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...

KEVIN SPIEHS 1997

A Kevin Spiehs’ time at Northwest came to a close, he knew he “owed a lot of career advice was sales, and by this 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 experiences, he soon set his sights on the entertainment capital of the world. He decided to move to L.A. from San Diego in 2001. “Because there are so many more opportunities and events in the 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 world.”

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 the networks he landed his dream job with.

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.”

THOM POLIZZI 1973

“Introducing 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 stunts appear as reality as a co-producer for the hit show. It was great because there were so many interesting action gaps all within one show,” Polizzi said. “What other show would you have such great stunts—underwater shots, a western, throwing someone in a burning cauldron of a volcano and pulling them back out, a skeleton, monsters, dragons, spaceships?”

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 by product they sell on daytime TV like a foam glider, the ‘better butter baster’ or an orange peeler,” he said. “At lot of times I would shoot it, edit it, do the opticals and titles, and mix the music—all using the schools 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.

THOM POLIZZI 1973

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 Shatner’s “Damaged Goods,” starring Laura Dern and TV shows including “The Untouchables” and “The WH1 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

but I miss thunderstorms and lightning like you get in the Midwest – and should,” she said. “I just keep smiling and having fun. L.A. is a great place, enjoys designing her own jewelry and hopes to soon become bicoastal writing a sitcom and will soon be performing at the Aspen Comedy Festival.

Hemminger 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,” Mike Myers in “Austin Powers 2 – The Spy Who Shagged Me,” and as a continual honeymooner in “The Love Boat – The Next Wave.”

“I haven’t had my ‘big break’ yet, but everything is falling into place as it should,” said Nauss, who has appeared in more than 15 plays since her first one in Grade School. “It’s all about the journey and knowing I’m choosing my life. I’m an actor when I talk to women, because it’s less appealing because actors are a dime a dozen.”

Monica Nauss

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.”

Monica Nauss is an English education major/business minor from Kansas City, Kansas. She currently is pursuing a business degree at Gold’s Gym at Venice Beach, the famed gym that’s regularly visited by celebrities such as Magic Johnson, Kevin Bacon, and Kevin Kline.

Nauss, who has been trained with Second City and The Groundlings, was a continual(honeymooner) in “The Love Boat – The Next Wave.”

“Broken Home” video and in a "alternative, General Mills Cuisine," and "Crash." He’s also appeared in several independent films – one that took him to the Sundance Film Festival.

Mike Madrigal, who has recently auditioned for "CSI: Miami," has also appeared in Place Four's "broken Home" video and in a "Jewel" video.

Long before Madrigal’s entrance into the acting world, he made his mark 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 Deckard Weekly Top 20 radio show, and served as the voice of the New Works organization associated with the National Repertory Theater Foundation. "Los Angeles is a lot like the 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. “List well 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

"Los Angeles is very, very fast. Midwesterners are a pretty relaxed bunch, which is great about the city. 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.”

"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.”

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 dint a lot of stand-up off a lot of ducks!" she said. “So you couldn’t really call me a duck-duster!" In 1998 she hung up her duster and followed the sound of laughter.

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

“When my mom was pregnan-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

“Technically, I went to an open mic on the stand-up stage,” she said. “I thought I’d step up jokes for a couple years 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.”

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,” Mike Myers in “Austin Powers 2 – The Spy Who Shagged Me,” and as a continual(honeymooner) in “The Love Boat – The Next Wave.”

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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 wardrobe malfunctions.

“I got 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 a fast 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, Kevin Bacon, and Kevin Kline.

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