



COMING ATTRACTIONS



This is the story of six Bearcats, six dreams and one incredible city. Their stories are classic Hollywood tales of growing up in the Midwest, heading West to “make it big,” paying their dues along life’s bumpy road and living their dreams in the city known as Tinseltown. While their journeys are not complete, these free spirits have rubbed elbows with some of the biggest names in the entertainment industry. Whether they’re in front of a camera, at a desk, behind the scenes, on the stage or at the microphone, these Northwest alumni are positioning themselves to fulfill their dreams. Sit back and take a look at these coming attractions who are hooked on Hollywood – Thom Polizzi, Kevin Spiehs, Sara Hemminger, Kurt Schmaljohn, Monica Nauss and Mike Madrigal.

STORY BY MITZI LUTZ ★ PHOTOS BY DARREN WHITLEY ★ ILLUSTRATION BY BRAD ELLIOTT

THOM POLIZZI 1973

It’s amazing how far a Swiss Army knife and a little ingenuity will get you – at least it always seemed to work on “MacGyver,” the TV series that ran for seven years on ABC. For four of those years, Thom Polizzi made those amazing gizmos appear as reality as a co-producer for the hit show.

“It was great because there were so many interesting action gags all within one show,” Polizzi said. “What other show would you have such great inserts – underwater shots, a western, throwing someone in a burning cauldron of a volcano and pulling them back out as a skeleton, missiles, dragons, rockets!”

Polizzi broke into the entertainment industry soon after he graduated from Northwest when he attended graduate school at the California Institute of the Arts.

“I started out doing low-budget regional commercials for products they sell on daytime TV like a foam glider, the ‘better butter baster’ or an orange peeler,” he said. “A lot of times I would shoot it, edit it, do the opticals and titles, and mix the music – all using the school’s equipment. They were certainly cheap.”

While in graduate school, he also worked on a Dick Van Dyke variety series with entertainers such as Tim Conway and Carl Reiner and was hired on a low-budget western feature film as a production manager.

JUST THE FACTS

Art major
Hometown: Kansas City
Current position: TV producer



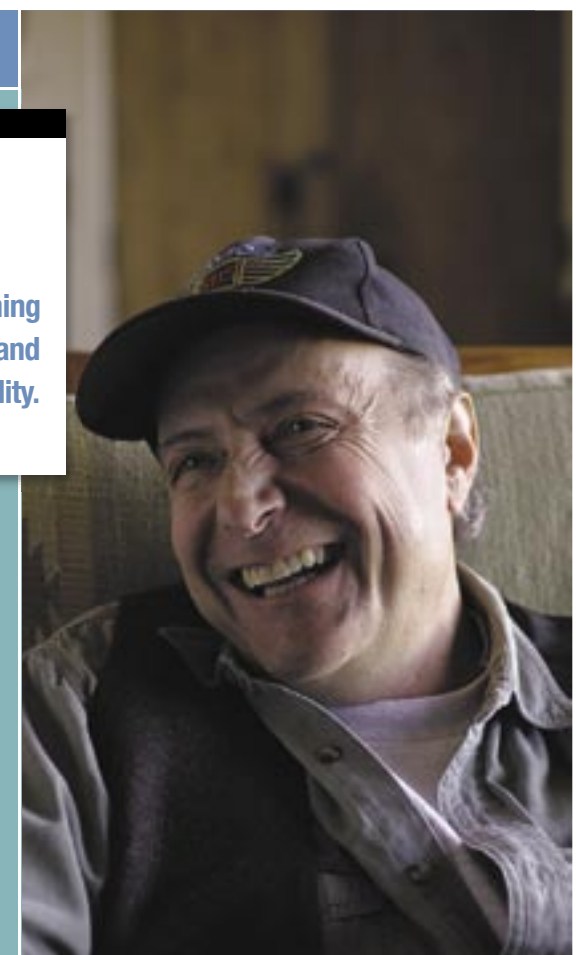
“This career is a lot like trench warfare. You’re battling everything – fighting with time and money and dealing with a lot of unpredictability. I guess it’s a lot like life.”

“I did a lot of scratching around, getting a job as an assistant camera man, a sound person, anything,” Polizzi said.

Through the years, Polizzi has been a part of the production team for many TV movies such as Showtime’s “Damaged Care” starring Laura Dern and TV shows including “The Untouchables” and “The Watcher” for which he was a producer.

Polizzi, who enjoys flying his 1948 L17B U.S. Army Korean War liaison plane in formation at air shows and memorial services, is now looking to get attached to a TV pilot this spring.

“You never know when you may get a call from out of the clear blue sky,” he said. “And when I do, I’ll jump right back on the merry-go-round.” ■



KEVIN SPIEHS 1997

As Kevin Spiehs’ time at Northwest came to a close, he knew he wanted a career in sales, and by the time he had his college diploma, he knew he wanted to live on the West Coast.

Two weeks after Spiehs crossed the commencement stage, he headed West to San Diego and accepted a job managing an Enterprise Rent-A-Car facility. Armed with valuable managerial experience, he soon set his sights on the entertainment capital of the world.

“I decided to move to L.A. from San Diego in 2002 because there are so many more opportunities and events in this city,” Spiehs said. “San Diego is a great place, but it’s more of a laid-back, surfer atmosphere. L.A. is all about the entertainment business, and there’s always something going on. I love L.A.’s fast-paced lifestyle, the concerts, clubs, working in this industry and being on top of the trends.”

When Spiehs moved to L.A., he circulated his resume. His previous managerial experience with Enterprise caught the eye of the MTV Networks executives who gave Spiehs a position as a sales assistant with Nickelodeon, one of entertainment conglomerate’s

JUST THE FACTS

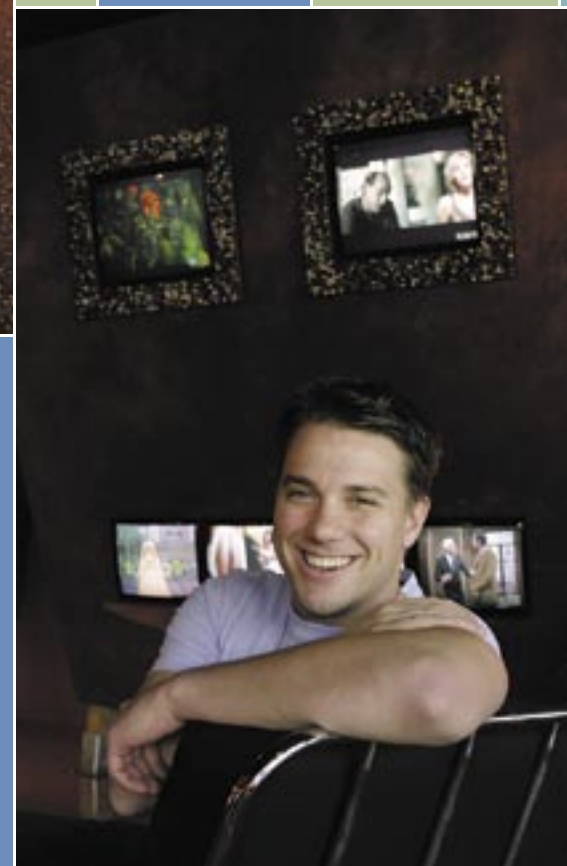
Marketing major, business minor
Hometown: Grand Island, Neb.
Current position: VH1/CMT sales coordinator



“Working as a Student Ambassador at Northwest and being involved in Student Senate and TKE were great experiences, and being an RA, dealing with random problems and coming up with solutions, were things I draw upon in my current position.”

10 networks. Nine months later he received a promotion to his current position as a sales coordinator with the MTV Networks, in particular VH1 and CMT, where he oversees a team of 10 salespeople.

“Sure, I do my fair amount of schmoozing at events like the MTV Movie Awards and the VH1 Big Awards, but I typically work from 9 to 6 – something that’s not all that common for people my age in this town,” Spiehs said. “I’m one of the fortunate ones who found a good opportunity in this industry, truly enjoy what I do and have been able to make some good money on top of it.” ■



SARA HEMMINGER 1994



If Sara Hemminger decides to change careers, the education system will never be the same again – and a lot more laughter will be heard in classrooms. A stand-up comic who performs throughout the country, Hemminger said she wouldn't mind being a teacher ... or a race car driver.

Hemminger was a stand-out on the basketball court while she was at Northwest and moved to Los Angeles three months after graduation to be a costume designer in the entertainment industry.

"Honestly, I dusted a lot of dandruff off a lot of actors' shoulders," she said. "So you could really call me a dandruff duster."

In 1998 she hung up her duster and followed the sound of laughter.

"I'd been writing jokes for a couple years and thought I'd step up on the stand-up stage," she said. "I went to an open mic at the Comedy Store where you sign up and get three minutes on stage. It wasn't very glamorous, but I discovered I loved the laughter."

Hemminger, who has been trained with Second City and The Groundlings, does a lot of sketch, stand-up and improvisational comedy and has her own improv troupe, Comical Tendencies. A bartender on the side, she's currently writing a sitcom and will soon be performing at the Aspen Comedy Festival and Boston Comedy Festival.

While in college, Hemminger dreamed of designing clothes and owning a dress shop in New York. While her life has taken a different path, she enjoys designing her own jewelry and hopes to soon become bicoastal when she finds an apartment in Manhattan.

"I haven't had my 'big break' yet, but everything is falling into place as it should," she said. "I just keep smiling and having fun. L.A. is a great place, but I miss thunderstorms and lightning like you get in the Midwest – and the cheap beer!" ■

JUST THE FACTS

Fashion merchandising major
Hometown: Harlan, Iowa
Current position: stand-up comic/
bartender

"When my mom was pregnant with me, her water broke at home and she was rushed to the hospital in the family car. My dad put newspapers in the car for her to sit on, and it happened to be the comics section. The ink imprinted on the back of my mom's legs, so I was actually born through the comics section."



KURT SCHMALJOHN 1992

Kurt Schmaljohn has played basketball with NBA great Michael Jordan, flown in a World War II airplane, played football in the Los Angeles Coliseum before a screaming crowd and has had too many wives to count.

"I get to do something different every day," Schmaljohn said about his acting career. "I certainly don't get bored. I enjoy acting because I get to do so many neat things that only a handful of people get to do. Even if I'm acting, I'm still in that environment, doing those things."

Although he admits to having "no real theater background," he likes the "rush of being in front of people" and has been bitten by the acting bug.

When he moved to Los Angeles in 1998, an internship with the Los Angeles Lakers fell through because of the NBA lockout. With an interest in athletics, Schmaljohn found a job at Gold's Gym at Venice Beach, the famed gym that's regularly visited by celebrities such as Magic Johnson, Keanu Reeves, Dwayne Johnson ("The Rock"), Ray Liotta and James Caan.

Schmaljohn entered the entertainment industry by doing extra work for TV and movies and appearing in magazine ads and TV commercials. He's worked alongside John Travolta in "The General's Daughter" and Mike Myers in "Austin Powers 2 – The Spy Who Shagged Me," and was a continual honeymooner in "The Love Boat – The Next Wave."

Originally hired to be the stand-in for Ben Affleck in "Pearl Harbor," the director had him read for a part and gave him the job.

"I worked on the film for five months and had several lines in the movie," Schmaljohn said. "I thought that was going to be my big break. 'Pearl Harbor' was a long movie, and it had to be edited down quite a bit. In that process they cut my lines. I didn't even know about it until I saw the movie in the theater. However, that's not uncommon in this business. I can't let it get to me, though. I'm not going to give up – yet." ■



JUST THE FACTS

Recreation major
Hometown: Maryville
Current position: actor/model/doorman/fitness trainer

"Everyone has a headshot – not just the pretty people. You've got trash men and security guards that are handing out headshots. I even deny that I'm an actor when I talk to women, because it's less appealing because actors are a dime a dozen."

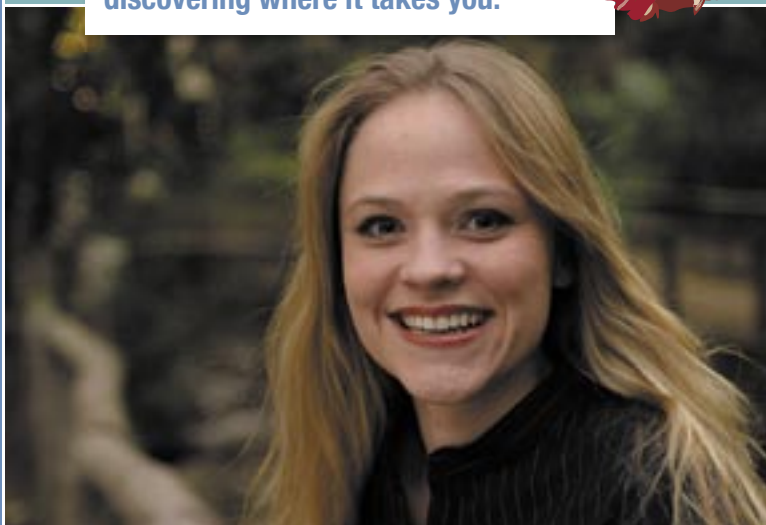
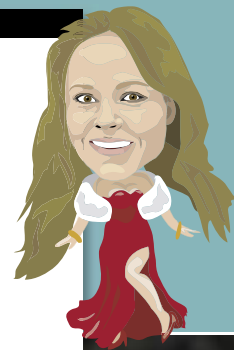


MONICA NAUSS 1996

JUST THE FACTS

English education major/business minor
Hometown: Kansas City
Current position: actress/waitress

"The best thing about moving to L.A. is the freedom I have and knowing I'm choosing my life. It's all about the journey and discovering where it takes you."



From the age of 5, Monica Nauss knew she wanted to be an actress. By the time she was in high school, she was involved in theater productions and knew someday she would move to Hollywood. But when she came to Northwest, she was inundated with thoughts of practicality and responsibility.

"In college I was involved in so many things – Phi Mu, Student Senate, I was even the Student Regent," Nauss said. "And I thought I'd better do something practical when I graduated, so I was an English education major."

However, two weeks after graduation, all practicality was placed on the back burner, and her pursuit of a dream surfaced. She and several college friends moved to Las Vegas; a year later she and another friend packed their bags for Los Angeles.

"We lived out of our car, in motels and with friends for several weeks until we found a place," she said. "I knew L.A. was where I wanted to be, but you've still got to have a lot of stamina to stay here!"

For the past six years, Nauss has been a waitress and special event caterer at Paramount Studios – a position that puts her in contact with many producers, executives and celebrities. She is also appearing in the four-person stage production of "Sunday on the Rocks." In addition, Nauss attends acting class, works on a showcase called "Reality Bites" and serves on the executive board of New Works Company, a nonprofit organization associated with the National Repertory Theater Foundation.

"Los Angeles is a lot like live theater – it's unpredictable, and that's why I love it," said Nauss, who has appeared in more than 15 plays since coming to L.A. "Last week during a monologue, I tripped and landed in the front row. What's that Shakespeare quote – 'all the world's a stage'? Sometimes you fall off the stage, but you get back up, laugh at yourself and keep on going." ■

MIKE MADRIGAL 1991



Some of the best advice Mike Madrigal got from his acting coach was "don't audition" – somewhat strange advice for someone who's trying to become an actor.

"He reminded me that a first bad impression lasts far longer than a first good impression," Madrigal said about his coach of six years who's trained actors such as Tobey Maguire, Steve Martin and Christopher Walken. "I didn't audition for a TV role for two years. It's a good thing because those big casting directors have laser vision, and you'd be a wreck if you weren't prepared."

Since that time, Madrigal has appeared in hits including "The Practice," "Providence," "America's Most Wanted," "ER," "Unsolved Mysteries" and "Dragnet." He's also appeared in several independent films – one that took him to the Sundance Film Festival.

Madrigal, who has recently auditioned for "CSI: Miami," has also appeared in Papa Roach's "Broken Home" video and in a Jewel video.

Long before Madrigal's entrance into the acting world, he made a name for himself in the radio business for his station imaging and voiceover skills. Following stints in Kansas City, Dallas and San Diego, he broke into the Los Angeles market producing the Rick Dees Weekly Top 40. He's currently the imaging director for Power 106 and KZLA, the top hip hop and country stations in the U.S. His "alternative, Generation X" voice is in such demand he's recently started his own company – ShortBusRadio.com – which has clients from throughout the world.

"There's nobody in L.A. who doesn't have more than one thing going on," he said. "People here want to work 10 years and quit all together. They know in their 30s if they slave to the grind they can walk away from L.A., sitting extremely good with enough money to sit on for a long time. There will come a day when I won't care about acting, and my radio days will be done. At that time, because I love astronomy, I'll retire, buy a big telescope and move to the desert." ■

JUST THE FACTS

Broadcasting major
Hometown: Olathe, Kan.
Current position: radio imaging
director/actor

"Los Angeles is very, very fast. Midwesterners are a pretty relaxed bunch, which is the great thing about it. But if you snooze here, you lose. L.A. is for the fast and furious – the fastest thinkers, fastest reactors and the most creative people."

