in engineering and began paying off his college debt by working for an environmental engineering firm run by his crew coach. His rowing career peaked the following summer when he competed in the U.S. national championships. “I lost 30 pounds in three months” to row with the East Coast national lightweight training team, getting up at 4 A.M. to drive down to New London, Connecticut, where they were training, then up to Worcester for work, back down for the evening session, then to Cambridge, where he lived at the time. “It’s unbelievably fun, if you’re young—it’s a brutal, painful sport.” He hasn’t picked up an oar since. The noncompetitive, Zen-like meditative aspects that other rowers enjoy never appealed. “At the risk of offending the thousands of rowers on the Charles this morning,” he says, “I never got there. It’s more about pushing yourself.”

By that time, he had also seen ways to expand his boss’s business, “but he didn’t agree with me, so I went off and started my own company.” He ran that first start-up, Enstrat, an environmental-services company, throughout his years at Harvard Business School, selling it to a junior firm, throughout his years at Harvard, he moved to Manhattan and joined a start-up management consulting firm filled with recent HBS grads, Mitchell Madison Group, and was elected to partner before leaving to launch his own financial-services company, Silver Oak Solutions, in 1999. There, he carved out a niche helping governments save money in procurement, ultimately building a $23 million, 100-person business that he sold in 2005.

At Harvard, he had become close friends with classmates Mark W. Adams (now president of Micron Technology) and Dean Dorman (president and CEO at Silver Oak with West, and now an operations executive for TPG). It was in 2008, while vacationing with them and their wives (West is married to Danielle West, A.L.B. ’01) in the British Virgin Islands that the idea for The Whistle arose. “We were all talking about watching sports with our kids and having to turn down the volume or change channels when ads for Viagra came on, and Mark Adams said, ‘Someone should create an ESPN for kids,’” recalls West. “I was the only one not working at the time, so I was elected to get on it.” (He was recovering from burnout after the Silver Oak transition.) Adams and West put up the initial several hundred thousand dollars of seed capital, and both Adams and Dorman, also an investor, are advisory board members. West has “zero interest” in working for a big company, or even in running daily operations. His passion is innovating; building on an idea through research and putting together a team of talented people who are excited about working together to launch the concept. It’s like being in an eight-man shell on the water, exerting himself to the fullest, until the finish line is crossed. He has spent seven years at each of his previous companies; he is three- and-a-half years into The Whistle. He loves that Gerry Laybourne has told him, “You’re ignorant enough about the challenges of starting a media company to actually do it.” Says West, laughing, “I think it’s the highest compliment I could have gotten.”~ NELL PORTER BROWN

Voting Results

The names of the new members of the Board of Overseers and new elected directors of the Harvard Alumni Association (HAA) were announced during the HAA’s annual meeting on the afternoon of Commencement day.

As Overseers, serving six-year terms, voters chose:

Scott A. Abell ’72, Boston, Massachusetts. Retired chair and CEO, Abell & Associates, Inc.
Candidates selected as elected directors of the HAA, serving three-year terms, were:

John F. Bowman ’80, M.B.A. ’85, Santa Monica, California. Executive producer, Disney Company.

Yvonne E. Campos, J.D. ’88, San Diego, California. Superior Court Judge, State of California.


Brian Melendez ’86, J.D. ’90, M.T.S. ’91, Minneapolis. Partner, Faegre Baker Daniels LLP.

Cambridge Scholars

Four members of the class of 2012 have won Harvard Cambridge Scholarships to study at the University of Cambridge during the 2011-2012 academic year. Eva Gillis-Buck, of Leverett House and Pittsburgh, a joint concentrator in human developmental and regenerative biology and studies of women, gender, and sexuality, will be the Charles Henry Fiske III Scholar at Trinity College; social studies concentrator Abigail Modaff of Eliot House and Minneapolis will be the Lionel de Jersey Harvard Scholar at Trinity College; history and literature concentrator Mikael Schinazi, of Quincy House and Saint-Mandé, France, will be the John Eliot Scholar at Jesus College; and economics concentrator Chen

GSAS Centennial Medalists

The graduate school of Arts and Sciences Centennial Medal, first awarded in 1989 on the occasion of the school’s hundredth anniversary, honors alumni who have made notable contributions to society that emerged from their graduate study at Harvard. It is the highest honor the Graduate School bestows, and awardees include some of Harvard’s most accomplished alumni. The 2012 recipients, announced at a ceremony on May 23, are: Daniel Aaron, Ph.D. ’43, Litt.D. ’07, founding president of the Library of America and Thomas professor of English and American literature emeritus at Harvard; East Asia expert Karl Eiknenberry, A.M. ’81, a political and military leader who served as U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan from 2009 to 2011, Nancy Hopkins ’64, Ph.D. ’71, a professor of biology at MIT who has blazed a trail for women in science; and international-relations scholar Robert Keohane, Ph.D. ’66, professor of public and international affairs at Princeton’s Woodrow Wilson School.

Clockwise from top left: Daniel Aaron, Karl Eiknenberry, Nancy Hopkins, and Robert Keohane