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Taking off at Linfield

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Linfield College

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Tom Wiggins ’09

Taking off at Linfield

Wiggins used a dry-erase board to communicate during his 18-month recovery at a series of military hospitals. Although the shooting left him deaf, he now has limited hearing thanks to a surgically implanted cochlear device that amplifies sound.

Wiggins, senior leader of Evergreen Defense and Security Services, relocated to McMinnville and resumed the education he set aside for the military. He has found an unexpected camaraderie among Linfield students, faculty and staff and has been particularly impressed by the strong Business Department.

“Everyone at Linfield wants to see each other succeed,” said Wiggins, who models his life as a business. “Everything that you do every single day is a part of your business, and depending on how you run that business, you will either succeed or fail.”

In his Linfield classes, a stenographer sits beside Wiggins in the front row, types each lecture and transmits the classroom discussion instantaneously to his laptop screen.

Mike Jones, Harold C. Elkinton Professor of Accounting, is also a military veteran and has connected with Wiggins on a personal level.

“I feel invested in him and I enjoy having him in class,” Jones said. “He’s a quick wit.”

Besides managing a full course load at Linfield, Wiggins also travels extensively for Evergreen – he logged 85 days last year escorting politicians and celebrities to high-conflict areas around the world.

Wiggins’ initiative drives his success.

“Tom has demonstrated national leadership, which is one of the rarest talents on earth,” he said. “Tom has the ability to overcome adversity. These setbacks seem to be a launching pad for him to conceive, believe and achieve.”

Looking ahead, Wiggins hopes to hold public office one day.

“I have a lot I want to do,” he said. “My goal has always been to be in the U.S. Senate by age 32. That may seem very ambitious, but I’ve learned that goal setting is goal-getting.”

— Laura Davis

Communication is easy for this natural-born talker

Aaron Larsen ’08 was born into a family of talkers. Whether he learned it from his grandma, who told incredible stories, or his grandfather, “a barber with the soul of a poet,” Larsen’s goal has always been to have the ability to overcome adversity.

“Both my parents are social, especially my mom who likes to chat it up with people,” Larsen said. And it’s clear he got that gene – he can’t go more than five minutes without waving to someone across the room or having a friend stop by to chat.

Larsen, a communication arts major, has parlayed his natural talent into success as a debater and speaker, participating in several tournaments as a member of the Linfield forensics team. He recently placed fourth in the Mahaffey Memorial Tournament, hosted by Linfield.

But he struggled to express himself while studying in Costa Rica his junior year. His host sister, Yuli, helped him overcome obstacles presented by the Spanish language.

“There I was, a communication arts major, learning how to speak English effectively and persuasively yet when I’m in Costa Rica, I’m outdone constantly by her and her language,” Larsen said. “It became a goal of mine to really learn the language so, in a way, I could compete with her.”

Larsen’s competitive spirit and wide-ranging interests pushed him into film last summer, when he served as a production assistant and actor on a film directed by Kevin Curry ’92 and Devon Lyon ’97. The movie, Age, Sex, Location, deals with the dangers of the Internet. Larsen’s primary responsibility was to check for continuity between scenes of the movie. He also became familiar with copyright issues and removed or hid any products in scenes where he could not get permission to use them.

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During last fall’s homecoming celebration, Aaron Larsen ’08 interviewed and recorded alumni who shared memories of their college years.

“Our goal would be to select bands from both Nicaragua and Costa Rica to perform in front of an audience made up of Costa Rican citizens and Nicaraguan immigrants to provide an experience that they can both enjoy and build upon,” Larsen said. “All relationships begin with a shared interest, and in this case it is music.”

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