

PEDDIE

CHRONICLE

Fall 2009

Seeds of Success

As the first beneficiaries of the Annenberg gift make their marks, they all agree: *Peddie paved the way.*

Their stories,
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Finn M.W. Caspersen '59,
Peddie's board chair, dies.
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The Annenberg Effect

When Ambassador Annenberg bestowed his historic gift on Peddie, the transformative power of his generosity was immediately clear to the school. He provided an endowed fund expressly designated for financial aid, allowing the brightest minds from any walk of life to receive a Peddie education. The gift brought instant notoriety to the school, and students who previously had never considered Peddie were given an opportunity at a world-class education.

And now, 15 years later, the value and virtues of the Peddie experience are coming into focus for some of the earliest beneficiaries of the Annenberg gift. They are teachers and doctors, social workers and parents, businesspeople and students, touching lives, building futures and, in the late ambassador's words, striving for the highest quality of citizenship.

And they're grateful for the lessons they learned from our dedicated teachers in our classrooms, on our playing fields and in our art studios.

Here, *in their own words*, are 10 of their stories.

chronicleXtra

To read more stories from alumni, go to www.peddie.org/chronicle

Today, more than 40 percent of Peddie's student body receives assistance from a financial aid budget that tops \$5 million — or \$4 million more than the year preceding the Annenberg gift.



**Nikki Semenetz
Dunigan '99**
Private equity
product specialist
A.B., Princeton
University

The virtues of barking for cupcakes

I have yet to meet anyone who has barked like a seal to obtain a Little Debbie Swiss Cake Roll and I doubt I ever will. However, on countless occasions during my junior and senior years at Peddie, I found myself sitting at an old desk in Annenberg Hall, reciting lines from a textbook during Doc Martin's Latin class, arms waving and barking with the hope that Doc would throw a cream-filled chocolate cake my way.

Latin may not be the most fascinating subject to study, but Doc epitomized the type of faculty member that makes Peddie so unique. Doc understood how to connect with his students, and his approach to teaching fostered an enjoyment of learning. I found that Doc was not the only faculty member who was able to impart their passion for the subject matter they taught or the sport they coached. Whether it was on the athletic field or in the classroom, the faculty's ability to interact with students left an indelible impression on me and prepared me to succeed following graduation.

Peddie helped me discover the importance of building dynamic relationships. The faculty were not only teachers and coaches, but also friends and mentors. And they weren't simply reciting passages or formulas from a textbook. They were thoughtful and inventive in their approach to communicating their message in attention-grabbing ways. Attempting to follow their example has benefited me not only through college, but also in my career in sales and marketing. I may not be able to toss Swiss Cake Rolls to investors, but I am able to effectively connect with people by delivering messages in a creative way.

Such experiences would not have been possible without Ambassador Annenberg's gift. It attracted some of the region's finest faculty to Peddie, nurturing a collegial atmosphere between teachers, coaches and students that has benefited countless alumni long after graduation day.



**Jared Daugherty
'99**
Nonprofit
Program Officer
B.A., Dartmouth
College

A rich palette for the future

The diversity of the Peddie community guaranteed that I had no shortage of "teachers." I learned so much from faculty and students from so many different backgrounds. But perhaps the most influential aspect of my Peddie experience was my involvement in the fine arts.

Since Peddie, I have rarely seen the respect that the faculty in Swig Arts Center showed toward all kinds of art: classical, avant-garde and popular styles from anywhere in the world. I would still credit this respect, and the ability to find "worthwhile" art everywhere, for giving me the ability to think critically about the world around me. I still remember how frustrated I was when my Foundations Art class taught by Mr. Trelease forced me to make sense of Claes Oldenburg's giant clothespin, and how, by the time I finished AP Art History my senior year (taught by Mr. Trelease and Ms. Watkins), I was finally able to make sense of and appreciate the same work. Courses like AP Music Theory (taught by Ms. Acker) enabled me to analyze Beethoven and the Beatles alike and think about what was uniquely good and skillful about both. Moreover, faculty didn't confine art to one venue but encouraged theory and practice, excellence in analysis and performance. I remember the difficult process of perfecting a musical, choral piece, and art critique. (I'll never forget Harry and Mr. Rund's unending patience with the "Music Man's" barbershop quartet.) The number of avenues for creative expression and the quality of the faculty were unbelievable.

I now work as a program officer at a Christian organization that promotes "sustainable environments for religious freedom worldwide" — for people of all faiths and without faith — through engagement, analysis and education. My time spent in the Swig Arts center gave me invaluable tools for creative problem-solving, analysis and expression, tools I frequently use in my current work. It also engendered a lot of patience and hope in practice not necessarily making "perfect" but making something that is enduring and beautiful, and in the potential for people from different backgrounds to come together and cooperate across the deepest of differences. This experience would have been impossible without Walter Annenberg's gift, and for that, I'm deeply grateful.



Michal Petrzela
PG '94
**Investment
banker**
B.S., Syracuse;
M.B.A., Stanford

A single year transforms a life

I woke up at 5:15 in the morning in Austen Colgate and walked to the swimming pool for the first of two grueling daily swim practices. Joining a team full of aspiring Olympians, I found the two-hour workout tough, both physically and mentally, even in comparison to the rigorous athletic training I had experienced growing up behind the Iron Curtain in communist Czechoslovakia. After a breakfast with my ravenous teammates in the Peddie cafeteria, I was off to English with Ms. Gleeson, a nearly impossible class for someone who had arrived in America only two months earlier. Ms. Gleeson handed me the results of our first quiz, on William Shakespeare's Hamlet. Twenty-seven percent. I felt as though I was living my own Shakespearean tragedy, but Ms. Gleeson's note, "Michal, don't give up!" gave me a glimmer of hope.

Hailing from the town of Olomouc in the Czech Republic, I knew that attending Peddie as one of the beneficiaries of the Annenberg gift was an invaluable opportunity for me.

The 27 percent score and the demanding swimming workouts were only some of the challenges I faced, but with the support of my Peddie teachers and teammates, I managed to learn English, competed successfully at Eastern Independent Schools Championships and earned a full athletic scholarship to Syracuse University.

Since that difficult but defining year at Peddie, my first in the United States, I have gone on to graduate cum laude from Syracuse University, to pursue a career as an investment banker in New York and London, and to earn an M.B.A. from the Stanford Graduate School of Business. Today I am a vice president at Lightyear Capital, a private equity firm based in New York City. As a happily married father-to-be, I am tremendously appreciative of the doors the Annenberg gift opened for me and my family. Fifteen years later, I know that my single year at Peddie has shaped my whole life.



Catie Perez
'99
Attorney
**B.A., University
of Pennsylvania;**
**J.D., Georgetown
University**

An extended family and moral compass

I went to college with Kate Murray '99, another beneficiary of the Annenberg endowment. In our college dorm room we had a picture of Ambassador Annenberg hanging on our wall. Every single day was a reminder that attending the University of Pennsylvania would likely not have been possible had it not been for the tremendous generosity of the ambassador 15 years ago.

I can find a way to trace most of my academic and professional successes to the head start I received from Peddie. The work ethic and drive instilled in me there gave me the foundation I needed to successfully complete college and graduate law school. But of course, there are times when life presents you with challenges that even the best education cannot prepare you for. In these moments it is not the exam grades and college acceptance letters you remember. Rather, it is your friends and family that you value most.

This is what is truly astounding about the Peddie experience. Classmates, former roommates and teammates — these are many of the people I still talk to on a weekly basis. It is not just friends either; it is friends' parents, former teachers, advisors and dorm supervisors. These are the people with whom I shared the most formative years of my life. Some helped me grow up, others grew up with me, and through it all we forged a bond that I do not think can ever be broken.

Sometimes I wonder if Ambassador Annenberg knew this about his gift to Peddie. Of course, he contemplated providing a superior educational opportunity to families that would never otherwise be able to afford such a thing. But did he know that the people I met at Peddie would be the same people who helped me survive the biggest challenges I would face in my adult life, the same people who would celebrate my successes alongside me and support me when I was failing? The Peddie community gave me an education not only in school but also in life, an extended family and a moral compass, all of which will guide and steer me throughout my life no matter what lies ahead. For this I am forever indebted to Peddie and Ambassador Annenberg.



Amir T. Ingram
'98

U.S. EPA
attorney

B.A., Boston
College; J.D.,
Howard
University

Dominoes fall and prospects rise

Like countless others throughout the better part of two decades, my life was forever changed by the generosity of Ambassador Annenberg. Unbeknown to me when I first got off Exit 8A with my mother to attend my interview with Mr. Quinn and Mrs. Potter, the ambassador's historic act of philanthropy would completely alter the course of my life by setting in motion a domino effect.

As a direct result of my life experiences at Peddie and the first-class education it provided, I was able to gain admission to nearly all of my top undergraduate choices. Five years of an exceptional curriculum, T's annual Falcon call to get us fired up for Blair Day, family-style dinner where I constantly got placed with the DeGrays, Saturday classes, and everything in between fully prepared me for the academic rigors of undergrad and double majoring in political science and economics, while allowing me to thrive 250 miles away from home in a new city, surrounded by 12,000 new faces on campus and unbearable Red Sox fans.

My five years at Peddie also afforded me the strength, endurance and diligence to work full time while also attending law school full time for three tough years, and still finding time for family, friends, my fiancée, God and establishing a happy, rewarding life and career in Washington, D.C., along the way.

All of these achievements are a direct result of attending Peddie. Coming from a middle-class working family, attending a high school where tuition, room and board, and expenses together cost more than the family car, was not a fathomable option, and simply was not in the cards for me. However, the rules of the game completely changed on that historic day in 1993, and subsequently, the course of so many lives have been changed, all thanks to one man and his alma mater.



Megan Colpitts
Miranda
'99

Former teacher /
mother of two

B.S., Mass.
Institute of
Technology

Passionate about teaching and life

My parents never planned on sending me to private school, but Ambassador Annenberg changed their thinking. His gift granted me the opportunity to enroll at Peddie, receive the highest quality education, and eventually gain admittance to MIT.

It was not surprising to anyone who knew me outside of Peddie that I eventually became a scientist. It was surprising, however, that I eventually became a high school science teacher as well. But then, they didn't have the privilege of learning from the teachers at Peddie. And that's a shame.

During my five years at Peddie, the teachers did more than just teach. They published works of fiction, nonfiction and academic textbooks. They ran mini-labs, consulted in technology, coached teams and led us in community service. They didn't just say they were passionate about the subjects they taught; they lived their passions. It rubbed off. I entered Peddie with a strong, yet undefined, interest in math and science. [I left Peddie with a passion for biology, literature, Latin and writing, just to name a few.](#)

Each fall, I conduct admissions interviews at the local high schools for MIT. They are great kids, smart kids, driven kids. But I often find myself thinking, "If only they had been given the opportunity to attend Peddie. Imagine what they could have become." Peddie forced me outside my comfort zone and exposed me to many facets of academia and extracurricular activities that I'd never considered. I also learned that there are many ways to give back to the community. Which is why, after graduating from MIT and working in biotech for several years, I became a teacher at a local public high school. I wish I could say that I was as great a teacher as Mr. Oram or Doc Martin, but those are some pretty big shoes to fill. I can say, however, that I was passionate. And I hope it rubbed off.

At Peddie, I learned that it is acceptable, perhaps even essential, to have more than one passion in life. I was a scientist. I was a teacher. I am currently indulging a new passion — raising my children. I'm not sure what I'll do next when my kids go off to school, but my Peddie experience ensured that the future possibilities are endless.



**Chavon Sutton
'99**

**Business
journalist**
**B.A., University
of Pennsylvania**

A shot of courage, then confidence

I was among thousands of kids who grew up in poor single-family homes in Newark painfully aware of my chaotic surroundings and my place in them; I was eight years old when I began to feel like an outsider.

I burned with an intellectual curiosity that led me to play three instruments by the age of 11, sing in city-wide choruses and to charge to the top of my middle-school class. But, encouragement was only found in my home. Instead of being admired or even just ignored, my peers often penalized me for not “keeping it real” or for “acting white.” Soon, it felt as if Newark itself was preemptively moving to thwart my success.

Fate had different plans. At the age of 13, I earned one of the first scholarships funded by Walter H. Annenberg’s historic \$100 million gift to Peddie and left the only home I had ever known to live among strangers.

Annenberg’s gift afforded me many “firsts.” For the first time, I was intellectually challenged and taught how to analyze problems rather than to simply complete tasks.

I now lived among people from all walks of life. I was introduced to and excelled in team sports. I owned my first laptop and boarded planes for the first time, via the Principio Project, for international study. I became the first in my family to attend an Ivy League college.

Most importantly, my myriad Peddie experiences gave me a confidence and perspective that I would not have gained if I had not taken a leap of faith. It took courage beyond my years to leave home, but it required even more to fully capitalize on Mr. Annenberg’s generosity. One of my most vivid memories is that of Pat Clements and Peter Kraft telling me I’d be a kick-ass woman of the 21st century. Today, as a former investment banker, graduate student, journalist, singer, mentor, and volunteer, I am eternally grateful to them and to Peddie for starting me well on my way.



**Shun-ning Wong
'97**

**Research
associate**
**B.A., Princeton
University;
M.B.A., NYU**

A risk that keeps paying dividends

If you had asked me to risk a comfortable life in public high school to plunge into a new existence in a boarding school hours away from home, I would have immediately said, “Never!” Yet, that was what happened in the summer of 1994 after the Annenberg gift actually made this a possibility, and I will be forever grateful for the opportunity to take what would be the first of many life-changing risks.

Former Headmaster Tom DeGray described Peddie as a school that measured success by “how far kids come, not by where they end up,” and as such, it was a world unlike any other for both students and teachers to demonstrate creativity, passion and guts. In a span of three short years, I (plus 29 other brave souls) had the opportunity to redefine the traditional curriculum through the Principio Project, study abroad in Spain, start a student campaign supporting war-torn Bosnian children, give a Chapel speech, conduct project research in the Nevada desert (i.e., today’s “Signature Experience”), and test the limits of a 5-foot, 7-inch, 130-pound body on a football field while singing and dancing on stage in the off season. Peddie, above all, was a place that allowed me to embrace life in its full potential and carve my own path.

That spirit of enterprise developed at Peddie defined the young man I was, as it defines who I am now. It enabled me to pursue a major in philosophy without having to worry about career prospects. It prepared me for a newly created seat on the trading floor of Goldman Sachs with minimum supervision. It provided me motivation to try out a lingering musical passion, leading to an amateur career as a club deejay. It gave me courage to leave a comfortable position on Wall Street to join a technology start-up. And, most recently, it has sustained me through my M.B.A. studies and restarted a career in a financial sector decimated by job and capital losses.

I have received much more from Peddie than I have been able to describe here. The lifelong friendships built at Peddie remain my source of strength and inspiration today.



Cezary Pietrzak
'00

Entrepreneur
B.S., University
of Pennsylvania

A door opens — to a world of opportunities

Waking up at 5 a.m. for crew practice was never easy, but it was worth it. While Peddie slept, I was in a racing shell with my brother and three teammates, pulling my port oar so hard it hurt. As the sleek boat cut through the still waters of Mercer Lake, I had only a faint idea of how incredibly my life had changed.

I was a sophomore when my older brother Maurycy and I transferred to Peddie in the fall of 1997. My family lived in a small town in Maine, having emigrated from Poland nine years earlier. As we gritted our teeth and worked hard to excel, I never imagined attending one of the finest prep schools in the country. When, out of the blue, the opportunity to attend Peddie presented itself, it was Ambassador Annenberg's gift that made it possible.

I had never even heard of crew before my first campus visit, but a few weeks after moving to campus I was in the water practicing my stroke. And so began three of the most challenging and marvelous years of my life.

Thanks to Peddie, I vaulted into the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School in Philadelphia, where I earned my business degree in marketing and management. I then joined an advertising agency in New York before striking out on my own. In the past year, I co-founded a digital marketing consultancy and an online travel startup with several friends, and I'm constantly plotting new ventures with my brother. **As I reflect on my new life as an entrepreneur, my thoughts turn to Peddie. I'm still amazed by the boost that it gave me and the doors that it opened.**

I recently returned to Hightstown with Maurycy for his 10th reunion. It was bright and hot outside, and the campus was green and beautiful. I recalled how hard we had both worked at Peddie and how much we loved it there. As my own 10th reunion approaches, I look to the future, mindful of the past. The world awaits.



Dr. Katie Whalen
'97

Anesthesiologist
B.A., Holy Cross;
M.D., UMDNJ
Medical School

Knowledge, compassion and will

"Wow! Thanks, Walt!" I remember seeing the sign hanging from the Peddie gate after Ambassador Annenberg's donation to the school. It is a gift that has benefited so many, including myself, as I received financial aid to attend Peddie. **There are dozens of people and experiences at Peddie that help me excel in my career as a physician.**

I was always interested in math and science, and this interest blossomed when I took Honors Biology. Mr. Oram was an outstanding teacher, and I was thrilled when he asked me to participate in a DNA lab. We performed electrophoresis, Western Blots, as well as other techniques that piqued my interest in medicine.

Peddie is truly a community, with chapel gatherings, community meetings and family-style dinners. But I don't know if anyone could have made it through Peddie's rigorous schedule without their advisor. Week in, week out, my advisor, Mrs. Tennyson, was always there to listen, help me figure out my schedule, champion my causes and, most importantly, indulge my sweet tooth. Mrs. Tennyson was more than just a guidance counselor; she was a surrogate parent and friend.

Whichever hat they're wearing, Peddie's talented faculty members are enthusiastic and devoted to students. I made the basketball team as a freshman in what was Mr. Casey's first year as coach. No matter how many shooting or ball-handling drills we did, he always wanted us to push ourselves to the limit. All the hard work paid off, as we went from a sub-.500 team our first year to winning the state championship our senior year — a title the team has yet to relinquish!

Today, I am an anesthesiologist. I take care of patients as they are undergoing surgery, often a scary time for them and their families. Without the inspiration to constantly pursue scientific knowledge I gained from Mr. Oram, the compassion I learned from Mrs. Tennyson, and the will to succeed I learned from Mr. Casey, I would not be as good a physician as I am today. I am grateful to Peddie. I, too, am delighted to say, "Wow! Thanks, Walt!"