

# McGill News

ALUMNI MAGAZINE



Who are  
the Greatest  
McGillians?

When nurture  
nudges nature

Ambition:  
Politicien

## Daring to be Different

How Matt Haimovitz  
led his students to their  
night at the Grammys

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03	Editor's Notebook
04	Letters
06	The Principal's Perspective
07	Newsbites
11	Insights
29	Alumni Profile
34	Reviews
36	Making History
38	Alumni Activities
40	Alumni Profile
41	Alumnnotes
52	In Memoriam
56	Online Offerings



## 07 Surfing the Orange Wave

Something unexpected happened to several young NDP-McGill activists in the last federal vote — they got elected. These rookie MPs realize they've got a steep learning curve to contend with, but they're determined to make their mark in Parliament.

BY DANIEL MCCABE, BA'89



## 16 Are Your Genes Your Destiny?

For centuries, philosophers and scientists have quarrelled about the respective roles played by nature and nurture in forging human identity. By pioneering a new field called epigenetics, McGill researchers have provided a fresh twist, while proving that a mother's love is a powerful thing indeed.

BY HANNAH HOAG, MSc'99



## 20 Who are the Greatest McGillians?

Laurier or Leacock? William Osler or William Shatner? The McGill Alumni Association recently challenged grads to name the McGill individual who has had the greatest impact. There was no shortage of candidates as more than 700 nominations were received. Here are a few of the nominees.



## 24 The Adventurous Virtuoso

He is one of the most respected cellists in the world, renowned for his mastery of Bach. But that doesn't mean that Matt Haimovitz and his students don't like to tackle a little Led Zeppelin now and then. Their unorthodox approach leads to some interesting situations — like a night at the Grammys.

BY PATRICK McDONAGH



## 30 De la rue Sherbrooke à la Grande-Allée

Du premier député de Québec solidaire à un ancien ministre péquiste, McGill est l'alma mater de nombre de politiciens québécois. Découvrez comment les leçons de vie apprises à l'université ont contribué à façonner les futurs élus.

PAR JEAN-BENOÎT NADEAU (B.A. 1992)



## 34 Making the Case against Media Empires

In his recent book about the history of game-changing communications technologies, Columbia University law professor Tim Wu, BSc'95, argues that it's never a good idea to give a handful of companies too much control over what we might read or watch.

BY DANIEL MCCABE, BA'89



## 40 No Ugly Cars on His Watch

BMWs are known the world over for their elegant design. It will be up to Karim Habib, BEng'93, to make sure it stays that way. As BMW's new head of exterior design, Habib will be playing a major role in determining the shape of things to come for the automobile manufacturer.

BY MARK REYNOLDS

# Enough talk.

## Announcing the Bloomberg Manulife Prize for the Promotion of Active Health.

The Bloomberg Manulife Prize for the Promotion of Active Health will be offered each year by McGill University to an academic whose research in the area of physical activity, health and well-being makes key contributions to active health for Canadians. For more information on the prize visit: [Bloomberg-ManulifePrize.ca](http://Bloomberg-ManulifePrize.ca)

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## EDITOR

Daniel McCabe, BA'89

## SENIOR WRITER

Allyson Rowley, BA'77

## SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Diana Grier Ayton

## CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Julie Fortier

## DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS, DEVELOPMENT & ALUMNI RELATIONS

Derek Cassoff

## PROOFREADING

Jane Jackel  
Karine Majeau

## ADVERTISING

Christina Barile  
Tel.: 514-398-6043

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Christina Barile  
Joel Hartung

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## DESIGN AND TYPOGRAPHY

Steven McClenaghan  
Graphic Design, Public Affairs

## ONLINE EDITION

Content and Collaboration Solutions

## MCGILL NEWS

1555 Peel Street, Suite 900  
Montreal, QC, Canada H3A 3L8  
Tel.: 514-398-6043  
Fax: 514-398-5293  
Email: news.alumni@mcgill.ca  
Web: publications.mcgill.ca/mcgillnews

McGill News is published  
by McGill University  
Circulation: 198,000 copies.

Printed in Canada ISSN 0709 9223

Canadian Publications Mail Product  
Sales Agreement No. 40613661.

Cover photo of Matt Haimovitz  
by Steph MacKinnon



# The people in my neighbourhood



I can be a little on the cynical side, notwithstanding the fact that my eyes tend to mist up every time I watch the ending to *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*. (Stop smirking. Those hobbits went through an awful lot, y'know.) Or that I occasionally resort to *Sesame Street*-inspired headlines.

So you might think that after working at a single institution for more than 20 years, in a field where one is often privy to the latest colourful rumours of misbehaviour (some of them even true), I would be a little sour about the place. But I'm not.

In any community, you're bound to come across a few bad apples, and with more than 36,500 students sharing two campuses with about 5,000 faculty members and staff, McGill is no exception. But a few bad apples can't do much to ruin the harvest of a particularly fruitful orchard.

Universities are special places. Students come here to become better, smarter people. Professors become professors because they want to explore new ways of viewing the world and they want to share those insights with others. That all strikes me as a pretty noble way to want to spend your time. Interacting with people like that on a daily basis for two decades can wear down a cynic.

I've recently been reminded of all this because I've been poring through some of the hundreds of nominations that were sent in for the McGill Alumni Association's "Greatest McGillians" contest (you can read some of the nominations for yourself on page 20).

While a lot of people understandably nominated the familiar storied heavyweights of McGill's history — the Rutherfords, Oslers and Penfields — there were plenty who interpreted the term "Greatest McGillian" in a far more personal manner.

There were dozens of tributes from former students about teachers who had changed their lives. The words "dedicated" and "inspiring" crop up repeatedly.

Jennifer Morehouse, BA'95, for instance, praised James McGill Professor

of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychology Michael Petrides who skillfully "introduced me to a world that I had never understood." History professor Gil Troy "was able to bring American history to life, and showed me how to think differently about seemingly settled notions of historical people and events," reported Phelps Turner, BA'03, BCL/LLB'07.

Political science professor Rex Brynen "makes learning fun, and extremely interactive." His departmental colleague Elizabeth Gidengil, PhD'86, helped one student "realize that I was capable of more." Macdonald Professor of Chemistry David Harpp is "someone we should keep making more of!" Economics lecturer Kenneth MacKenzie was applauded for his remarkable memory, his comforting manner and his bagpiping skills.

It goes on and on. Professors aren't the only ones who earned kudos. Student adviser Paul Oliooff, for instance, was singled out by one student "as the man without whom I'd have spent the majority of my years at McGill huddled up in a corner rocking back and forth."

The Greatest McGillians contest has now moved on to its next stage with 20 finalists to choose from (see page 51). My vote would be a toss-up between two Sir Williams — Osler (arguably the most important figure in the modern history of medicine) and Dawson. Many would argue that McGill wouldn't exist at all if not for James McGill's far-sightedness, and it's hard to quibble with that. But I don't think McGill would be the university it is today — internationally respected and relentlessly ambitious — had Dawson not set the tone for the place at a pivotal point in its history.

Before I sign off, a quick bit of house-cleaning. Due to an editorial error (which would be, um, me), we mislabeled one of the photos that accompanied our story about the McGill Debating Union last issue. The photo re-appears in this issue's letters section on page four. That's Kate Winbaum, not Nicole Gileadi, with fellow MDU members Sean Stefanik and Calvin Rosemond.

Have a wonderful summer.

DANIEL MCCABE