

# THE MBA HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD

Alumnus of the Year Matt Gillam turned his GGU project into a \$90 million company

By Susan Fornoff  
Photos by Ed Ritger

**M**att Gillam had no reason to go back to school for his MBA. As an account executive for a prominent event management company in San Francisco, he enjoyed an exciting career traveling the world for as many as 274 days of the year, charming senior executives and CEOs with his 110 percent service commitment.



So what on earth was he doing in Phuket, Thailand, faxing a term paper back to an instructor at Golden Gate? And why was he on a plane, buried in books, while his first-class seatmate, then-client and now good friend Raphael Che, made merry with fellow travelers?

“His job was not easy — it was a big job,” Che said. “When people go to school and they are also working, they have two very serious jobs. But he was very highly motivated.”

Gillam didn’t know it at the time, but his work at Golden Gate would have a powerful impact on the direction of his career. In fact, it produced the business plan for a then-fictional startup, which today is Enterprise Events Group, a 90-employee, \$90 million company that is the biggest privately held event-management company west of the Mississippi.

Using its innovative, ever-evolving proprietary software platform, EEG provides full-service management for events ranging from a 10-person board meeting to a reward for a company’s top 1,000 performers to a conference for 15,000. Flight reservations, hotel bookings, ground transportation, logistics, entertainment — even welcome gifts — fall under its purview.

“We didn’t have to write a thesis for the MBA program I was in,” Gillam said in a sit-down at EEG’s ever-expanding San Rafael headquarters. “But I took it upon myself to do some sort of project. ... I told myself, I’m going to write a business plan, a marketing plan, forecast, budgets, everything. So the whole concept of EEG started at Golden Gate. I still have the paper somewhere. I turned it in.”

He showed the paper, some weeks later, to colleague Rich Calcaterra. The company they were working for, Creative Marketing Incentives, had been sold and was beginning to lose the personal stamp of its leader,



**“We went to the Four Seasons in Paris, then chartered the Orient Express and took it down to Venice.”**

Joyce Clark. One of Clark’s partners, Dick Hodge, had hired and mentored Gillam and was not the least bit surprised when Gillam and Calcaterra struck out on their own to create a competitive venture built on their years of experience and deep industry knowledge.

“No more than a month after I hired him, I could see he’d have his own business,” Hodge said. “He’s a charming guy who is smart and high-performing. I understand what entrepreneurship looks like and what those genes are. And I think the MBA gave Matt the confidence to do that.”

Not that anyone would have described Matt Gillam as lacking in confidence. As a child, he built forts and then made pitches to his grandfather for toy soldier funding; by age 7 he was working in the family bakery business, stemming strawberries and assembling doilies. And when he graduated from high school, he became a full-fledged German baker for the Santa Clara bakery.

“I baked everything from cakes to cookies to pies, you name it. My specialty: breads and cookies,” he said. “Then I woke up one day, I was 19, and I thought...”

There he was 19, getting up at 4 every morning to go down to the bakery, open it up, start the ovens and make bread. In that kind of equation, 19 and 4 simply don’t add up.

“I went to see my mother in Honolulu and started at the University of Hawaii,” he said. “I would have stayed there, except my mother, thank God, said, ‘You know what? You need to go to a real college.’”

Gillam, who loves to swim and has classic blond California looks, left Hawaii and went to UCLA. It was the Reagan era, his life was good and banking beckoned.

He trained at Bank of America as a lending officer and ended up opening

the company’s first loan center, in San Mateo. And soon enough, there he sat in an office, surrounded by stacks of paper. Once again, he thought, “I hate this, I’m bored, this is not what I want to do,” he said.

So, what did he want to do? He remembered a college girlfriend whose mother had worked for Sheraton in Hawaii. Now *that*, he thought, would be a great job — hotel pools, fine dining, what a life.

He sought out a manager’s job, dropping off his resume with every big hotel in the Bay Area. Finally an HR person told him to start at the bottom and get some experience, and that was how he began a hotel career that started at the front desk on the graveyard shift and led him up the ladder to Hyatt and sales.

He was on the team that opened Hyatt Waikoloa, the Grand Wailea and the Hyatt Kauai. And it was in that job that he crossed paths with Joyce and John Clark, whose Creative Marketing Incentives worked with world-class resorts to plan meetings, events and incentive trips for companies large and small.

The Clarks brought Gillam back to San Francisco to be their first account executive, and soon hired Calcaterra to work alongside him.

“I had come from a competitor and was very familiar with the industry and how companies became successful,” Calcaterra said. “And Matt came from the hotel side, so we were just sort of a natural fit.”

Joyce Clark had a company incentive program in those days. She would subsidize advanced degrees, paying 100 percent for an A in a class, 75 percent for a B, and 50 percent for a C, though Gillam noted, “She said, ‘Don’t come to me with any Cs.’”

He had been out of school nearly 10 years by now, yet felt a compulsion to go back. “I just always felt in my

gut I needed to go,” he said. “I didn’t really have a specific thing in mind at that time, I just felt that I needed it. I’m always looking at ways in which to learn or grow. I believe in constantly learning. Who said it — Bob Dylan? That he who is not busy being born is busy dying? It’s that sort of thing. I’m constantly looking for ways to push.”

He looked to Stanford and Berkeley immediately, but then thought, “I can’t do that! Not with my job!”

## Discovering GGU

He found Golden Gate in the neighborhood of his office at 1 Sansome, and met with counselors.

“They stressed things like, ‘We’re a lot more flexible for the business person who’s working; we know you travel and we make arrangements for that,’” he said.

Thus, the faxed tests and book-buried flights. He never took a C to Joyce Clark and rarely had a B. Hodge watched as the degree took effect.

“Number 1, it gave Matt more confidence, not that he was lacking any,” Hodge said. “Second, he developed a broader understanding of business that helped him also understand his customer. And third, it gave him the foundational skills that would help him start a business.”

And in the end, he went to Calcaterra with that school project.

“I always felt bad for Elvis (Presley) because he had no one to talk to,” Gillam said. “The Beatles had four guys to talk to. I wanted a business partner. Rich had just married Wendy and she was pregnant. Why would he want to do this? We had high-paying jobs, we were established, we could have easily stayed.”

“Honestly,” Calcaterra said, “I thought it was kind of a no-brainer. The company had been sold; it was changing. And we both were really

ready to roll.”

Che’s Genstar Container Corp. was their first customer. “Our first trip for them was amazing,” Gillam said. “We went to the Four Seasons in Paris and bought out the Four Seasons, and then chartered the Orient Express and took it down to Venice, where we bought out the Danieli hotel for another five nights.”

Gillam says “we” because he and Calcaterra make a point of providing personal service. They divide the clients 50-50, and even today leave their families to hit the road at least a couple of times a month. (Gillam and wife Shawn have a daughter, Ari, in first grade and a son, Jackson, in third.)

Now in its 17th year, EEG has had to weather turbulence that was unimaginable when Gillam drew up that business plan. Driving across the Golden Gate Bridge on Sept. 11, 2001, he took a call from Calcaterra’s wife, Wendy, who told him what had just happened.

“As she explained it to me, I thought, ‘Oh my God, our business, we’re done,’” Gillam said. “Yet we came out of that pretty well.”

## Weathering the Storm

There was a dot-com implosion blip later, then, worst of all, a recession in which businesses were publicly flogged for taking employees on anything remotely resembling a junket.

The partners had to consider the possibility that there might not be anything for their employees to do. They let a few go, and made 2009 the only year of their 17 that they did not increase salaries. In fact, they cut them.

Yet they made it through, and recently expanded their headquarters.

Here are a few of the secrets to the Gillam-Calcaterra success story:

- A diversified customer base. “You could just focus on tech, but the

problem is when tech goes off the cliff, you go with it,” Gillam said. So there are clients in healthcare, pharmaceuticals, transportation, energy and retail — including some smaller and younger companies with growth potential.

- Living within their means. “We run a very conservative company,” Gillam said. “So we have a lot of cushion to take on longer periods of downtime than a lot of other people can.”
- A concentrated customer base — focusing on doing good work for 30 to 35 clients rather than spreading thin across 100.
- An emphasis on the kind of service that guarantees repeat business and word-of-mouth endorsement. “We’re interested in the whole relationship, not just the pieces that are profitable,” he said. EEG hasn’t even done sales, in the traditional sense.

The aspirations of Gillam and Calcaterra seem modest. They’ve hired an account executive, readied a new software launch and set a growth goal of 20 percent, to a \$110 million company.

Gillam, who gets particularly animated and talks even faster than his usual 1,000 words a minute when he talks about his time at GGU, remembers sitting in class with other working professionals like himself and having this argument:

“You gotta grow your company,” they’d insist.

“Why do you have to grow your company?” he wondered. “Why couldn’t you choose to be the best in your space, and only be about this size, and just dominate the space? Why couldn’t you be happy doing that? No one really knew the answer.”

But of EEG, he said, “That’s kind of where we are now.” 

Special thanks to the Hiller Aviation Museum ([www.hiller.org](http://www.hiller.org)), where we photographed man-on-the-move Matt Gillam.

# 2012 Alumni Awardees

Stories by Susan Fornoff

## Bruce Braden Amicus Award

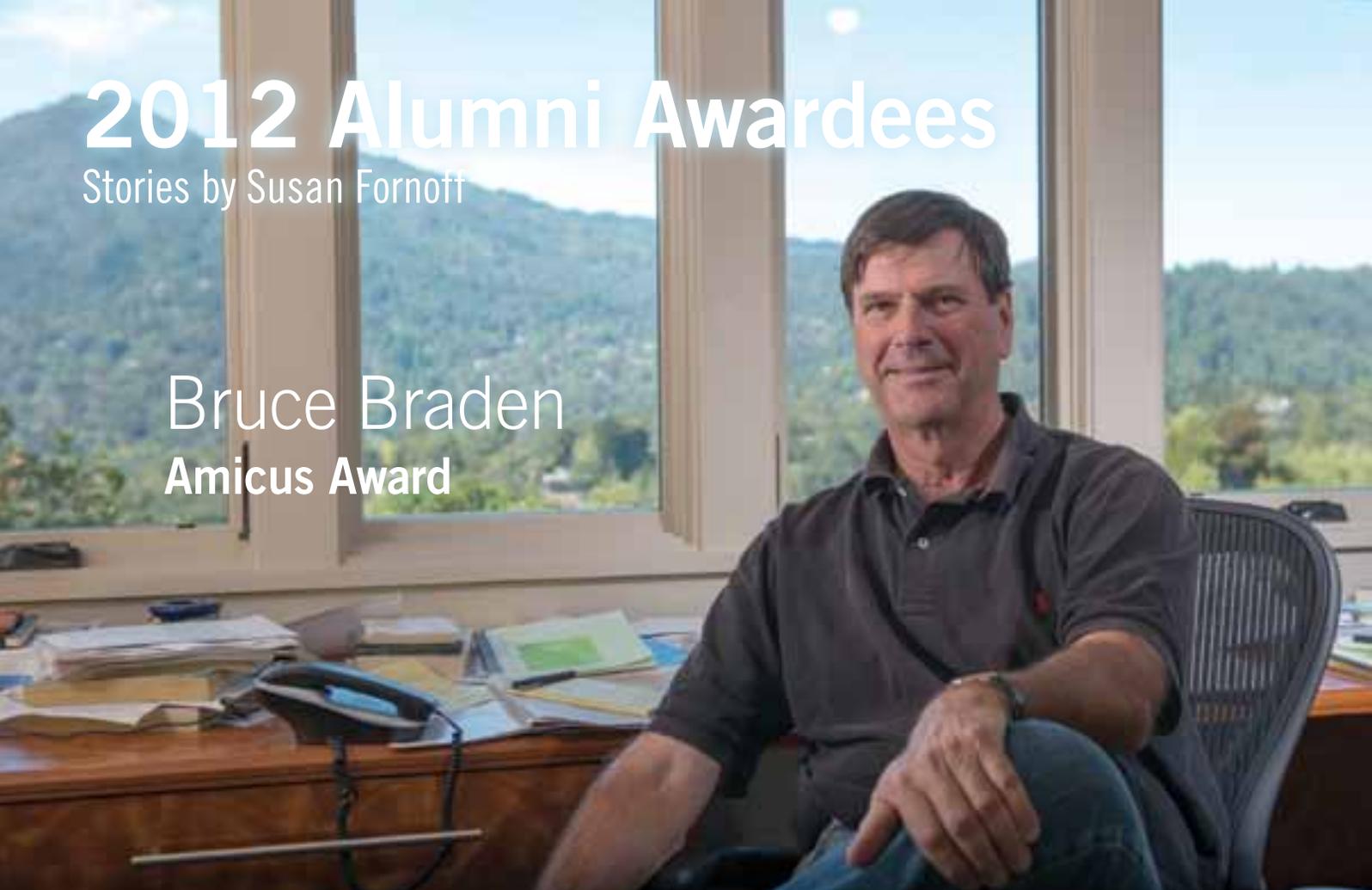


Photo by Ed Ritger

### Bruce Braden

#### AMICUS AWARD

*Given to those whose efforts have resulted in significant contributions to the university's resources and, thereby, to its educational capabilities and services.*

**B**ruce Braden (MBA 73) cannot explain how he got himself into a position to make a \$2 million commitment to support GGU's School of Taxation, soon to be renamed the Bruce F. Braden School of Taxation.

"If I knew that, I'd probably write a book about it," Braden said over the phone from an idyllic fishing and golf trip to Sun Valley. "The only thing I could say is that I was lucky. I was going to go work for the phone company after I came out of the Army. But the phone company was on strike, so I ended up going to Golden Gate."

Braden had gone into the Army after he graduated from Stanford in the '60s. Ma Bell's strike put him to

work on a GGU MBA with a concentration in taxation. He then started his career with Touche Ross, where one of his supervisors was a man by the name of Ted Mitchell. (Hold that thought for a moment.)

Braden ascended to partnerships at two other firms before he discovered oil and became a founder and major contributor to four successful companies in the industry (including his current Braden Exploration, in Fort Worth, Texas) — and one wildly successful company.

"It was not planned," Braden said. "I made a decent amount in the oil and gas business, but I got into it because I really enjoyed it. It's a combination of science and gambling."

Braden managed all of his businesses, he said, for the long haul — making decisions as if he would own them for 20 years. That one wild

success — Stroud Energy, which he started in 1998 — was no different, except for its results.

"All of my businesses have been successful," Braden said, without a touch of boastfulness. "But that one, it was far beyond any of the others — a 50-fold return."

By the time he sold Stroud Energy in 2006, Braden had lost touch with GGU. He had taught for three years before he got into oil and gas, and then 25 years passed before his former supervisor wondered if he wouldn't like to reconnect with the university.

That would be one Ted Mitchell, by now a member of GGU's board of trustees, and Braden soon began writing a generous check.

"When I thought about it," Braden said, "where would I be without Golden Gate? Maybe still working at the phone company."

## Ingrid M. Turner

### COMMUNITY SERVICE

*Given in recognition of outstanding leadership and service contributions to the community.*

Prince George's County (Md.) Councilwoman Ingrid M. Turner (MBA '89) already has a houseful of honors.

Her accolade-fest started with her career in the Navy, with medals for Achievement, Commendation and Meritorious Service. More recently, the Prince George's Community Foundation bestowed its 2009 Civic Leadership Award on her, Emily's Way handed over a Service Award in 2010 for Giving of Self for the Advancement of Others, and the Women Business Owners of Prince George's County in 2011 gave her its Leadership by Example Award. In 2011 she was listed among the *Washingtonian* magazine's 100 Most Powerful Women.

Yet, news that Golden Gate University was honoring her for community service brightened the sparkle in her eyes.

"It's a wonderful feeling," Turner said. "It's like 25 years later, they followed me, they caught up with me and it's as if I have made the university that provided my foundation proud of what I have accomplished. And that foundation, education, is one that opens doors and provides opportunities."

The daughter of an Army officer and sister of three brothers who went to West Point, she was the wayward sheep who went to the Naval Academy. "I'm the only smart one," she said, laughing. "I got all the good duty stations."

Her first Naval duty station was Monterey, where she soon gravitated to GGU's satellite for her MBA. Her next duty station allowed her to earn a Juris Doctorate from Catholic University, which led to her first duty

station as a lawyer: Treasure Island.

"I was able to serve my country for 20 years on active duty," Turner said. "When I came back to where I grew up, I wanted to put that knowledge to work helping my community. I believe youth are our future, so I have focused on education." That said, it's easy for Turner to single out two recent, profoundly satisfying accomplishments.

One: the opening this fall of a new, \$56 million Greenbelt Middle School, replacing an appalling environment she described as "third world" after she took office in December 2006.

And: At last, a library in the Pointer Ridge section of Bowie, the town where she grew up and still lives.

"What's my passion? Education, yes, but also, how can I give my community the tools to succeed?" she said. "My building blocks were like the ones I received from GGU — the tools I needed to succeed."

Photo by Mark Lovett



Ingrid M. Turner  
Community Service



## Susan Rutberg Distinguished GGU Service

Photo by Ed Ritger

### Susan Rutberg

#### DISTINGUISHED GGU SERVICE

*Given to a GGU faculty or staff member in recognition of exemplary leadership and service.*

**S**usan Rutberg (JD 75) used her law degree to defend the indigent and represent the public interest. Then she began teaching at GGU, and did more of the same. Exponentially more, she figures.

“As a lawyer I got great satisfaction, because I felt I was doing something that mattered,” she said. “But teaching law students has had a much wider ripple effect.”

Rutberg’s father, Jerry, had big things in mind for his only daughter: becoming the first Jewish woman president of the United States. She had big things in mind, too — just different big things. Raised in upstate New York, she graduated from Cornell in 1971 and then joined her friends in San

Francisco for the late flower-child era.

“It was an exciting place to be in law school,” she said. “It was a very welcoming culture, and, with the teachers just a few years older than we were, a very collaborative environment.”

Rutberg put in 15 intense years as a trial lawyer, mostly as a public defender, and then moved into the 1st District Appellate Project. Then she accepted an invitation from Bernie Segal (the late GGU professor and criminal defense attorney) to return to GGU to teach in 1988.

“When I started doing appellate, I started reading all of these trial transcripts, and I realized how many lawyers were not well prepared,” she said. “I thought, this would be a good time to start teaching law school, to better prepare lawyers, rather than try to make up for their mistakes in appeals.”

So in 1991 she took on full-time

teaching. She supervised GGU’s legal externship programs, originating the homeless advocacy and capital post-conviction clinics, both in partnership with community agencies.

She made a point of bringing in real clients for the Lawyering Skills class she taught, and watched with pleasure as students interviewed a young man from the Homeless Advocacy Program and took on his case. “Their energy level went way up,” she said. “They cared.”

In 2001, Rutberg started the Innocence Project in partnership with Santa Clara University’s law school, and in 2005 the team used DNA testing to exonerate Peter J. Rose, who had served nearly 10 years of a 27-year prison sentence.

Rutberg is on sabbatical this fall, but she’s got a public interest pursuit already: mentoring in the girls unit at Juvenile Hall.

## John Williamson

### VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

*Given to a person who demonstrates exceptional service to the university through volunteer activities.*

**J**ohn Williamson (MS 90), the Partner-in-Charge of EisnerAmper LLP's San Francisco office, receives fairly predictable gratification for the pro-bono program he originated with Dean Mary Canning and the Braden School of Taxation.

It happens at the height of tax season. The phone rings and a former student, who might otherwise be overwhelmed by clients, forms, receipts and The Code, says thanks.

"They'll call us and say, 'It was great that I had that experience,'" Williamson said. "That feedback makes it so satisfying. The students love the practical experience and the way it helps them get through their first tax season with future employers."

Williamson, who received his BS in accounting from Illinois College, went to work for Big 8 CPA firm KPMG as an auditor but fell in love with San Francisco on a vacation. In 1982, he moved west and soon went to work for the CPA firm of Harb, Levy & Weiland LLP. Once there, Howard Weiland suggested he enroll in GGU's master of taxation program.

"The one rule was: No classes during tax season," said Williamson, thus explaining his slow and steady pace to his degree.

Williamson found the program so instrumental in his success, and the faculty so professionally grounded, that he worked with Canning to institute a free student tax workshop that consumes five to six hours on three consecutive Fridays.

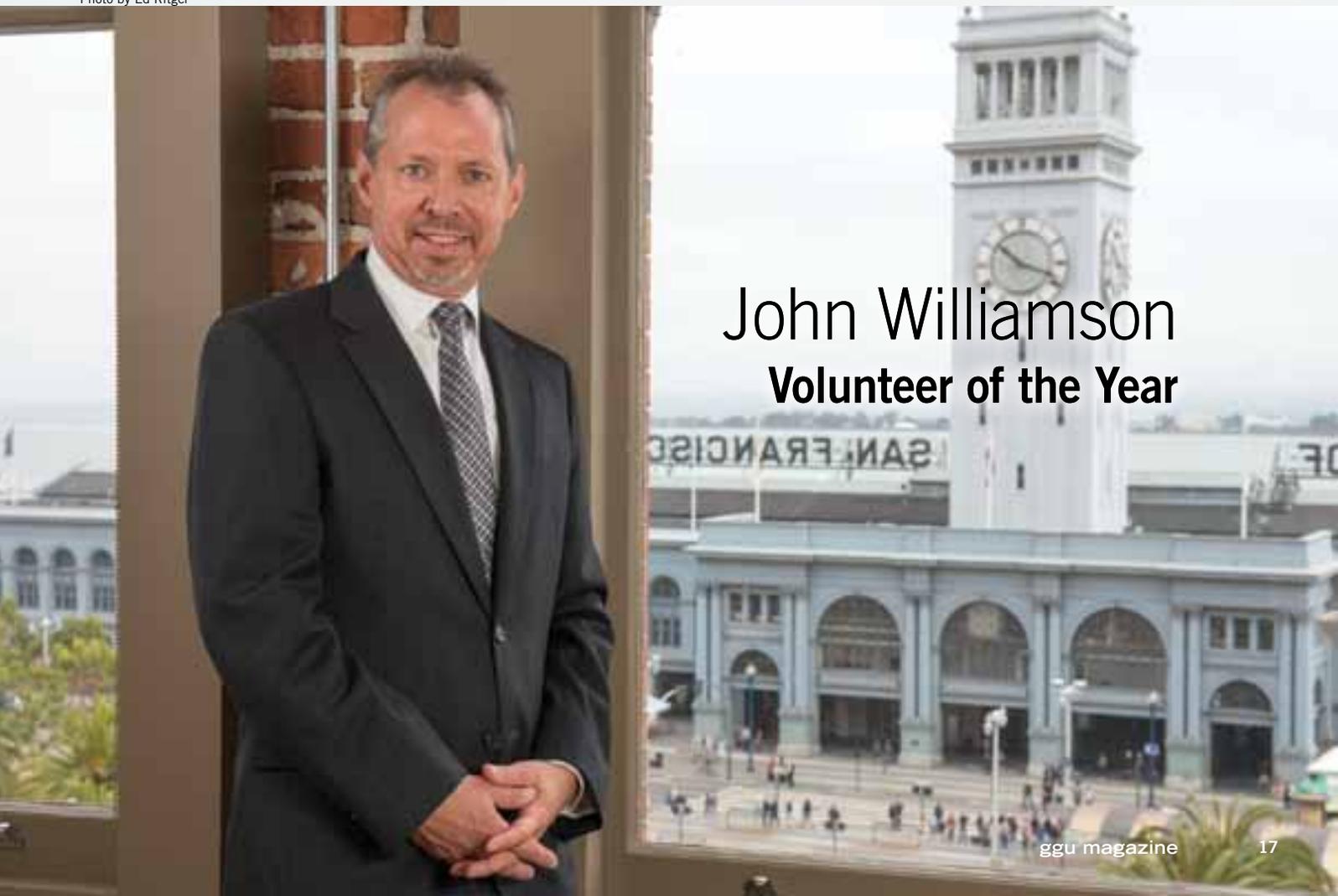
"The idea was to show GGU's master's in tax students how to prepare individual, partnership and corporate

tax returns," he said. "The first day, we give a half-hour lecture and a quick tutorial on the tax software, and then each student receives a packet of the information we typically get from a client. They essentially learn the whole thing from A to Z."

Williamson doesn't have to go looking for things to occupy his time. He serves on the EisnerAmper Executive Committee, the Executive Committee of Hedge Funds Care (established for the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect) and the board and Audit Committee of Freight & Salvage Coffee House, a music venue in Berkeley. (Yes, he does catch the occasional show at Freight & Salvage.)

"I love doing what I'm doing; I wouldn't trade it for anything," Williamson said. "We all like to give back to the community, and this tax program especially gives us a chance to give back specifically to GGU."

Photo by Ed Ritger



## John Williamson Volunteer of the Year

# SLEDGEHAMMER GAMES

## Glen Schofield Rising Star

Photo by Ed Ritger

### Glen Schofield

#### RISING STAR

*Given to a recent graduate who exhibits extraordinary professional achievements and contributions to the community.*

Truth be told, if Glen Schofield (MBA 02) had known the video games he was designing would eventually gross more than \$3 billion, maybe he wouldn't have gone back to school at GGU to supplement the bachelor of fine arts degree he had received from Pratt Institute.

"The video game business in 1990 was a small industry," Schofield said. "I moved to Crystal Dynamics in 1996 and it wasn't long before they were talking about me running the place. I figured I'd need an MBA. When video games grew from a cottage industry to a very big business, the education and degree really helped me."

Schofield got a boost from Electronic Arts when he moved to the

Redwood City gaming giant before he had completed that MBA. "They were very supportive and encouraged me to finish it," Schofield said.

While there, his game, *Dead Space*, won Best Action Game from the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences in 2009. "Then I went to Activision, where my business partner and I built a studio, Sledgehammer Games, from scratch," Schofield said. "Next up was *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* — and within three years we made the biggest game of them all."

*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*, co-directed by Schofield, set all sorts of entertainment records by grossing more than \$1 billion in only 16 days; it also won "Best Action Game" for 2011, and Schofield today is CEO of Sledgehammer Games, the Activision Blizzard studio he co-founded in Foster City in 2009.

"Golden Gate got us used to speaking in front of people, constantly

practicing and giving reports and critiquing, and now that's what I do — talk to the press, appear on TV," Schofield said. "And I'm comfortable with that."

"The other thing: I went from running art teams to running a business that makes \$200 to \$300 million or more. Our last game made more than \$1.5 billion. So budgets, scheduling and all of the business education really helped me. Having both creative and business degrees in the video game industry is the perfect match."

With success, Schofield is now able to concentrate on his first love, art. He's returning to the creative side of the business. But, he said, "I am still the CEO and, with my business partner, make the big decisions. It's good to know that nobody can pull the wool over my eyes." 

Schofield's work appears at [www.ArtBySchofield.com](http://www.ArtBySchofield.com) and [www.Sledgehammergames.com](http://www.Sledgehammergames.com).