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Star Treatment

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With events that included a blockbuster film premiere and the annual Alumni Awards, IWU celebrated Homecoming 2011 in style.



The hit DreamWorks Animation movie *Puss in Boots* had its world premiere at the Hansen Student Center.

It was a year to honor those who work behind the scenes and take the stage at Illinois Wesleyan's 2011 Homecoming, titled "Lights, Camera, Action," held Oct. 21-23.

Among the weekend's highlights, the hit DreamWorks Animation movie *Puss in Boots* had its world premiere at the Hansen Student Center, thanks to alumnus Bill Damaschke '85, chief creative officer of the animation company responsible for the enormously successful *Shrek* and *Kung Fu Panda* films.

Damaschke hosted a screening, and was later awarded the 2011 Distinguished Alumni Award at the annual Homecoming Luncheon held in the Shirk Athletic Center. Other alumni were presented Young Alumnus and Loyalty awards at the luncheon. Below are excerpts of the winners' acceptance remarks, as well as from "Back to College" classes taught by two of the recipients.

Bill Damaschke '85, Distinguished Alumni Award

What he does: As chief creative officer for DreamWorks Animation, Bill is responsible for leading the creative and artistic direction of the animation studios. He has been involved in hits such as Academy Award-winning *Shrek*, Academy Award-nominated *How to Train Your Dragon* and the recently released *Puss in Boots*, which had its world premiere at a Homecoming screening hosted by Bill. He also oversees all live theatrical productions, including the Tony Award-winning *Shrek: The Musical*.

What's next: Among many projects, Bill is working on a “hybrid film” due out in 2014 called *Me and My Shadow*. The movie will combine traditional animation and computer-generated filming techniques. “The rule of the shadow world is we’re casters, they’re shadows, they follow. But what if one day your shadow took over and started dragging you around because they just couldn’t take it anymore?”

IWU’s influence on his career: “Every day I look back at what I learned here — whether it was about creativity or taking risks — those kind of things serve me every single day and I’m really happy and proud that I have the foundation I got here at Illinois Wesleyan.”

On the power of yes: “I always say you must come from a place of ‘yes.’ Yes is the most important word to use. It’s so easy to come up with all the reasons why something might not work, especially in a creative environment. ... I don’t think you can really innovate and be creative and actually accomplish anything unless you really think from a place of yes. Yes is about opportunities — it’s the ability to take risks. It’s about the environment I had here at school.”

On curiosity and the liberal arts: “I think curiosity about other things in the world is really important. I think that if you’re intellectually curious and you go to a liberal arts college and you take classes outside the things you think you want to do, those things will always come back to serve you later on. If you think you know what you want and what you’re going to do, you are wrong. You actually don’t know.”



Bill Damaschke '85 is shown at the premiere of *Puss in Boots*.

Eric Snowden '00, Robert M. Montgomery Outstanding Young Alumni Award



Eric Snowden '00 taught a popular Back to College class.

Nothing against science or chemistry, but I realized pretty early on that I wasn't going to be very good at something that I wasn't in love with."

Maintaining a Wesleyan connection: "I really realized how Wesleyan has been a common thread throughout all of my jobs. I've worked with Wesleyan graduates in three different states, in three different jobs. It seems like everywhere I go, I'm leaving from one connection to the next. It's been really a beautiful thing."

How to keep a fresh perspective: "For creative people and for people who are designing or coming up with new ideas, it's extremely important to have something else other than work. To make sure that you're being creative in other ways, that you're getting tactile with your hands, that you're actually making things. I think it's easy to get in the same repetition, and if you don't break out of that, everything you do gets stale."

Deon Hornsby '97, Loyalty Award

What he does: As the vice president of direct-to-fan creative and technology at Atlantic Records, Eric oversees all design, development and project management for the digital department. He also teaches workshops and classes in photography, digital imaging and Web design for such institutions as the Parsons School of Design and Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Colorado.

On switching from chemistry to art: "I was a chemistry major for about the first semester I was here [at Illinois Wesleyan] and realized it wasn't quite the right fit for me.

What he does: Deon is a regional underwriting manager for the Private Client Group of Chartis Insurance in Schaumburg, Ill.

Achievements at Illinois Wesleyan: He was an executive board member of the Black Student Union for two years, as well as a three-year letter winner in football, and a member of the undefeated 1996 Titan team.

On the tradition of alumni giving back: “The thought of giving back was actually planted when I was a freshman. There were so many alums that came back. ... People who won Loyalty and Distinguished Alumni awards in the past, that instilled in me that your job isn’t just to graduate, your job is to reach back and help the next generation through it.”

How he gives back: For 10 years, Deon has served as an executive board member of the IWU Alumni Association, where he volunteered for numerous committees. He was co-chair of the Minority Alumni Network for six years. He continues to be a role model and mentor to Titan football players and students on campus, as well as participating regularly at the minority mentoring session for students at Homecoming and the annual ALANA orientation for first-year students and their parents.



Deon Hornsby '97 has served on the IWU Alumni Association Executive Board in addition to mentoring Titan football players.