



Arts Leader

The arts are part of everyday life, says Nancy Uscher '72E. As the new president of Seattle's Cornish College of the Arts, she works to keep it that way.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

NANCY USCHER '72E SAYS SHE'S HAD A COUPLE of epiphanies during her career, and the first was at Eastman. It was 1972, the year of her graduation and also the school's 50th anniversary, a celebration that ran the course of the 1971-72 academic year and culminated with a performance by the Eastman Philharmonia at New York City's Carnegie Hall.

Uscher, a violist in the Philharmonia, was told she'd play sixth chair.

"I thought I was going to be disregarded almost," she says, recalling the letdown

she felt, especially having spent the previous year at the Royal College of Music in London, an experience she describes as "glorious."

"Then I remember this incredible experience," she continues. The concert featured a premier of *Partita for Harpsichord and Orchestra*, a piece written especially for the occasion by Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki.

"We'd been rehearsing, and I see that I alone begin the piece for the entire orchestra. As the sixth chair."

Uscher describes how Penderecki would approach her and sing the rhythm. "He

would go 'bump bump bump bump.' He said, 'You have to start without a conductor. You just have to remember the pulse and start it.'"

"I've thought about this many times," Uscher says today, and the lesson she draws from it is that leaders can be drawn from anywhere. Even the sixth chair. So, she tells young artists: "Be ready."

Inaugurated in October as the new president of Seattle's Cornish College of the Arts, Uscher says the experience guides her approach to leadership. "Everyone can be a leader in his or her own way. I really believe that leadership should come from different

sectors, and I don't like micromanagement.”

Uscher has herself come from many different sectors of the arts world. After graduating from Eastman, she pursued scholarly and performance paths simultaneously, pursuing a doctorate in music at New York University and advanced study in viola at Juilliard. A series of guest teaching assignments and residencies took her around the world. And for six years, she was coprincipal violist in the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra.

She returned to the United States in 1984, eventually focusing on scholarship and academic leadership, working her way up to associate provost of academic affairs at the University of New Mexico, then provost of the California Institute of the Arts (or, CalArts), before being tapped as president of Cornish. In 1999, she returned to Eastman and delivered a talk, “The Artist’s Leadership Challenge: Defining Career Opportunity for a Changing World,” as part of the Arts Leadership guest speaker series.

Uscher says Cornish offers “a very unusual model.” It was founded almost a century ago by Seattle pianist and educator Nellie Cornish, who wanted her students to experience the “interrelatedness” of all the arts. In 1977, the school became an accredited college, offering bachelor’s degrees in visual arts, design, theater, music, dance, and performance production. With the exception of only two arts colleges she can think of—her previous employer, CalArts, and Philadelphia’s University of the Arts—Uscher notes that colleges of the arts are either colleges of the visual arts or colleges of the performing arts.

“It changes the context in which you learn,” she says, adding that at CalArts, the tendency of visual artists to articulate the concepts behind their work encouraged her to do the same as a musician.

In the 1930s, the Cornish faculty included the dancer Martha Graham and was the place where the avant-garde composer John Cage and the dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham met one another and began their lifelong collaboration and partnership.

Nonetheless, the school floundered for decades following Cornish’s retirement as president, and its accreditation as a college in the 1970s failed to revive it. In the past decade, however, the college has experienced a notable turnaround, securing a move downtown, the integration and improvement of physical facilities, and grow-

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ing visibility in the Seattle arts community and beyond.

With these changes, Uscher says, “Now we’re in a position to really fulfill our promise.”

Paul Nathanson, who’s the executive director of the National Senior Citizens Law Center and helped Uscher establish

“Some of the faculty were pretty straight about what they were doing. Their attitude was, we’re doing composing, we’re playing, and the rest of this stuff”—such as Uscher’s activities at the center—“is just sort of weird. Nancy has a broad vision of the arts.”

Indeed, Uscher says if there’s one thing she wants to communicate to young artists, it’s that “they have a huge role in our world.” And lest anyone think that’s mere platitude, Uscher has an illustration of exactly what she means—her second epiphany, which occurred while she was in New Mexico.

She was on a town hall tour, in which the new president of the university and other leaders ventured far from the flagship Albuquerque campus into the mostly rural state, to see how the University could meet the needs of the state’s far-flung communi-



a Center for the Arts in Society when they were both at the University of New Mexico, thinks she’s well poised for the role. He recalls her success in designing innovative programs to bring arts into the community, and in finding funders to help them thrive.

“She’ll be able to push an agenda that shows the interconnectedness of the arts, and of the arts in society,” he says. In the music department at New Mexico, he adds,

▲ USCHERED IN: Violist Uscher (opposite) was inaugurated as president of Cornish College of the Arts this fall, a celebration whose guests included Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn (above, right) and John Gordon Hill, the chair of Cornish’s board of trustees.

ties. In one of the towns, a young university doctor who had been offered a job to become that town’s only physician stood up and said, according to Uscher’s recollection: “You’ve offered me a really high salary, and I thank you, but I can’t come here, because my daughter can’t take ballet lessons, and I can’t go to a museum, and I can’t go to the theater and have my ideas challenged.”

It was a powerful illustration to Uscher of the centrality of arts to thriving communities.

“This is not separate,” she says, referring to the arts, and to her life’s work in helping to bring them to as many places and people as she can. “It’s integrated into the way people are thinking about their lives.” **R**



RENEWABLE: Small industrial cities like Flint, Muncie, Youngstown, and others are often seen as throwaways, but despite their challenges, they “have a lot to work with,” argues Tumber in a new book published this fall by MIT Press.

Q&A

Bright Lights, Small Cities

Small industrial cities haven't fared well. But they could thrive in a green economy, argues journalist and historian Catherine Tumber '92 (PhD).

Interview by Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

SMALL-TO-MIDSIZE INDUSTRIAL CITIES with illustrious pasts have more promise in the future than we've been led to believe, argues **Catherine Tumber** '92 (PhD) in a new book, *Small, Gritty, and Green: The Promise of America's Smaller Industrial Cities in a Low-Carbon World* (MIT Press, 2011).

Eclipsed by the strength of large cities such as New York, Boston, and Chicago, small-to-midsize industrial cities such as Syracuse, Akron, and Muncie, Ind., rarely find themselves included in debates about what the city of the future might look like. But beginning in 2008, Tumber, a journalist, historian, and research affiliate at MIT's Community Innovators Lab, traveled to those and approximately 20 other mostly small industrial cities in the North-

east and Midwest, and found healthy, intergenerational sustainability movements attempting, with some notable successes, to retool their communities for a green, low-carbon future.

Tumber—who grew up near Syracuse, attended college amidst the several small industrial cities of western Massachusetts, and earned a doctorate in history at Rochester—is frank about her personal affection for modest-sized cities.

“They can be really interesting, idiosyncratic places to live for people who don't necessarily want to live in New York or Los Angeles. And they have a lot to work with,” she said in an interview in October.

What are some key assets of small-to-mid-size industrial cities in a low-carbon future?

For one, they generally sit among some of the richest farmland on earth. And in the

future that land will be essential to restoring local food systems, harvesting wind and solar energy, and producing biomass for alternative fuels.

In Janesville, Wis., there's a fight on between people who want to preserve some especially rich farmland that surrounds the city and those trying to develop that area for an eventual megaregional corridor stretching from Detroit through Chicago to Minneapolis–St Paul. These are two very different responses to climate change and globalization. Should cities grow even more concentrated into megaregions, or should these smaller cities retain not only their identities but their farmland and industrial infrastructure for productive use? Smaller industrial cities are also home to much of what is left of American manufacturing—in terms of both skills and industrial infrastructure. In Muncie—a place

with a long history of making automotive transmissions—they're transitioning to making gear boxes and other components for windmill turbines. They've attracted a couple of companies—unfortunately, not American ones—to the area because of the skills and infrastructure there. In addition, parts of Indiana are on a highly desirable wind shed. So they're manufacturing their product near their ultimate market, a practice that will likely grow more common as transportation fuel costs rise. Muncie is a great example of a city using both its natural resources as well as its manufacturing legacy to plan for a low-carbon economic future.

Why have small-to-midsize industrial cities confronted so much more difficulty than big cities in the first place?

You have to go back to the 1960s to get to the root of their trouble. That's when deindustrialization and outsourcing began in earnest. But federal disinvestment in cities and economic support for suburban development also played a large role and had consequences that were devastating for large cities, but catastrophic for smaller ones.

Urban freeways, for example, were constructed in cities of all sizes. But while the Cross Bronx Expressway destroyed specific neighborhoods in New York City, in a city the size of Rochester, the Inner Loop destroyed the entire urban fabric of the central city. The flight of retail to the suburbs also disproportionately harmed smaller cities. Large, dense cities could still sustain a significant retail presence, but smaller cities were hollowed out by the retail exodus and became much less appealing places to live over time. That said, they also have disproportionately more to gain from reversing these and other ill-fated decisions.

You're quite critical of some of the urban theorists and economists who've conceived of ways of revitalizing cities after the 1960s. Why?

They've made the metropolis the ideal urban form, when that had not always been the case. I lay much of the blame for that on Jane Jacobs—as much as I admire her—who framed the intellectual response to widespread urban decline, ignoring what she called “little cities and dull factory towns,” and arguing that urbanism thrives only in large and growing cities. She influenced the next two generations of urban theorists—

people like Richard Florida and Ed Glaeser—who, while they don't ignore smaller cities, advise them to do things like develop a creative class of artists, try to attract knowledge industries, and develop a tourist trade. These are not necessarily economic strategies that will work in smaller cities. As much as Scranton is a nice small city, it's probably never going to have a substantial tourist trade.

In the 1960s, there had been a debate between Jacobs and the social critic Lewis Mumford about different visions of urbanism. In the 1920s and 30s, Mumford argued against concentrating all of our wealth and cultural riches in large cities, and for valuing smaller cities as well, including the farmland and the ecological region in which they're set. Jacobs basically won the debate, which is why we don't really hear about Mumford's vision.

You write that a localist movement has existed “in fits and starts” since the 1970s. Are you optimistic about its future?

Definitely. So much has changed since the 1970s. First, the environmentalist movement has become more urban-centered. A lot of localist talk was cast in terms of the rural back-to-the-land movement in the 1970s. Second, the smart growth movement has emerged. It didn't really exist in the 1970s. And the smart growth movement tends to view cities as part of a larger economic and ecological region. And so when people talk about localism, they talk about it in a more expansive way. And then third and more recently, the local food and retail movement, inspired to some extent by Michael Pollan's work, has mounted a serious challenge to our petroleum-drenched industrial food system. All of this has broadened the appeal of localism since the 1970s.

Will that be enough to reverse the fortunes of small industrial cities?

My book is really about the promise of smaller industrial cities in a low-carbon future, and that future is not really yet upon us. There's little market incentive for the shift in thinking and political will that my book calls for. I wrote this book in the hopes that public officials, foundation leaders and an animated citizenry will take a longer view. Short of that, we can also impose cap-and-trade, fuel taxes, or things like that. But I don't think we have the political will for that. Better for these places to quietly prepare for what's likely to come. **R**

In the News

RICHARD KOVAR '76 IS NATIONAL FAMILY PHYSICIAN OF THE YEAR

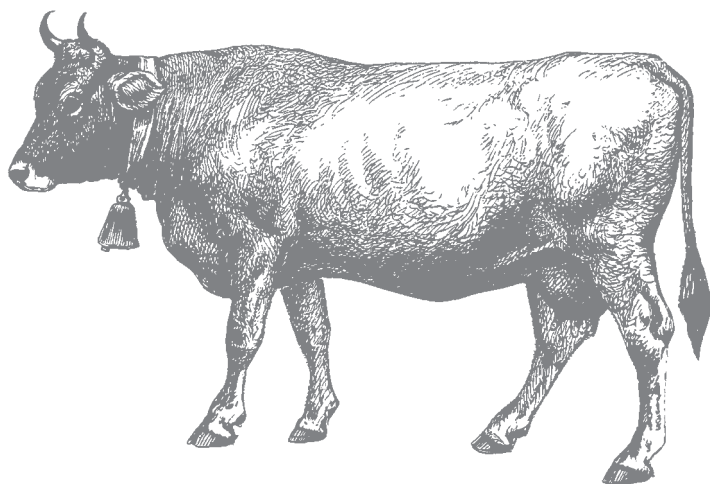
The American Academy of Family Physicians has named **Richard Kovar '76** the Family Physician of the Year. The award, national in scope, is given out annually to just one physician. Kovar, a practicing family physician and medical director of the nonprofit Country Doctor Community Health Centers in Seattle, serves predominantly urban, low-income, uninsured patients. His medical interests range from pediatrics and adolescent medicine to geriatrics, treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS, and mental health and crosscultural health care.

SPORTS JOURNALIST RON THOMAS '71 EARNS LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Ron Thomas '71 has received a Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Sports Journalism. The award, given out by the Northeastern University School of Journalism and its educational and consulting center, Sport in Society, recognizes journalists who examine sports in social and cultural context. In addition to reporting for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *USA Today*, *Chicago Daily News*, *BlackAmericaWeb.com*, and other outlets, Thomas is the author of *They Cleared the Lane: The NBA's Black Pioneers* (University of Nebraska, 2002) and was a researcher for the HBO documentary *Fields of Fire: Sports in the '60s* (1995).

CIVIL ENGINEER PRISCILLA NELSON '70 HONORED FOR RESEARCH

Priscilla Nelson '70, a professor in the department of civil and environmental engineering at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, has received the 2011 Henry L. Michel Award for Industry Advancement of Research from the American Society of Civil Engineers. Nelson, a leader in the design and construction industry, specializes in geological engineering and its application to underground construction. She served as provost at the institute from 2005 to 2008, and previously spent 11 years at the National Science Foundation where she served as senior adviser to the director, and in various other leadership roles.



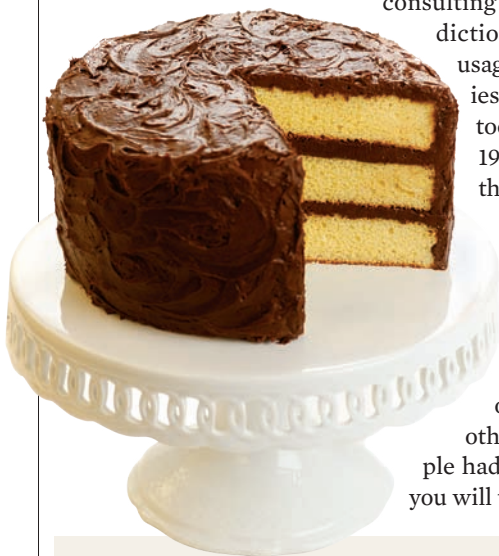
It's Idiomatic

HAS THE WORLD GONE TO HELL IN A HANDBASKET? IF SO, DON'T HEM AND HAW. Hitch your wagon to a star...

We'll bet dollars to doughnuts you've heard—and even used—a few phrases like these. When it comes to knowing their origins, make no bones about it: **Steven Price '62**, author of *Endangered Phrases: Intriguing Idioms Dangerously Close to Extinction* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2011), is the bees' knees.

Price is a writer specializing in guides, catalogs, and collections of quotes and stories, mostly about horses. But he's versatile—a jack of all trades, one might say—with a knack for creating useful handbooks on other subjects, such as *What to Do When a Loved One Dies*, also published by Skyhorse.

Last year, Skyhorse's publisher, Tony Lyons, approached Price about creating a collection of idioms and their origins. Price obliged, and began to research, consulting a host of



usage, and watching quite a few movies and television shows. Literature, too, is a rich source of idioms, with 19th-century poets and Shakespeare the unwitting creators of quite a few.

These days, Price finds that a major appeal of idioms is nostalgia. "As I came across any number of phrases and expressions," he writes in his introduction, "I heard in my mind's ear the voices of my parents and grandparents and others of their generation. Other people had the same reaction, and I suspect you will too." **B** —KAREN MCCALLY

Quiz Kid

How many of the idioms, whose origins are described below, can you identify? (Source: Steven Price, *Endangered Phrases: Intriguing Idioms Dangerously Close to Extinction*. Skyhorse Publishing, 2011).

- 1.** Meaning to make peace or settle differences, this expression refers to a ritual practiced by American and Canadian native tribes at the end of hostilities.
- 2.** A person who's so ignorant that s/he can't even make Boston's most famous dish is a person who _____.
- 3.** Used to convey "delighted surprise at finding someone whose appearance was unanticipated," this expression is the title of a 1950 hit by popular singer Eileen Barton.
- 4.** This expression, which means to become useless, refers to the fate of chickens or other farm animals who've outlived their utility.
- 5.** Meaning "the whole thing," this expression, originating in the early 19th century, refers to all the parts of a working musket.
- 6.** Meaning "to get into an argument," Price writes that this expression "appears in an 1865 poem by Algernon Swinburne to describe the domestic disagreement of a heifer and her mate."
- 7.** An idiom of fairly recent origin, this one is used to express disgust. It originated in Southern California in the 1970s and was made famous nationally in a 1982 hit single by father-daughter duo Frank and Moon Unit Zappa.
- 8.** Used to describe "an effete and spoiled goody-two-shoes young man," this expression refers to the title character of an 1886 best-selling novel by the author and playwright Frances Hodgson Burnett.
- 9.** Meaning "subjected to a harsh scolding or punishment," this idiom refers to a device used to remove excess water from clothing in the days predating washing machines equipped with spin cycles.
- 10.** Meaning "noisy confusion," it appears in this quote, from William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "When shall we three meet again / In thunder, lightning, or in rain? / When the _____'s done, / When the battle's lost and won."

ANSWERS

1. Bury the hatchet
2. Doesn't know beans
3. If I knew you were coming, I'd have baked a cake.
4. Go to pot
5. Lock, stock, and barrel
6. Lock horns
7. Gag me with a spoon
8. Little Lord Fauntleroy
9. Put through the ringer (or, wringer)
10. Hurly burly

A ‘Savvy’ Scientific American

Executive editor Fred Guterl '81 helps the 166-year-old magazine thrive in the digital age.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

FRED GUTERL '81 RECALLS THAT HE WAS SIX or seven years old, growing up in Rockland County, New York, the son of an engineer, when science first lit his imagination.

“It was the 1960s and the moon race was on,” he says. “That stuff was in the headlines all the time, and I was completely taken by it.”

Those headlines, of course, were the big, inky kind that, on major news days especially—such as July 21, 1969, the morning after Neil Armstrong and Edwin (Buzz) Aldrin became the first humans to walk on the moon—soiled your shirtsleeves and blackened your fingertips.

More than 40 years later, at a time when it takes more than newsprint or grainy analog television newscasts to ignite general interest in science, Guterl is helping the nation's oldest, and many say most authoritative, popular science news venue to thrive in the digital age.

Guterl, who studied electrical engineering at Rochester, is a veteran science journalist who served in editorial roles at *Discover*, *IEEE Spectrum* (the magazine of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers), and *Newsweek* before joining *Scientific American* as executive editor in April 2010.

He was hired to help spearhead the magazine's latest redesign. At *Scientific American*, redesigns are part of a process of what editor-in-chief Mariette DiChristina has fittingly described as evolution. “Everything evolves,” she wrote in October 2010, introducing the recalibrated and rejuvenated magazine.

But the struggle for survival in the wild world of media is a bit more daunting than usual. “It's no secret that print journalism isn't growing,” says Guterl. “Any magazine that wants to survive has got to figure out what to do about that. You can decide to hang on to what you have for as long as you can, or try to reinvent yourself, in addition to holding on to what you have.”

What *Scientific American* has had for some time, Guterl stresses, is pretty good: more than 500,000 loyal, highly educated print subscribers. What it has devel-

oped more recently is arguably even better. “We've got close to 3 million unique visitors to our website every month,” he says.

The October 2010 redesign of both the print and online editions changed the look of *Scientific American*, and updated several of its departments. Science journalist Charles Petit praised the redesign on the well-respected blog *Knight Science Journalism Tracker*, noting the magazine's “increased readability, timeliness, and savvy,” and the

“The really exciting thing we're doing is getting all of our editors, including the ones who have worked mainly on print features, to think more broadly about our content across platforms,” says Guterl.

Last January, in a sign of what's to come, *Scientific American* launched its first special edition for the iPad.

It drew content from two previous theme issues—“Origins: The Start of Everything” (September 2009) and “The End: Death,



American Society of Magazine Editors gave it one of its coveted “Ellie” awards—a National Magazine Award for General Excellence—at a celebration last May.

“That is real recognition from our peers that we've raised the bar here in terms of editorial quality,” says Guterl.

Now he and a team of editors are looking ahead toward creating more, and more impressive, digital enhancements for the magazine.

▲ **LIFE IN CYBERSPACE:** Transforming print magazine features into digital events gives them “an alternative life” online, says Guterl, who is helping create digital enhancements at *Scientific American*.

Endings, and Things that Should End” (September 2010)—and combined and transformed it to create a downloadable collection of articles, audio interviews, videos, and interactive graphics called “Origins and Endings.”

Guterl says *Scientific American* will continue to take feature articles and transform them into digital events with three-dimensional, interactive graphics, among other elements.

Because while printed articles can be static, on the web, they live. As Guterl says, they have “an alternative life.” And helping ensure that those alternative lives have richness in content and meaning to readers will be Guterl's job in the days ahead. **R**