

The Classes

“**Gilbert S. Merritt, JD’60**, was one of 13 legal experts selected by the U.S. Justice Department to travel to Iraq and help rebuild its judicial system.”

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Please Note: Class Notes are only available in the print version of this publication.



**Berenice Denton,
BA’58**

NEIL BRAKE

You Can’t Take It with You

She once sold a *Commodore* yearbook with Dinah Shore’s picture in it to a fan club for \$375. She sold country music star Waylon Jennings’ bathrobe for \$385, then got an irate call from a fan prepared to pay \$1,000.

From million-dollar art collections to a household freezer with a boa constrictor inside, Berenice Denton has sold it all. She got her start more than 30 years ago doing neighborhood sales. Since then, she’s been on a lifelong course to educate herself about the things others accumulate. She’s taken courses at Christie’s and does appraisals at antiques road shows.

These days Denton has two Nashville retail shops and handles more than 125 estate sales a year. She approaches each sale knowing it can be traumatic for those involved. Once, while a sale was going on downstairs, the owner was upstairs committing suicide. Another time when Denton arrived to discuss an upcoming sale, the estranged husband met her at the door with a shotgun.

“I tell people we come into this world with nothing and we leave with nothing. What we do with what we have is what’s important in God’s eyes,” she says. “Life is all about recycling.”

“**Teresa Lawrence Phillips, BA’80**, became the first woman in NCAA history to coach a men’s Division I basketball team last season.”

Alumni Association News

Strategic Planning to Enhance Alumni Relations

Over the past two years, the Alumni Relations Office has worked with the Alumni Association, faculty, students, administrators, staff and alumni to review Vanderbilt’s alumni relations program and explore ways to improve perceptions and engagement regarding the Alumni Relations Office. An ad hoc committee has recommended focusing on three key areas:

- Building on Vanderbilt’s sense of community by fostering class identity and increasing alumni participation;
- Enhancing Reunion to celebrate alumni involvement with VU; and
- Increasing alumni interaction with students.

The Alumni Relations Office looks forward to the challenges ahead. To learn more or to make suggestions, contact us at 615/322-2929 or at alumni@vanderbilt.edu.

Our Place in Manhattan

Vanderbilt University has become an affiliate school with the **Penn Club of New York**. Vanderbilt alumni and current parents worldwide are invited to join the Penn Club, which is located in midtown Manhattan on West 44th Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues. The club includes a library, formal dining rooms, a grill room, meeting and function rooms, a business center and sleeping accommodations. Members have access to one of the most comprehensive reciprocal club networks in the world. For information about the application process and membership fees, go to the Vanderbilt Alumni Association Web site (www.vanderbilt.edu/alumni) or contact Eileen Cunningham, director of alumni outreach programs in the Office of Alumni Relations at 615/322-2929.

Kentucky Alumni Make Their Mark

An exciting and unique event took place in Loretto, Ky., on May 31 as more than 75 alumni and guests from the **Lexington, Louisville** and **Western Kentucky** Vanderbilt Alumni Clubs spent their Saturday at the Maker’s Mark Distillery. Alumni gathered at the beautiful distillery, which is a National Historic Landmark and the smallest and oldest operating distillery in the nation. President **Bill Samuels, JD’67**, conducted a personal tour followed by Maker’s Mark cocktails, lunch, and alumni dipping their own Maker’s Mark bottle in the bourbon’s signature red wax.

“ **Andrea Zonn, BMus’93**, a musician with Vince Gill, made her debut on the Grand Ole Opry in May. She also has a release, “Love Goes On.” ”



Ron Ford,
MBA '92

NEIL BRAKE

Starting Early

Ron Ford remembers the first person he ever met who wore a necktie to work.

One Saturday when he was 10 or so, he accompanied his mother to work at Arvin Industries in Lenoir City, Tenn., and ventured into the office of her boss, plant controller Leon Viars.

“What can I do for you?” Viars asked.

“I want your job,” said Ford. “How do I get it?”

Viars advised the ambitious youngster to go to college, major in accounting, and become a C.P.A.

For most kids growing up “very, very poor” as Ford did, Viars’ advice might have seemed unattainable, but Ford has always had a life plan. From the age of 12, he has worked full time “doing anything I could to make an honest dollar.” After high school he worked at Oak Ridge National Laboratories by day and attended college by night, first at Roane State Community College, then the University of Tennessee. He earned his M.B.A. at Vanderbilt’s Owen Graduate School of Management, then a doctorate from Case Western Reserve.

“I absolutely loved it” is a phrase that frequently crops up when Ford talks about his career, whether it’s an early job in Oak Ridge or a recent stint as C.E.O. and president of Media Arts Group Inc., the nation’s largest producer and distributor of arts reproduction and related gift items.

This year Ford turns his boundless enthusiasm to service as president of the Vanderbilt University Alumni Association.

“ **Bennett Haselton, BS'99, MS'99**, founder of *Peacefire*, an unfiltered Web advocacy group, is working at the behest of the U.S. government to circumvent China's restrictive firewall. ”



Marissa Shrum,
BA'03

NEIL BRAKE

Pushing Past PC

“When I was growing up, I used to watch ‘The Cosby Show’ and wonder why kids on the program were automatically considered African-American even though they came from interracial backgrounds,” says Marissa Shrum. Growing up in Chattanooga, Tenn., with a black mother and a white father, she says, “my mom always stressed that I was both. I went to a private school where I was often the only person of color, and I could see how easy it was for kids to have preconceptions when all they knew was what they’d seen on television.”

As a Vanderbilt student, Shrum was active in a long list of campus and community organizations, serving for three years as a senator in the Student Government Association and two years as speaker of the senate. She graduated with a double major in English and sociology and was selected as the Young Alumni Trustee. This fall she will take the LSAT exam and is working in Nashville for the National Conference for Community and Justice.

“One of our programs is Camp Anytown for high schoolers,” she says. “We teach that diversity is not easy. A lot of people believe they have to be PC, so creating a forum where they can say what they think and learn from others helps prepare them to make a difference in their communities.”

