



LEGACY LEDGER

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER OF LEGACY NAFC ALUMNI



A Message from the NAFC Education Foundation Alumni Coordinator, Sherri McKeen

Time flies when you are having fun. Our students and staff are already in the final week of the first quarter, with Fall Break beginning next week.

During the first ten weeks of the school year, the NAFC Education Foundation has funded more than \$65,000 in Great Classroom Grants. These grants make it possible for teachers to bring their best ideas to life, with support for new books to grow classroom libraries, flexible seating for active learners, speech and sensory supports for diverse needs, math and literacy stations that spark collaboration, and technology tools that open new doors for discovery.

We are also proud to spotlight two remarkable alumni who are enriching communities through the arts. From New York stages to world-renowned opera houses, **Will DeVary (FCHS '18)** and Grammy Award-winner **Karen Kamensek (NAHS '87)** are using their talents to inspire and connect audiences everywhere. Their stories remind us of the incredible impact of the arts and the legacies that begin right here in Floyd County.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Amanda Beam, Guest Contributor

In this month's Legacy NAFC Spotlight, we highlight two alumni who are building vibrant communities through the arts. Through their tireless dedication and tremendous talent, these artists inspire others to realize their fullest potential.

Will DeVary (**FCHS '18**) does it all. Acting. Writing. Directing. He longs to tell stories that reflect this world in his own unique way. Through his work, he fosters a spirit of connection that extends beyond the page, screen, or stage.

Grammy Award-winner **Karen Kamensek (NAHS '87)** discovered at an early age that she had a penchant for music and leadership. Now one of the most sought-after guest conductors in the world, she uplifts orchestras and audiences with her distinctive artistry.

With talents like these, we're confident their impact will resonate—encore after encore—for decades to come.

Will DeVary (FCHS '18) A gifted storyteller on stage, screen and page

Director. Writer. Actor.

Will DeVary does it all.

Take July of this year. The 2018 Floyd Central grad acted in a production of "Richard II" in New York City, where he now lives. Then, he was the assistant director of a production helmed by Austin Pendleton, known by most audiences for his role in "My Cousin Vinny". Ending the month, Will took the lead and directed a workshop of an original off-Broadway play in a festival of new work.

Oh, yeah. A TV pilot he was featured in, "Born 2 Lose", continued to make its rounds at the film festivals.

Do we all need a deep breath?

Not Will. He's grateful for each opportunity to pursue his passions and share his creativity with audiences from around the globe.



Photo by Cody Tarr

“Every day I get to work on a play, or I get to work on a set, or I get to tell stories. I'm living my childhood dream in a very real, tangible way,” he said.

And boy, can Will dream. As a young child, he used toys and other props to create tales that he then had his family film. Recognizing his talent, his grandparents sent him a newspaper clipping advertising open auditions for “A Christmas Story” at Actors Theater of Louisville. At 11, he was cast in the production as Flick, the kid who is dared to put his tongue to a cold, metal pole.

Acting, much like his character’s tongue, stuck.

“The second I walked into that building, I immediately knew this was for my entire life,” said Will, who also performed in FCHS’s productions of “Mary Poppins”, “Newsies” and “42nd Street” and now has more than 25 professional acting credits to his name. “Being in an environment where everybody was coming together to put on a play, and tell stories, and kind of play pretend just felt like the most revolutionary and cool thing.”

In sixth grade, Will produced his first novel. But he didn’t stop there. He then turned this first work into his first screenplay. He continues to create both new work and adaptations. During the pandemic, the writer helped breathe new life into Shakespeare’s history plays by restructuring them into a radio-friendly format, which he helped produce.

“The question I'm always asking myself is why now? Why this play? Why this project? Why this part?” Will said. “And I think all the great writers wrestle with that in some way.”

And his directing?

For his sophomore year directorial debut, Will received invaluable support from Robbie Steiner, the former Director of Theater Arts at Floyd Central. The director of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” had to cancel due to a scheduling conflict, and so Will and a friend offered to helm the play.

“He was like, ‘Sure. Why not?’, which is a profound level of trust placed in 16-year-old me,” said Will, who would go on to stage additional productions at the school. “I was really, really lucky when I was growing up, that I had a lot of people who just gave me the opportunities to be myself and develop the work that I wanted to make.”

After graduating from FCHS, Will earned his BFA in Acting and BA in English from Ithaca College in New York. In addition to acting, directing, and writing, he also cofounded the production collective BURN1.

“The biggest thing is to be true to yourself. And I know that's kind of trite, but I think that's the only thing that you have,” said the 26-year-old. “One of the wonderful things about this industry is that it's like playing golf. Really, you're only competing with yourself. It's just your journey.”

Karen Kamensek (NAHS '87)

Conducting orchestras and operas with masterful care



Photo by Yossi Zwecker

Even on video, Phillip Glass's opera "Akhnaten" stuns. In this particular 2019 Metropolitan Opera recording of "Hymn to the Sun", the God-King slowly, methodically climbs a set of stairs, his translucent robe flowing, and takes his place in the center of a bright orange orb. A chorus of voices at the bottom worships him with song.

And hidden away from the audience's view, leading the orchestra below and the actors above, Karen Kamensek conducts. Like a god of yore, the 1987 New Albany High School grad shapes the music with the stroke of her baton as onlookers marvel.

"A conductor is an amalgam of many skill sets," said Karen. "Besides the obvious musical skills, such as knowing how to play various instruments, language skills, aural and technical skills, one must feel comfortable with being a leader, and be extremely passionate not only about the music itself but about working together with the wonderful musicians who bring it to life."

In 2022, Karen and the cast of "Akhnaten" won a Grammy Award for Best Opera Recording.

But her journey to the golden gramophone began right here in Southern Indiana.

Music education began early for the artist. She started piano lessons at 4, violin instruction at 8. It was during the latter in an elementary school orchestra class that renowned teacher Rubin Sher offered the precocious youngster a drumstick to beat time after she corrected a classmate. Karen picked it up so quickly that the maestro pronounced she was going to be a conductor. At 11, Mr. Sher allowed her to direct.

"Rubin immediately saw my potential and guided me in that direction," Karen said. "His comment that I had the temperament and talent to be a conductor felt like the right assessment, and felt natural to me, like a calling, and passion."

Her immersion in the arts continued throughout high school. Here, she accompanied the choir on the piano and played violin for the orchestra. She then went to Indiana University Bloomington's Jacobs School of Music and earned degrees in piano performance and orchestral conducting.

"All the seeds of my musical career were planted and sown in the NAFC school system from grades 1-12," she said. "The teachers were inspirational and supportive, and without these musical and artistic fundamentals, which I was so fortunate to receive from the beginning, I'm sure I wouldn't be where I am today."

And then came New York and the legendary Simone Young.

While working on her craft in the Big Apple, Karen waited for Young outside a stage door and told her she needed an assistant.

Appreciating Karen's "chutzpah", the famed conductor hired the Hoosier and helped her launch her international career.

And, my, oh, my, has she gone global.

In addition to her position as Music Director of Hanover State Opera in Hanover, Germany, from 2011 to 2016, Karen has guest-conducted numerous operas and orchestras in cities across the globe.

London. Milan. Sydney. Los Angeles. Brussels.

And, of course, the Met, where she debuted in 2019.

The next stop in her busy schedule? In October, she'll conduct "Akhnaten" at Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona, Spain. And at the beginning of next year, Karen travels to the Royal Swedish Opera to lead "Figaro Gets a Divorce".

"In the course of a career, one is shaped by every single piece of music and art that one encounters," she said. "As a mature artist, I'm still discovering new works and re-visiting old favorites, and I feel my creative juices flow and my mind and soul stretch constantly. So, it's more of a work in progress with myself. Sometimes I can be brought to my knees by one single measure of Mozart. That's the power of music and art."

Thank You to WesBanco – Our Matching Gift Sponsor



We are deeply grateful to **WesBanco** for serving as our **Matching Gift Sponsor** for this year's *Give for Good Louisville*. Their generous \$5,250 gift helped inspire our community to come together in support of NAFC students and educators.

Because of WesBanco's commitment, every dollar given on September 18 carried an even greater impact by helping us fund innovative classroom projects, expand mental health initiatives, and provide vital resources across all 16 schools.

Thank you, WesBanco, for investing in brighter futures for our students and for standing alongside us in this important work.



This month, the NAFC Education Foundation awarded **\$37,741 in Great Classroom Grants** to bring new ideas and opportunities to life in our New Albany Floyd County School classrooms. This brings our total to more than \$65,500 in funded Great Classroom Grants this school year.

Here are a few of this month's highlights:

- **Prosser Career Education Center** – culinary students will have new pasta machines and lab materials to expand their hands-on training.
- **New Albany High School** – interior design students will use fabric swatches, drafting tools, and design boards to apply industry concepts in practical projects.
- **Mount Tabor Elementary School** – speech and language students will benefit from new therapy materials and tools to strengthen communication skills.
- **Floyd Central High School** – Biomedical students will have new tools to collect and analyze real-time physiological data and to build anatomical systems on manikins.

These are just a few of the 66 innovative projects made possible this month, thanks to community support and dedicated educators.



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Stay updated on your Floyd County classmates, discover thrilling events in your NAFC school community, and learn firsthand about the NAFC Education Foundation by connecting with us at facebook.com/LegacyNAFCAlumni.

New Albany-Floyd County
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The New Albany Floyd County Education Foundation is a not-for-profit organization that works in conjunction with NAFC Schools to provide privately funded supplemental resources and programs to students, teachers, and schools. Legacy NAFC is the official alumni support group of the NAFC Education Foundation and New Albany Floyd County Schools.

For more information, contact Sherri McKeen at smckeen@nafcs.org or 812-542-2242 at the NAFC Education Foundation.

www.NAFCEdFoundation.org/alumni



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