tampa Bay area for various dinner theaters and community theaters, winning numerous awards for her outstanding costumes that were “built from scratch.”

“Later in life I decided to do more with costuming so I went back to school for my BFA and my MFA in costume technology from the North Carolina School of the Arts,” Deighton noted.

Prior to joining the Niagara University theater department as a faculty member this summer, she was a lecturer and draper/tailor at the University of Maryland–College Park. Earlier she served as an assistant professor of costume technology at the University of Mississippi. Professionally, Deighton has been the costume shop director for Paper Mill Playhouse in its New York City Costume Shop; costume director for the Colorado Shakespeare Festival; shop manager for the North Carolina Shakespeare Festival; and a freelance men’s tailor for The Shakespeare Theatre, Arena Stage and Wolf Trap Opera in the Washington, D.C. area. In addition, she was a tailor for the Broadway version of “Bring in ‘da Noise, Bring in ‘da Funk” designed by Paul Taswell and a draper for the Robert Altman film, “Cookie’s Fortune,” starring Glenn Close and Julianne Moore.
Focus on Alumni: Drama King
by Andrew Z. Galarneau, courtesy of The Buffalo News

Ever since he was an Amherst teenager, Paul Todaro, ’87, has ruled the stage. He was 15 years old when he won his first big role—“Charlie” in the Amherst High School production of “Flowers for Algernon.”

In the play, Todaro’s character befriends a laboratory mouse named “Algernon.” To prepare, Todaro secretly took the mouse home. He spent hours with the tiny white rodent, talking to it like Charlie would talk to Algernon, until the mouse knew its part.

When the show opened, there was Algernon, perched on Todaro’s shoulder.

“He trained that mouse to go up and down his arm,” said former Amherst High School drama director Frank Cecala, marveling 25 years later. “I’ve seen other high school productions. They don’t bring the mouse out, or the mouse is in a cage. But even at 15 years old, this was Paul’s meticulousness of detail.”

That drive to master the details has helped Todaro become one of a handful of people in Buffalo making a living entirely from theater. If you’ve been to Shakespeare in Delaware Park or a score of other Buffalo-area productions in recent years, you’ve seen him.

Between acting in local productions, directing plays in most of the city’s theaters and teaching acting at his alma mater, Niagara University, Todaro hasn’t been forced into a “day job” to pay the rent.

Buffalo has earned a reputation as a city with a stronger theater community than the surrounding economy would seem to dictate. That’s mainly because of a dedicated core of semi-pro and professional players like Todaro, who have starred on larger stages yet settled in Buffalo because they could live here more comfortably while they pursue their work.

With his wife Michelle Gigante, ’87, Todaro returned from New York City in 1997. The couple, who married in 1993, had been running the successful off-off-Broadway Independent Theatre Co. for a decade before being forced out by rising rents. They decided to come home for a year, to recharge.

“Been here ever since,” Todaro says with a shrug.

All these years after Algernon, he’s still sweating the details.

“It’s motivated mostly out of fear, to get it right, so that the thing won’t run off stage and you’re left with egg on your face,” he said. “That’s the most terrifying thing in the world, to be on stage, so you want to fill up the void with things.”

A Versatile Actor

Once he starts talking you’d never pick Todaro out as the professional actor in the room. He responds slowly and quietly to questions, slighting his own success.

Ask him, “How do you train a mouse, anyway?” and he says, “I just tried to get it to do what I wanted it to do, by doing it over and over again. I guess you train a mouse the same way you train an actor. You keep doing it until it becomes familiar.”

So much for taking airs.

Todaro’s unassuming approach to acting was apparent even in high school, said Cecala. “Your drama clubbers tend to be your extroverted, backstabbing kind of people,” but Todaro seemed introverted.

“Then you’d see him get on stage and just break out into these characters, and you would wonder, ‘Where did this come from?’”

Even after returning from a decade of work in Manhattan and some decent reviews in the New York City press, Todaro has been quietly excellent in his role as a teacher of acting, said Brother Augustine Towey, C.M., Niagara University’s former longtime drama director.

“He doesn’t sing his credits all the time,” said Towey, who jumped at the chance to hire Todaro in 1999. “He doesn’t proclaim how wonderful he is. He’s very, very humble. And that creates a certain charm.”

Together with his versatility, that’s what keeps Todaro working steadily, said Saul Elkin, the University at Buffalo theater professor who runs Buffalo’s Shakespeare in Delaware Park festival.

“It’s his really extraordinary range and flexibility as an actor,” said Elkin, who has frequently acted with and directed Todaro, including in this summer’s productions of “Love’s Labour’s Lost” and “Twelfth Night.” “He handles the language as well as anybody I’ve ever heard anywhere. He’s that good.”

See TODARO, continued on page 10
something in the play, in the character, to drive actions on stage. “Emotion is the byproduct of action—we’re actors, not emoters,” he said. “You don’t laugh or cry because you felt something. Something happened.”

That genuine experience is theater’s stock in trade, unique happenings with enough attraction to mass audiences to keep theater viable against the onslaught of movies and television and everything else.

When something happens on the stage, it’s a singular moment, shared by the people in the room and no one else, he said. “It can’t be perfect—and that’s what’s good about it.”

The Reward of Approval

Todaro grew up in Amherst, the son of an ad agency artist, and the second of four siblings. He played Little League baseball for eight years, but did miserably. “My dad was the coach, and I was in right field for eight years,” he chuckles.

Everyone had to take part in plays in the fifth and sixth grades, he said. So it wasn’t until his friend David Johann Kim convinced him to join a summer drama club that he took the stage voluntarily. That’s when he felt the reward of approval for the first time, a payoff for his effort on stage. “That tasted very good,” he said. “I was drawn to it.”

Contrary to popular misunderstanding, the real work in acting isn’t the memorization of lines, he said. “The brain’s like a muscle—the more you work it, the easier it gets.”

No, the real work is finding “English,” but after six plays a year, he really majored in theater.

His friend Kim also pursued an acting career, and got Todaro his first work after college. He’d moved to New York City without a job, but Kim was already in the cast of an Independent Theatre Co. production.

“One of the actors had been fired, after a fistfight,” Todaro said. He had four days before the show opened to rehearse his lines.

He would end up running the company, in partnership with Michelle, for the better part of a decade. The seedy Lower East Side neighborhood had hookers on the street corners, but the rent was cheap enough to let the company take risks on the shows it presented.

“Our main partnership grew out of that,” said Gigante, who today teaches yoga at East West Yoga studio, and dance at Buffalo Contemporary Dance.

She would direct and he would act, or vice versa, while they took on the additional task of managing the building. “We worked 14 hours a day,” Gigante said. “This was our baby.”

In the summer of 2005, Paul Todaro stole the show as a humorous “Mercutio” in Shakespeare in Delaware Park’s production of “Romeo and Juliet.” Later in the summer he played the lead in “Hamlet.” Here he shares the stage with NU alumnus Louis Colaiacovo, ’99.

In June, as his role in “Celadine” was wrapping up at the Kavinoky Theatre, Todaro had started rehearsals for his Shakespeare in Delaware Park roles.

“When you’re outdoors, you’re competing with barking dogs, birds flying by, a gorgeous sunset,” he said. “So you have to do it a little bigger.”

In the summer of 2007, Paul Todaro will play “Tevye” in Niagara University Theatre’s production of the acclaimed musical, “Fiddler on the Roof.” He looks forward to working with the cast of NU students and the production’s director, Brother Augustine Towey, C.M. In 2002, Niagara University students also had the golden opportunity to work with Paul when he starred as “Grand Pere” in NU Theatre’s production of the Kander and Ebb musical, “The Happy Time.” Here, a scene from that production shows “Grand Pere” (Paul), right, giving sage advice to “Jacques” (Damian Vanore, ’02).

Friends of Niagara University Theatre
Renaissance Man

Kim, the best man at their wedding, made their partnership the point of his wedding toast. “To be able to see a couple work like that, you go, ‘Oh that’s how it should be. That’s how it can really work,’” he said.

The company drew laudatory reviews for tackling difficult plays, absurdist comedies and existentialist dramas rarely produced, even in New York City. On top of his other responsibilities, Todaro also composed music for several productions.

Actor, director, composer.

“That’s the thing that’s so amazing to me about Paul,” said Paul Bargetto, a fellow troupe member who’s now the artistic director of East River Commedia. “He really is kind of a Renaissance man.”

Bargetto remembered a typical Todaro moment from rehearsals of the play “Out at Sea,” wherein two starving men in a lifeboat try to convince a third to serve himself up for food.

Stalling, the intended victim washes his feet, and hands the towel back. “Paul took the towel and tucked it into the top of his shirt, like a bib, or napkin, before he would eat him,” Bargetto said.

“It was this moment that was so perfect, no one ever could have thought of, sprung out of the moment, and it just brought the house down every night,” Bargetto remembered. “Chilling and hilarious, all wrapped up in one.”

A Teacher’s Role

That was nine years ago, of course. He’s been working steadily, between directing, acting and teaching, and she’s been teaching as well. The sense of community in Buffalo is another ingredient in the glue, Gigante said. “I walk outside my door and I say ‘Hi’ to probably a dozen people in 10 minutes’ time. And that’s really nice.”

One thing that hasn’t changed is her effect on his acting. “We’ve been together for 20 years,” he said. “I know most of the time what she’s thinking, and she knows most of the time what I’m thinking. That’s a great shortcut at times, but other times it’s difficult.”

That’s because she knows when he’s cutting corners, he said. “There’s always a deadline, and you have to produce something in a certain amount of time, which sometimes forces you to not do the most honest work you can.”

He can’t get away with that with his wife, he said, because they know each other so well. “People are able to delude themselves at times,” he said. “I can’t delude her, or trick her, or fool her.”

Todaro confessed that his drive for an honest performance sometimes leaves him acting like a bit of a jerk. “I’m very impatient,” he says ruefully. “With co-workers, I expect everyone to do things the way I do them. But I’ve learned by now that doesn’t always play that way.”

When he slips into his teacher’s role, to shape some of the next generation of actors at Niagara University, he throttles back.

“When I teach, I don’t believe in any kind of preaching,” he said. “I try to be very Socratic about it. I ask questions. That’s all I ever do.”

It’s an exhausting process, he said, but he believes in it for the authenticity of the results.

“Sometimes it doesn’t work. But when it works it works for real, and it’s lasting because the student has made the realization themselves.”

For all his intensity, Todaro knows he needs to lighten up from time to time. One of those times is Sunday nights, when he slips down the street to McGarrets, a neighborhood bar. He picks up an electric bass and joins five other talented musicians in belting out classic country and western, zydeco and more “hootin’ and hollerin’” music.

On this stage, Todaro can finally relax.

“Acting is fun, but it puts the bread on the table,” he said. “It’s my job to enjoy it while I’m doing it, but it’s still a job. I just needed something I liked that didn’t have any consequences whatsoever.”
High Heels and Coronets: The True Story of a Designing Woman

By Mary E. Furlong

High heel shoes! They were the first thing I noticed in costume designer Maureen Stevens’ office. She devotes a whole shelf to them—fancy, dancy miniatures in sexy neon colors, all trimmed out with beads and fur and spangles. Dream shoes, no doubt, for, surely, 6-foot-2 Maureen never actually stepped out in high heels.

Oh, but she did! Still does, at least in spirit! “I’m a shoe person,” she says with an air of fatalism. She’s a hat person, too. And a gown person. And a bustle person. And a Romeo shirt person. And, in particular, on the day we talked, a coronet person.

Coronets! That’s what they call those charming goose-girl head pieces that the Daughters of Charity used to wear. Those starched linen flying-nun chapeaus with their graceful, awe-inspiring wings.

Coronets are featured in “Vincent in Heaven,” the Niagara University Theatre’s season opener. Written by director emeritus Brother Augustine Towey, C.M., the production chronicles the life of St. Vincent de Paul, founder of both the Vincentian order and the Daughters of Charity. The Daughters’ traditional figure-enveloping blue habits and gleaming white coronets are a costume designer’s dream of character definition and dramatic effect.

“They had an aura about them,” says Maureen in describing the first women religious to work in the world rather than retiring to a cloister. An aura, she adds, that had to do with the way they both “blended in” with and “stood apart” from the seventeenth century society in which they lived.

Maureen has had time to give the subject a lot of thought. She designed costumes for Vincent’s premiere production back in 1988. At the time, she was a recent graduate of SUNY College at Buffalo, intent on making a transition from her initial career choice (fashion design) to the world of theater. After “Vincent,” she costumed the NU production of “Oklahoma” at Artpark. Then, it was on to graduate school at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to beef up her theater credentials.

Master’s degree at last in hand, Maureen freelanced for about seven years, gaining experience in such prestigious venues as The Colorado Shakespeare Festival, the San Francisco Opera, the Hartford Stage, Studio Arena, and the Illinois Opera, Dance, and Repertory Theatres. She calls this her “wandering child” phase, a time when she kept her options open and her car trunk packed.

By 1996, Maureen thought she’d settled into a permanent niche at Walt Disney World in Florida. Then, a phone call from Brother Augustine called her home to Western New York and full-time teaching and designing at Niagara University.

Maureen estimates that she’s worked on more than a hundred shows over the years. Certain ones stand out because of the way all their artistic elements came together in unified visions. “Steel Pier” is at the top of her list of favorites. She fell in love with the music, the story, and the courage of the characters, whose costumes she designed to reflect the poverty and desperation of the Depression era. To her immense satisfaction, both composer John Kander and lyricist Fred Ebb expressed their preference for her designs over their gaudier Broadway counterparts.

“That was very cool,” says Maureen.

Other standouts include: “Julius Caesar,” which she costumed in militaristic Tai Kwon Do style; “Hamlet,” whose dramatic color scheme was inspired by Dutch artist Rogier Van Der Weyden’s painting of the Crucifixion; and “Spoon River Anthology,” done in sepia tones to mimic old photographs.

And, of course, “Vincent in Heaven,” a revival of her inaugural NU production. The first time around, Maureen, a carefree 20-something, had the technical assistance of Sister Mary Fran Martin, who turned up on performance evenings to pin each stage nun’s coronet wings into place. Sister, however, is presently Visitatrix of the Northeast Province of the Daughters of Charity (which, like a compliment from Kander and Ebb, is very cool). And Maureen, now the busy wife of Kevin and mother of K.J. and Clara, is no longer quite so carefree.

Don’t worry. She’ll manage—winging it so to speak—with the aplomb of a Fred Astaire dancing partner. Okay, okay! Not literally backwards and in high heels. But with that kind of flair. That’s a shoe person for you.
Alumni News...

Heather Adair, ’04, recently finished “Annie Get Your Gun” and “A Chorus Line” at a dinner theater in Ohio.

Several NU Theatre alumni, students and a professor participated in Buffalo’s annual Infringement Festival this summer. Over 200 performances of diverse productions attracted good crowds. Alumni who participated included: Lauren Arena, ’04; David Autovino, ’03; Kelly Beuth, ’96; Virginia Brannon, ’04; Joe Christopher, ’06; Lindsey Detota, ’06; Erin Garvey, ’06; Jenny Gembka, ’04; Kahlil Gibran Jackson, ’04; Andrew Liegl, ’06; and Andrew Michalski, ’98. Current students who participated along with adjunct professor Larry Smith included: Candice Kogut, ’08; Kelly Konecko, ’09; Lisa LeCuyer, ’08; Paige Mingus, ’09; Ryan O’Byrne, ’09; Emily Pici, ’08; Kristen Smiley, ’07; and JennaBeth Stockman, ’09.

Virginia Brannon, ’04, was one of the organizers of the Infringement Festival and acted as festival supervisor/house manager for the New Phoenix Theatre on the Park. She acted in one of the productions at the festival and directed “The Respectful Prostitute” by Jean-Paul Sartre. In addition, she did two monologues in “The Marble Orchard Tours” in Lewiston this summer and was cast in “Nunsense” for Theatre in the Mist in Lewiston. Virginia directed “Wait Until Dark” for Theatre in the Mist in October.

Tiffany Bruce, ’01, is currently teaching theater and film and directing productions at Downers Grove South High School near Chicago.

Victoria Buda, ’98, wrapped up “The Hobbit” this spring and headed to New York City to direct at a children’s theater camp in Larchmont for the summer.

Julie Burdick, ’03, is in Washington, D.C. this fall, working on “Cabaret” at the Arena Stage. She plays a “KitKat Girl” and is covering “Sally Bowles.” Julie has also had some wonderful callbacks in New York for such productions as “Tarzan,” among others, and reports that she got to meet Bob Crowley and see his Tony Award at a recent creative meeting.

Tonia Campenella, ’02, received her MFA from Richmond and is teaching acting to freshmen and sophomores at the University of Oklahoma, where she may also do some directing.

Sheila Connors, ’97, is a member of The OutoFar Trio Jug Band and appeared on the Western New York Adelphia Cable television show, “Crossroads,” in June. She also played rubboard and sang back-up vocals on Alison Pipitone’s new CD, “Tigerbabies,” and participated in Pipitone’s CD release party events (www.alisonpipitone.com).

Dan DelGaudio, ’04, reports that he is now a member of the SAG Actors Guild, having been featured on “CSI” and “King of Queens.” After living in Los Angeles for the past year and a half, he has relocated to Boston. In Los Angeles, he performed at a small repertory theater in Hollywood doing a series of one-act productions by David Ives. He recently signed an exclusive deal with a SAG-franchised agency in Boston and is also working as a marketing manager at an Internet marketing firm.

Paschal Frisina III, ’00, exchanged marriage vows with Kristen Marie Nixon, ’02, on Aug. 12 at St. John de LaSalle R.C. Church in Niagara Falls, N.Y. Brother Augustine Towey, C.M., honored the couple by giving the homily. The couple resides in Grand Island, N.Y.

See ALUMNI, continued on page 14
Denise Payne Lennon, '99, recently finished a seven-month tour of “Dr. Doolittle, the Musical.”

Michael Mariano, '85, reports that he feels lucky to have landed “the best job in television this year:” producer on the hit comedy, “My Name is Earl.” His friend Greg Garcia created this show, along with “Yes, Dear,” which Mike previously worked on.

Brendan Powers, '96, artistic director of Niagara University Theatre, participated in a benefit performance with Oscar-nominated actor Alec Baldwin on July 12. The event included a reading of the Tony-award winning play, “ART,” by Yasmina Reza, and benefited a new Buffalo theater company, Road Less Traveled Productions.

Colleen Quinlan, '91, has landed a role in “Pig Farm,” a new play by Greg Kotis, who wrote “Urinetown.” The production will be on stage at The Old Globe in San Diego from Aug. 29 through Oct. 29.

Michele Ragusa, '87, is currently starring in “Urinetown” in Ohio through November. From January through March, she’ll be at Primary Stages in its production of “Adrift in Macao.”

Patrick Riviere, '88, was appointed assistant director for the Hudson Riverfront Performing Arts Center in January. He is coordinating the educational outreach programs, assisting with two concert series, and producing the reading of the new musical, “Triangle,” in association with All Seasons Theatre Co. Patrick also recently published “Flowers in Autumn: endings and beginnings,” a poetry book featuring his poems and paintings by his late mother, Gen Riviere. The book is published by Cliffside Small Press and is available online at www.lulu.com. Patrick noted, “I’m excited to have people see this work. It is as much an art book as a collection of poems.”

Dawn Smith-DeLuca, '96, was onstage in “Footloose” this summer at the Lancaster Opera House in Lancaster, N.Y.

Paul Todaro, '87, along with several other NU alumni and students, again starred in Buffalo’s Shakespeare in Delaware Park this summer. Alumni cast members of “Love’s Labour’s Lost” included Todaro; Joseph Wiens, ’04; David Autovino, ’03; Susan Drozd, ’02; and Lindsie Detota, ’06. Alumni and current NU Theatre students who were seen in “Twelfth Night” included: Todaro; David Autovino, ’03; Andy Liegl, ’06; Jonathan Klett, ’08; Lona Geiser, ’93;


Samuel Torcasio, ’06, is featured on Saturday mornings on WDCX 99.5 FM Buffalo in a weekly radio show called “Car Connection.”

Damian Vanore, ’02, a member of “Money in the Pants,” a sketch comedy troupe comprised of Second City Conservatory alumni, was on stage in September in a new show called “Comedy Through Time.” The production was on stage at Donny’s Skybox in Chicago.

Variety is the spice. After playing the sultry “Velma” in NU Theatre’s production of Kander and Ebb’s hit musical “Chicago” last spring, Lia Sumerano, ’08, played it sweet as “Belle” in “Beauty and the Beast” in Albany, N.Y.’s Park Playhouse this summer.
Summer In the Spotlight

Several talented administrators, alumni and students from Niagara University Theatre were involved in the Irish Classical Theatre’s poignant season opener, Terrence McNally’s musical, “A Man of No Importance.” Front row from left, Niagara University Theatre director emeritus, Brother Augustine Toweys, C.M., director of the production; Michele Roberts, ’99, (Adele); and senior Meaghan Reilly (Kitty). Back row from left: junior Matthew Chavez, assistant to the director; senior Patrick McGee (ensemble); and NU Theatre dance professor Stacy Zawadzki Janusz, choreographer for the production. Missing from the photo are David Autovino, ’03, (Breton Beret) and NU Theatre scenic and lighting director Eric Appleton, who provided set design for the musical. For more information, visit www.irishclassicaltheatre.com.

NU student Cassie Gorniewicz, ’08, (pictured above) and alumni David Autovino, ’03, (pictured right, top) and Sarielys Matos, ’04, (pictured right, bottom) shared their acting talents in three new television commercials promoting Niagara University. The commercials were shot on campus this summer and are being broadcast in Western and Central New York this fall. To view these commercials, visit NU’s homepage at www.niagara.edu and click on “learn more” under the “Campus Spotlight” heading.

(Left) NU Theatre’s Lisa LeCayer, ’08, right, and David Autovino, ’03, center, were among a group of several NU Theatre alumni, students and faculty who performed in the comedies “Twelfth Night” (pictured) and “Love’s Labours Lost” at Shakespeare in Delaware Park this summer. Here, LeCayer and Autovino listen to the lovelorn Christopher Young (“The Duke of Illyria”).
Three Works by Brother Augustine Available

“Poems from San Francisco,” a chapbook by Brother Augustine Towey, C.M., director emeritus of Niagara University Theatre, contains 13 poems, including “All This, and Books Besides,” the poem commissioned for Niagara University’s 150th anniversary.

All copies are signed by the author and are available for sale. To order, please send a check made payable to Niagara University Theatre for $25 for each copy.

In addition, Brother Augustine’s chapbook, “The Anna Poems,” written in memory of his mother, is available in a limited edition at $20.

Also, Brother Augustine’s play, “Vincent in Heaven,” which spotlights the engaging humanity of St. Vincent de Paul, is available for $10 U.S./$12 CN per copy.

For any or all of these works, please complete and mail the form at right.

Order Form

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