

TOWER NEWS



Withrow Alumni • Box 8186 • Cincinnati, OH 45208 • 513-363-9085

Spring 2021

John Ruthven, world-famous wildlife artist, and his Withrow roots

by Bob Linnenberg '63

Last October, Withrow lost a great friend and benefactor in alumni John A. Ruthven. Former *Tower News* cartoonist, author, conservationist, lecturer, philanthropist, and world-renowned wildlife artist, John was a member of the class of 1943. Drafted as soon as he turned 18 in late 1942, John went to war instead of graduating with his classmates. Upon returning home from the Navy in 1946, as a result of credits earned while serving, John finally received his Withrow diploma. He then entered the Art Academy of Cincinnati.

John soon opened up shop and began his career as an illustrator. His cartoon skills came in handy when he created the Play-Doh Boy appearing on the original cans of Play-Doh. In 1959, his painting *Redhead Ducks* won the Federal Duck Stamp competition and brought him national attention. Later, John painted the cardinal that appeared on Ohio's most popu-

lar license plate. He was commissioned to do an entire series of bird prints for Colonial Williamsburg, one of his most popular. Often referred to as the "20th-century Audubon", his wildlife paintings

are on display at many museums, including the Cincinnati Museum Center and the Smithsonian Institution. One more recent endeavor

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President's Messages

by Dave Blocksom '68

As it has been for everyone, this year has been tough for our students, teachers and staff. The school year started off with a blended learning model where students were in class two days a week and learning remotely three days a week. Later in the fall, due to an increase in Covid cases, teaching went completely remote five days a week. In mid-February it went back into blended learning, and as I write this, Withrow will go to traditional five day classroom teaching after spring break (March 31st). This year has been especially hard on our seniors, who have had to forego all of the in-school experiences of senior year. We are working with the administration to try to enhance the remaining experiences our seniors will have during their last two months on campus (yearbooks, prom, graduation, senior day).

Retiring teacher raising funds for scholarships

Long time Withrow physical education teacher Michael Finnegan is retiring at the end of this school year. As a way to honor his experiences at Withrow, Mike has decided to create a scholarship fund for Withrow students. He wants this fund "to shine and grow our community of young people and put them in a position to improve my life's passion for health and wellness". Recipients of the scholarships will need to major in a health, wellness, medical or education field. You can contribute to and

learn more about this scholarship at the CincinnatiScholarshipFoundation.org. Donations to CSF are tax deductible.

This summer, in an effort to raise funds for his scholarship, Mike will be riding his bike from Santa Monica, California, to Washington, D.C. His fund raiser is called "A Tiger's Journey". Mike has created a go fund me page for the ride that you can also contribute to at gofund.me/a8a186cl/.

Withrow chosen to be the site of urban youth tennis academy

The United States Tennis Association and the Cincinnati Tennis Foundation have selected Withrow to be the site of an urban youth tennis academy. This will be similar in scope to the Major League Baseball and Cincinnati Reds urban youth baseball academy in Roselawn. The tennis complex will encompass the complete refurbishing of the existing six tennis courts with new surfacing and fencing and the addition of two more outdoor courts. There will also be a two-story indoor tennis facility with eight courts and men's and women's locker rooms, offices, a lounge, a conditioning room, and classrooms. There will also be 50 additional parking spaces created. The indoor courts will be located along our rear property line adjacent to what were the old railroad tracks and is now the Wasson Way bike and walking trail. The Xavier and UC tennis programs will

be partnering on this project and will serve as mentors and coaches to the young players. Local area tennis pros will also work with the players.

This facility will be used mainly by Cincinnati Public School students, but will also be open to the public on a limited basis. Hopefully, this is the beginning of bringing a tennis program back to Withrow after an absence of many years. The complex has been approved by the CPS Board of Education and the goal is that it be open in 2022. It will be a great addition to our baseball/softball complex which opened in 2015 and was funded by Major League Baseball, the Cincinnati Reds, and Withrow Alumni.

COVID cancels HOF induction ceremony

The Withrow Athletic Hall of Fame 2021 induction ceremony had to be cancelled due to Covid restrictions. We will hold a combined 2021 and 2022 induction ceremony next February.

Yearbooks needed (and not)

We are looking for yearbooks from 1977, 1980 and 1987 to complete our permanent collection of yearbooks in the Alumni Center. We could also use yearbooks from 1963 on for our inventory. We do not need nor are we taking any yearbooks prior to 1963.

Repairs to iconic clock tower and bridge underway

Thanks to your generous donations and the funds we already had in our campus maintenance account we were able to pay for the entire cost of the new copper roof for the balcony level of the clock tower and two-thirds of the cost of the structural engineering work for the bridge repairs. Thank you, donors. Inclement weather prevented us from starting the roof work until March 1st. As I write this, the old roof has been torn off; the ice and water shield underlayment has been installed and the drains cleaned; and the sheet metal workers have almost finished installing the copper roof. We are also implementing an annual maintenance agreement with the roofing company for an annual inspection and drain cleaning to protect our investment. This will include the upper cupola area copper roof, too.

The structural engineering construction documents for the bridge repairs are done and we have received bids from four quality contractors. We are now in the process of reviewing the bids and selecting a contractor to work with. Once we fine tune the cost of the project we will approach CPS Facilities for funding for the repairs. The Facilities Director has indicated to us that she will try to find the funding despite the cuts that CPS has made because of the pandemic. It is our hope that repairs can be made this summer while students are not on campus.

I would be remiss if I didn't make a request for donations! If you received a federal stimulus payment and are fortunate enough not to need all of the money, a donation to Withrow Alumni would help us support our students, teachers, staff, and campus. Honestly, our donations are down slightly this year, due to Covid, I assume. We sincerely appreciate any help you can give us.

The clock tower has been repaired; bridge repairs will begin soon. Your donations are always welcome.



Withrow—the first fifty years

Honor Societies: Sigma Gamma and Dux Femina

by Bob Linnenberg '63

Membership in a high school honor society is usually based on a student's academic achievement. To be "tapped" for the Cum Laude Society, which flourished at Withrow in the 1960s and 70s, a student had to maintain a grade point average indicating academic excellence in all studies. For some other organizations, such as the National Honor Society, grade requirements were not as strict, and citizenship and participation in school activities were considered necessary for membership.

Both of these national organizations had chapters at Withrow at one time or another, but we had our own examples of the latter in Sigma Gamma and Dux Femina. Not only were our local groups created to honor worthy seniors, but their primary purpose was to serve the entire Withrow community, both students and faculty.

The history of Sig ...

Senior Guides was formed in the fall of 1933 under the aegis of Assistant Principal Rayburn W. Cadwallader. Twelve boys were selected from 36 nominated by the faculty to "aid those students who are not doing their best in school and to help freshmen accustom themselves to the new surroundings." The boys were selected on the basis of scholarship and citizenship. Adopting the Greek letter name of Sigma Gamma, the group soon found themselves escorting

new students and visitors, and consequently prepared a guidebook to the school

...and the herstory of Dux

In January of 1940, it was proposed by Principal Walter Peoples that a "female Sigma Gamma" be established as an honor society for senior girls. In March of that year, 16 senior girls, all of whom had applied for membership, were chosen by faculty members for Dux Femina. The name was chosen from a line from Virgil's *Aeneid*, "Dux femina facti", meaning "A woman was leader of the deed". A grade average of 85 or above and "participation in activities, and general prominence" were requirements. Before the end of the school year, the new Dux members had visited 15 elementary schools, talking to 8th grade girls about the experiences they would face as freshmen at Withrow in the fall.

Activities and contributions

The 1940s and 50s brought little change to Sigma Gamma and Dux Femina. Both continued in their service of guiding and tutoring new students and raising money for worthy projects and scholarship funds. Sigma Gamma began organizing and sponsoring the senior prom. The group also bought a glass enclosed bulletin board and supplied napkins (for the first time) to the lunchroom, provided

a new flagpole in the stadium, and bought new mirrors in the boys' gym. In 1945 Sigma Gamma held a successful contest for a new Alma Mater. The girls of Dux Femina were busy raising scholarship funds by selling flowers, souvenir plates, bracelets and stationery, and by selling refreshments at sporting events. Sigma Gamma continued the sponsorship of the senior prom and began organizing and running the schoolwide carnival and dance, Tigertown Twirl, a highly successful fundraising event for many years. Any and all profits from these events went to a scholarship fund to be presented to worthy students on Awards Day. For many years, Dux sponsored a Senior Boat Ride at graduation time.

Membership level in Sigma Gamma was set at 12 at its founding in 1933. With the exception of 1942, with 13 boys, the number remained at 12 until the late 1960s when the selection process was altered and the number began to fluctuate. Dux Femina, which was founded with 16 members in 1940, reduced its number to 12 girls with the class of 1955. Like Sigma Gamma, the number of members began to fluctuate in the late 1960s

Groups represent school life in society

Over the years the membership of Sigma Gamma and Dux Femina represented a cross section of school life. Participation in activities such as Student Council, the

Annual, Tower News, choir, band, orchestra, and dramatic clubs would all be considered for selection. Playing on sports teams and participating in the Minstrels and Sounds of Withrow were activities that helped students earn nomination. Social clubs also played an important part. During the 14-year period when social clubs were recognized by the Board of Education, 87 percent of the girls in Dux were sorority members and 72 percent of the boys in Sigma Gamma were fraternity members. Considering the demographics of the Withrow school district, Sigma Gamma and Dux Femina were almost exclusively made up of white students during the first 50 years. The first black member of Sigma Gamma was in the class of 1950, the second in the class of 1963. The first black member selected for Dux was not until the class of 1967.

The excitement of selection

The members of Sigma Gamma and Dux Femina were chosen in the spring by the senior members, with faculty recommendations, from eligible members of the junior class. On Class Day, when awards and scholarships, including those provided by Sig and Dux, were presented to graduating seniors, the names of new members were announced at the conclusion of ceremonies. The graduating Sigs would huddle, and shouting “Sigma Gamma calls”, summon the new members one by one out of the stands. The new Dux members were announced with a poem in their honor and presented with a carnation and a gold bracelet.

A Sigma Gamma pin and a Dux Femina bracelet were sources of pride for the few that were so honored. Be that as it may, there were many equally qualified students passed over either by senior members or, in some cases, by faculty, for membership. As in any organization, politics, personalities, and prejudice sometimes played a part in selecting new members. Some considered the groups to be elitist and discriminatory, but, regardless, the service and support the groups provided to the Withrow community was exemplary.

How to become a *special* tiger

You become a Special Tiger when you make a one-time gift of \$1,000 or more. This donation significantly impacts our ability to support academic and extracurricular programs and conserve our campus and facility. These are our most recent Special Tigers:

John Andrews '63

Ferdinand Avril '48

David Blocksom '68

Richard Carey '66

Charlotte McFall Damron '66

John Diekman '61

Roberta Fiore-Kittell—friend

Albert Halverstadt '53

Albert Heckman '60

Barbara Kiefer '62

David Kleinschmidt '59

June Murphy '63

Matilda Winder Ripley '38

Patricia Jenkins Shives '51

“Ruthven”, continued from page 1

was the creation of the Passenger Pigeon mural on the wall of a five-story building in downtown Cincinnati, which John, then 88 years old, helped to paint.

Numerous accolades and honors

John has been honored by many organizations for his artistic and philanthropic works. Some of these include the Ohio Arts Council, The Garden Club of America, and the Museum of Natural History of the Cincinnati Museum Center. In 1999, John was named a Great Living Cincinnati by the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber. In addition, the Withrow graduate has been honored with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Miami University and an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from the University of Cincinnati. John was

awarded the National Medal of Arts in 2004 from President George W. Bush.

Countless contributions to Withrow

John’s contributions to his alma mater were boundless. In 1979 he permitted the use of his painting of a prancing tiger from his *Safari Series* to be used as the cover of the Withrow Annual. This Annual is in such high demand and so scarce that the Alumni office has only one copy. In 1998 John completed the painting known as *Mother Tiger*. The painting, dedicated to the memory of Marlene Meyer Holwadel, ’50, one of the founders of the Alumni Association, was sold, and the proceeds from that sale and from the sale of prints and notecards, all went to Withrow Alumni, Inc. A print of this paint-

ing now hangs in the main hall. In 1999 John designed the *Special Tiger* plaque on which the names of major donors to the Alumni Association are listed. John later designed the World War II plaque which lists all Withrow alumni who gave their lives in that conflict. In addition, John donated many framed prints of birds and tigers to the Alumni Association to be sold. Many of these works of art now adorn the walls of Withrow hallways and the Alumni Center, which is located in the old library. John was active in the original Friends of Withrow organization and served on the Board of Withrow Alumni, Inc. for many years.

“Once a Tiger, always a Tiger” is how we will remember one of our most loyal—and famous—alumni, John A. Ruthven.



Above left: John’s painting Redhead Ducks won a national competition and was chosen for a U.S. postage stamp. Right: John and his painting of passenger pigeons, which was recreated as a mural on a building in downtown Cincinnati.



Opposite: A sample of cartoons John drew for Tower News during his years at Withrow.



Reunion News

Classes of 1970 & 1971

October 8 - 10, 2021

Friday

Golf Outing
Informal evening reception, Firehouse Grill, Blue Ash.
Wear school colors.

Saturday

Morning: School tour and class picture
Evening: Reception/dinner dance
Sharonville Convention Center

Sunday

Morning worship service, Corinthian Baptist Church
Rev. Dr. Kazava Smith, class of 1971
Aftnoon cookout, location TBD

Information: 513-609-4783 or
withrowreunion70.71@gmail.com

Class of 1991

**Legendary Summer Celebration,
August 6-8, 2021**

Friday

Meet and Greet, 6-10 p.m., location TBD

Saturday

School Tour, Withrow 12 p.m.,
CPS policy permitting
"Legends of a Generation" Gala
Freedom Center, 50 Freedom Way
6p.m.-midnight

Sunday

Brunch, noon-2 p.m., location TBD

Information: Felicia Rosemond,
WithrowClassof91@gmail.com

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