

## 2003 BEHIND THE MASK

### Alumnus makes career for himself as MLB mascot

BY BRIAN HARTZ

and fitness activities. Cordes, professor emerita at Miramar College in San Diego, lives in Fallbrook, Calif.

Purdue University professor and former head of the Department of Health and Kinesiology, **Thomas Templin**, BS'72, MS'75, received the John R. Endwright Distinguished Alumni Service Award at the IU School of Public Health–Bloomington Distinguished Alumni Awards recognition banquet in April. Templin lives in Lafayette, Ind.

**Allen B. Agnew**, BS'73, retired in January 2007 after 31 years as a senior regulatory specialist in coal and solid leasable minerals for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. He and his wife, Erika, live in Vancouver, Wash., and would love to hear from classmates, IU friends, and IU men's and women's volleyball players from 1966–77 at [abagnew42@comcast.net](mailto:abagnew42@comcast.net).

In June, Tate Publishing released *Recording A Kill*, the first novel by **James E. Henninger**, BA'73. A field representative in the insurance industry, Henninger wrote the book while recovering from hip-replacement surgery. He lives with his two dogs in Cumming, Ga., a suburb of Atlanta.

After more than 34 years as a family physician and obstetrician/gynecologist, **Nancy Wenning Griffith**, BA'74, MD'77, closed her medical practice in June. During her career, she delivered more than 4,500 babies, including twins, triplets, second generations, and even one named in her honor. Griffith continues to educate residency doctors in the IU Health network at Ball Memorial Hospital in Muncie, Ind. She and her husband **James**, BA'74, DDS'77, live in Mooreland, Ind.

**Rosemary Agnew-Meracle**, BS'75, MS'81, writes that after completing a doctor of education degree from California State College at Fullerton, she is a self-employed educational consultant in Santa Ana, Calif.

In February, Indiana Gov. **Mike Pence**, JD'86, appointed **Bryce H. Bennett Jr.**, BS'75, JD'78, chairman of the Indiana Election Commission. Bennett is co-founder of the Indianapolis-based law firm Riley Bennett & Egloff and is a business and trial lawyer whose practice is focused on representing businesses, government, and not-for-profit entities. He lives in Indianapolis.

In May, **Rodger J. Elble Jr.**, PhD'75, MD'77, was named 2014 Outstanding Scholar at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine. He is professor of adult neurology and director of the neurology residency program. Elble, an internationally recognized expert in movement disorders, received the award based on his international reputation for research related to tremor. He lives in Springfield, Ill.

Let it be known that **Alex Collins**, BS'03, was—for some seven years—the alter ego of the Pirate Parrot, the beloved mascot of the Pittsburgh Pirates. Collins, who majored in kinesiology with a concentration in sports marketing and management, left the Pirates earlier this year. He is now free to talk about his time portraying one of Major League Baseball's most popular and longest-running mascots.

"It's an awesome character," he says of the Parrot, which debuted in 1979. "The suit allows for great performance and the support of the organization and community is great. The Parrot is probably in the top three of Major League Baseball mascot jobs."

But just like an MLB player, Collins, 34, had to work his way up to The Show from the minors, so to speak, beginning his career with internships with the Tampa Bay Rays, Miami Marlins, and Cincinnati Reds. His first full-time role was Thunder, the mascot of the Lake Elsinore Storm, a minor league baseball team in California.

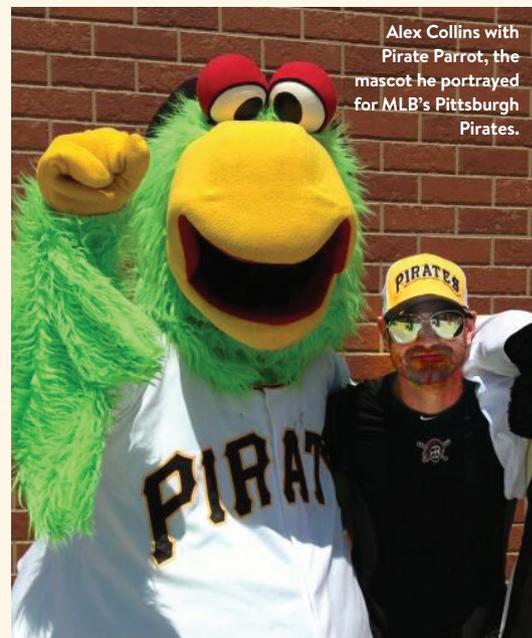
Long before that, however, he donned his first mascot suit as an IU student, when he portrayed Clifford the Big Red Dog and McGruff the Crime Dog at the women's basketball program's annual Mascot Day.

And yes, since you're wondering, "it gets really, really hot in the mascot suits," says Collins. "But you get to the point where you learn to manage."

Collins, who grew up in Indianapolis, describes his personality as "laid back" and "introvert." These qualities, he explains, help him excel as a mascot.

"It allows me to be someone else," he says. "You will find that those who are mildly introverted make a better mascot, because they can suppress their personality and let the character's personality take over."

The producers of the documentary series about mascots, *Behind the Mask*, approached the Pirates about featuring Collins, but the team said no. Many professional sports teams are reluctant to expose



their mascot actors to the media, he says, for fear of compromising the integrity of the character, which serves as an important link to the community—especially children and families.

To that end, Collins, whose father has battled prostate cancer, rallied the Pittsburgh community to his cause when he created the Pirate Parrot's Ride to Cure Prostate Cancer. Riding across the entire state of Pennsylvania on a Can-Am Spyder motorcycle—in full costume, of course—he raised tens of thousands of dollars for prostate cancer research.

In 2013, the Pirates enjoyed their first taste of the playoffs in more than two decades, so the timing of Collins' departure is bittersweet. However, he plans to continue to make sports marketing the focus of his career and he pursued an opportunity with another professional sports franchise.

"I haven't even thought of doing anything else, because I'm having such a good time," he says of his career. "I'm just really enjoying what I'm doing."

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*Brian Hartz, MA'01, is a frequent freelance writer for IUAM. A baseball fan living in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., he also enjoys sailing and playing tennis.*