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Young Achievers

By Judy Henderson Prather

From judges to professors, from ambassadors to entertainers, young Baylor graduates are making a mark on the world, and each year the Baylor Alumni Association honors some of those alumni who have made significant contributions before they reach forty years old.

The 2008 Outstanding Young Alumni Awards will be presented on October 31 during the first performance of Pigskin at Baylor Homecoming to Dr. Ali Azizzadeh of Houston; Dr. Tina Payne Bryson of San Marino, California; Collin J. Cox, also of Houston; Kimberly Hightower of McGregor; and David Phelps of Culleoka, Tennessee.

Dr. Ali Azizzadeh is a board-certified vascular surgeon who specializes in minimally invasive treatment of vascular disease. After graduating from Baylor in 1994, he attended medical school and completed a general surgery residency at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and a vascular surgery fellowship at Barnes Jewish Hospital at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.



He is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgery at the University of Texas Medical School in Houston and serves as director of endovascular surgery at Houston's Memorial Hermann Heart and Vascular Institute.



Dr. Tina Payne Bryson is the director of parenting education and development for the Mindsight Institute in Los Angeles and an expert contributor for eHarmony's parenting website, where her articles and podcasts appear. A 1993 Baylor graduate, Bryson earned a master's degree from the University of Kentucky and the PhD from the University of Southern California.

She is a sought-after public speaker whose professional life focuses on combining brain research and theory from various fields of science, and offering it to parents in a way that is clear, humorous, and immediately helpful. But she emphasizes that before she's an educator, researcher, or writer, she's a mom. She and her husband, Dr. Scott Bryson '91, MA '94, are the parents of Ben, Luke, and J. P.

A Waco native, Collin Cox served two terms as Baylor's student body president before graduating magna cum laude from Baylor in 1997. The permanent president for his class, Cox earned a master's degree from the University of Cambridge and completed law school at Duke University before serving as a law clerk for the U.S. Court of Appeals in Philadelphia. He joined the firm of Williams & Connolly in Washington, D.C., where he practiced litigation for almost four years.



In 2006, Cox returned to Texas and joined the law firm of Yetter, Warden, and Coleman in Houston, making partner the next year. Cox is married to another 1997 Baylor graduate, Jacquelyn Kelly DuBose Cox.



Kimberly Hightower is a special education teacher at G. W. Carver Academy in Waco. After graduating from Baylor University in 1999, she served a two-year internship as the missions coordinator in the Baptist Student Ministries at Baylor before beginning her teaching career with the Waco schools. Earlier this year, Hightower graduated from Baylor with a master's degree in curriculum and instruction, and she has become a national board certified teacher, making presentations throughout the district and region on best practices for teaching students with disabilities. In 2006, she was recognized as the Outstanding Secondary Teacher for the Waco Independent School District.

David Phelps, a 1992 Baylor graduate, is a Christian vocalist, songwriter, and vocal arranger, best known by many for his eight-year stint as lyric tenor and soloist in the Gaither Vocal Band. The recipient of four Dove Awards and two Grammy Awards, he has released several solo albums, and his audiences have included President George W. Bush, Billy Graham Crusades, and millions of ABC News viewers.



As a teenager, Phelps won the 1988 Seminar in the Rockies held in Estes Park, Colorado, the youngest winner of the contest at that time. After graduating from Baylor in 1992, he served a stint as artist-in-residence for First Baptist Church in Hurst, before joining the Gaithers. His wife, Lori Purtle Phelps, is a 1993 Baylor graduate.

For more information about the Outstanding Young Alumni award, or any of the other eight awards presented by the Baylor Alumni Association, call (254) 710-1121 or check the association's website at bayloralumni.com.

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