



## O N O U R S H O R T L I S T

# Pedal Power

*Cyclist Kathy Urschel  
garners silver in the  
Paralympic Games*

**K**athy Urschel pedals with an unwavering self-determination that has propelled her to national prominence as a tandem cyclist. In the nearly three years since she boarded the stoker's (back) seat of a racing bike built for two, Urschel, who is deaf/blind, has competed from coast to coast, winning several national titles.

In August she and her partner, Mike Hopper of Syracuse, added to their accolades by collecting a silver medal—and an American record (3:46.22)—

decades in the host city or country of the Olympic Games and are the world's second largest sporting event. The Atlanta Paralympics, for instance, featured an estimated 4,000 athletes from more than 100 nations competing in 17 sports.

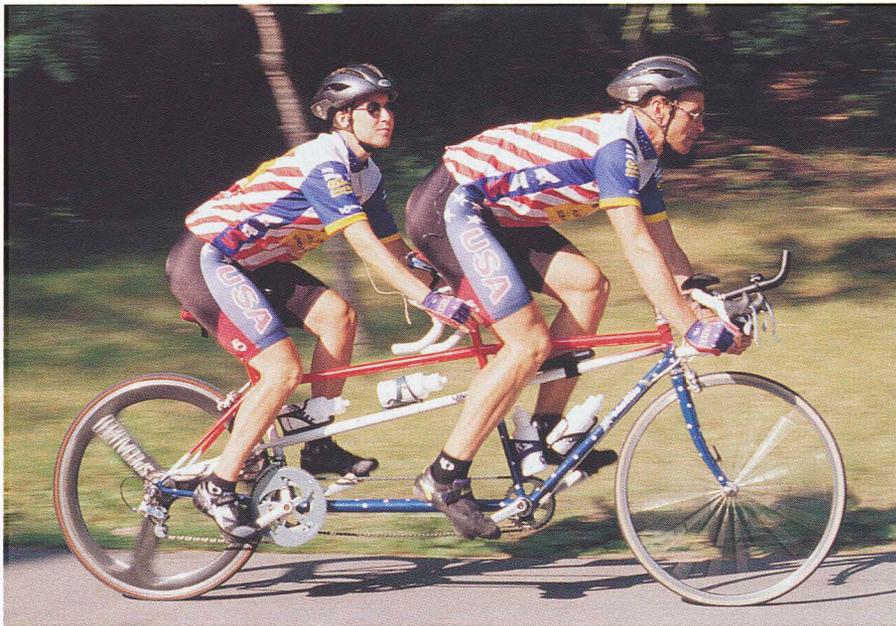
For Urschel, the road to Atlanta began unassumingly when Hopper answered her ad for a tandem partner in the Onondaga Cycling Club newsletter. "I wanted to be with someone who could get on the back, put their head down, and just hammer," he says. "Kathy does a good job reading the movement. She turned out to be a natural."

In the summer of 1995, the duo—who also race in mainstream competitions— nabbed three gold medals in road and track events at the United States Association of Blind Athletes national championships. This past June the two—who participated in the Olympic torch relay when it passed through Syracuse—were selected by the United States Olympic Committee for the USA Olympic/Paralympic cycling team after finishing in the top three in the qualifying trials at the United States Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. In July, Urschel and Hopper earned a silver (3,000-meter pursuit) and two bronze medals (one-kilometer sprint and match sprint) in the masters' mixed pair division of the United States Cycling Federation's national championships in San Diego.

"You have to work hard no matter what your adversities are because sometimes your setback is your opportunity to step ahead," says Urschel, who has a cochlear implant that allows her to hear.

Urschel first encountered adversity as a youngster. By age 9, she'd lost the hearing in her left ear and sight in her left eye. She adjusted, cast misfortune aside, and literally climbed back in the saddle, pursuing her love of horses. "I think it's easier for children to adjust," she says. "This is what's very important to me and this is why I preach inclusion—I was included."

Adversity returned when she was 21. Just as her professional career as a horse breeder, trainer, and rider was getting under way, she completely lost her vision after enduring a handful of



STEVE SARTORI

Kathy Urschel '91, G'93 (left) and her mixed tandem cycling partner Mike Hopper, both of the Syracuse area, pedaled their way to three top 10 finishes, including a silver medal, at the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games.

in the 3,000-meter pursuit at the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games. In the mixed tandem events, they also placed seventh in the one-kilometer sprint, and 10th in the 40-mile road race.

"We really had to pedal for that medal," says the 32-year-old Baldwinsville, New York, resident. "It was an exhilarating experience, and it's great to know we can keep up with the international competition."

For world-class athletes with physical disabilities, the Paralympics represent the ultimate international competition. Recognized by the International Olympic Committee, the Paralympics have been staged for more than three

operations. Seven years later, her hearing vanished. Again, her inner strength carried her through another potentially devastating ordeal. "For a year I let my eye live my life, but within that year I learned so much about life. It strengthened my spirituality and belief system," says Urschel. "I was a feisty free spirit—and still am."

That's evident today in everything Urschel pursues. Off the cycle, Urschel, who has both bachelor's and master's degrees from the School of Education, works as a career counselor for students with disabilities. She also runs Kids Need Kids, her own corporation that allows her to share her message of teamwork and the importance of inclusion and diversity with children. She and Hopper take their tandem cycles to schools and promote bike safety, health, patriotism, and goals. "I want the children to be aware of themselves, to know their identity, and also to learn to take risks and learn about the sport," she says. "My big thing is setting goals for yourself: No matter who you are or what you are, there are opportunities out there for all of us."

Hopper credits Urschel for her encouragement and positive outlook in keeping the tandem on track. "She's very motivated and, if anything, inspirational," Hopper says. "She's full of faith and optimism."

Not to mention energy. Her days are long and she trains hard, swimming, working out, and riding. "She will work too hard," says Mitch Lemelbaum, Urschel's personal trainer and a faculty member in SU's health and physical education department. "I actually have to slow her down. She's very focused."

Like many dedicated amateur athletes, Urschel also balances training with work and coming up with the finances to compete. Ideally, she'd love to land a corporate sponsor that would permit the pair to train full time—a benefit some of their competitors enjoy.

Being deaf and blind can be frustrating, Urschel says, but throughout her life she has overcome the fear of uncertainty and isolation that can accompany disabilities. "If you are really determined—and this is what I push with children—you make it happen," she says.

—JAY COX

## Rocket Man

Fred Foerst '87

If there's one thing Fred Foerst hates, it's blowing up rockets. But sometimes he doesn't have a choice.

Foerst is chief of instrumentation operations for the Western Range Instrumentation Office located at Vandenberg Air Force Base in central California. His job is to see that vehicles launched from the base fly along the expected trajectory. Seven different types of vehicles are launched, ranging from sounding rockets to Titan IVs. "If one doesn't fly as predicted, if it starts to endanger life or property, we must

send a command to blow it up," he says.

To do that safely, Foerst and his team have an off-board independent measurement of the vehicle's location and whether it's flying properly. "The Air Force civil service group I work for runs the instrumentation," he explains. "We have 29 different instrumentation sites along the coast and in Hawaii that take measurements on the rockets launched here.

"We're not responsible for the rocket, just for making sure it flies safely," he says. "We have radar sites, long-range telescopes, and telemetry receivers that take data from a transmitter aboard the rocket and tell us how the vehicle thinks it's doing. All these things work-

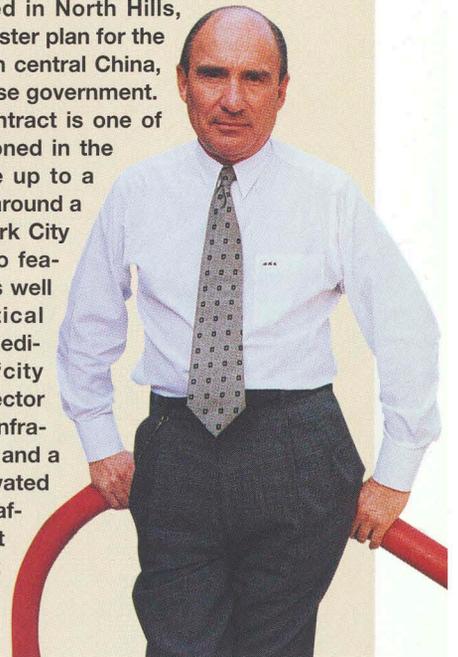
### CITY FATHER

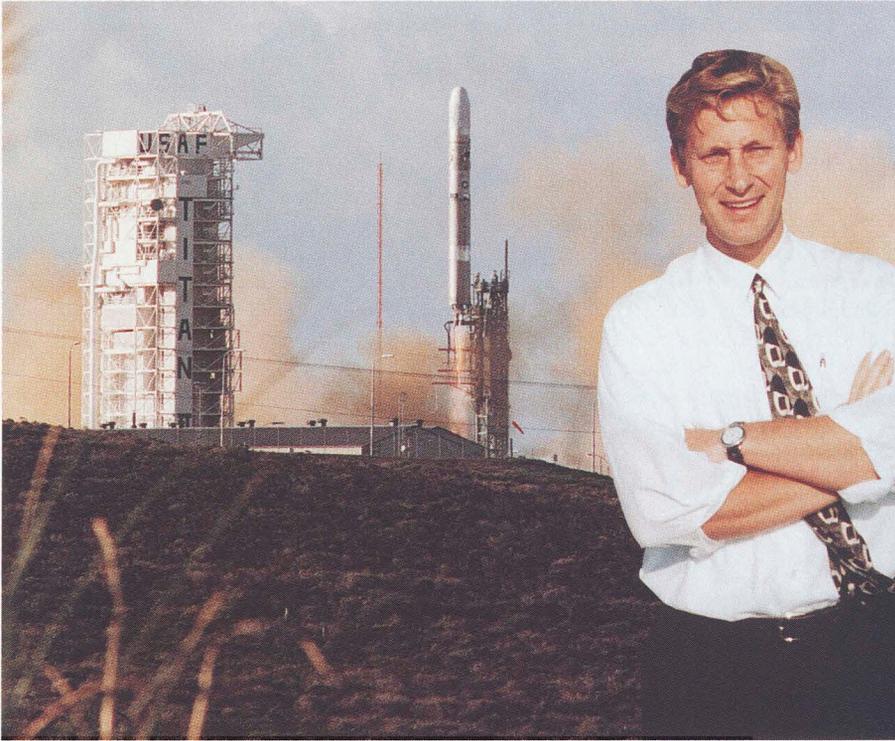
> *It might be China's* greatest architectural wonder since the Great Wall was built. The mission calls for creating the country's third largest city—from scratch—and the assignment has been awarded to the Spector Group, whose principal is Michael Harris Spector, a 1962 graduate of the School of Architecture. "Planning and designing an entire city is a major responsibility for any architect or urban planner," Spector says. "We must take into account so many issues and details regarding culture, lifestyle, goals, and objectives. It's a highly complex and very emotional experience."

The Spector Group, a 63-person architecture, interior design, and facility planning firm based in North Hills, New York, will work on the master plan for the development of Sand Lake in central China, in conjunction with the Chinese government.

The project's \$4.5 billion contract is one of the largest ever commissioned in the world. Sand Lake, which could take up to a decade to complete, will be centered around a financial district, similar to Battery Park City in New York, Spector says. It will also feature hotel and mixed-use buildings, as well as residential development—"vertical communities" that will include low-, medium-, and high-rise buildings. The "city within a city of high technology," Spector says, will require the creation of an infrastructure of roads, bridges, a railroad, and a metro. In addition, there will be an elevated platform for pedestrian and bicycle traffic, along with green areas, waterfront parks, and promenades throughout the city.

—Jay Cox





As chief of instrumentation operations for the Western Range Instrumentation Office at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, Fred Foerst tests rockets like the Titan IV to make sure they operate correctly.

ing together ensure that we on the ground can tell whether the vehicle is flying normally.”

If it isn't, a command-destruct transmitter sends a high-powered signal to the rocket, telling it to self destruct. Afterward, Foerst's team gives all the information to the missile designers. "Then they try to figure out why the thing wasn't flying properly," he says. "Eventually they'll come back and try again."

Foerst, a graduate of the L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science, has been at Vandenberg since 1989. "What's tough right now is that we must figure out how to become cost efficient so we can compete with other launch ranges in the world, including those run by the Russians, Japanese, Chinese, and French," he says. "Today the market is wide open because many political barriers have dropped. These other countries have launch ranges and American satellite manufacturers can launch from any of them. It's become very competitive."

Although his job is demanding, Foerst finds the rewards enormous. "Every day I come to work it's completely different. I find myself facing a new challenge and have to be incredibly flexible," he says. "I'm constantly stimulated. I love it."

—CAROL NORTH SCHMUCKLER

## Dress For Success

Jill Merritt '89

Ignorance turned out to be bliss for fashion designer Jill Merritt. The 1989 graduate of the College for Human Development wanted to break out of children's wear and into costume design for the entertainment industry. So with a little nerve, two years of experience, and hoards of enthusiasm, Merritt telephoned 40 Acres and a Mule, director Spike Lee's production company in her hometown of Brooklyn, New York, and inquired about information on costume designing.

Not expecting to get past the receptionist, she was connected to a costume

## BUTTONED UP



➤ *A woman visits* an antiques shop in Pennsylvania and asks about selling her small cache of Calvin Coolidge campaign buttons. The proprietor immediately places a call to a collector in Syracuse. Minutes later, Dick Woodworth is overjoyed with the news that his presidential campaign button collection will now include Calvin Coolidge.

"I have been collecting campaign buttons since 1968," says Woodworth, a 1978 graduate of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs and director of human resources for the City of Syracuse. "Three decades, seven elections, and 1,000 buttons later, I am still amazed at how consistently political history repeats itself."

Woodworth is often called upon to present his collection to various groups in the Syracuse area. "As part of the presentation, I discuss the associated issues and political scandals of the time," Woodworth says. "Afterward, people have remarked that they feel I walked them through history."

Lately, Woodworth has been hard at work collecting campaign buttons from the 1996 presidential race. Who does he think will win? "I collect memorabilia from both parties, but I always vote for the best candidate, as everyone should," he says. —Natalie A. Valentine



designer who ultimately asked for Merritt's resume. Late one Friday evening several weeks later, Merritt received a call from someone asking if she would be interested in working on a Spike Lee film. "Thinking it was one of my friends, I said, 'Stop playing around,'" she recalls. The woman on the phone assured her the film company was serious and had selected her for its internship program.

"I didn't know what I was doing when I placed that initial call," Merritt admits. "Now that I know the industry, I realize it never works like that. I also know that the designer I reached doesn't talk to people who make cold calls. The fact that she even took my call, much less asked for my resume, proves my working in the industry was destiny."

Merritt's first break was an unpaid, full-time internship on Lee's film *Malcolm X* in the wardrobe department, doing everything from unpacking clothes to dressing and accessorizing more than 10,000 extras. With the movie spanning the 1920s through 1960s, Merritt had to do her homework, studying fashion trends from hats to shoes. "I had no idea how detailed costume designing was before I got into it," she says. "Now I can pick up a shoe and tell you what year it was designed."

Thanks to her supportive family, Merritt was able to work for free to garner experience, spending much of the next year volunteering as a wardrobe assistant for movies and television specials and as a stylist for commercials and album covers. As her list of contacts grew, so did the job offers

—many for pay. She was principal designer for the film *A Razzing in Grindstone*, a 1940s feature shot in Washington, D.C., and an off-Broadway production of *Cat*

on a *Hot Tin Roof* that eventually toured 22 European cities with her designs. She has since worked on commercials for Taco Bell, Sprite, and Cinnamon Toast Crunch cereal; the *Soul Train Music Awards*; an episode of the TV sitcom *Mad About You*; and Jim Henson Productions' *Aliens in the Family*.

Merritt spent much of the spring and summer working as a wardrobe assistant on *Subway Stories*, an HBO movie expected to air sometime this winter. Composed of a dozen three-minute vignettes that take place in the New York City subway system, the movie uses 12 different writers and directors, but the same production crew. Every Wednesday through Sunday from 6

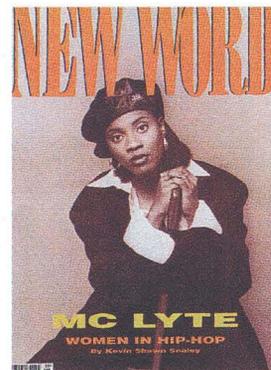
p.m. to 6 a.m., Merritt was organizing three or four sets of the same outfits for retakes, washing fake-blood-stained clothes, and jotting notes on Polaroid photos to ensure costume consistency from shot to shot. "Before I got into this industry I didn't realize films were shot out of sequence," she says. "It's the responsibility of the wardrobe staff to make sure that if someone takes off a tie in one scene it's still off in the next, even though the next scene may not be shot until the following week."

In a year or so Merritt expects to be costume designing full time, leaving behind the more technical side of executing the designer's vision for the creative side of conceiving the film's look. Of course, that requires analyzing the script and working with the director. "I see working in wardrobe as

the step I need to take to be a better costume designer," she says, hoping that one day it will lead to an Academy Award.

Meanwhile, she spends more and more time traveling between New York and Los Angeles in pursuit of new opportunities. "One of my goals was to work in television, and there's not a lot of television in New York," she says. "I go where the work is. I don't have any commitments; I'm not married and I don't have children. So if somebody calls me tonight and I can go to L.A. tomorrow to work on a wonderful gig—I'm going."

—MICHELLE MCGRATH



Jill Merritt helps suit up actor Robb Pruitt as part of her job as wardrobe supervisor during a commercial shoot in New York City. Merritt's resume also includes costume work for record albums and magazine covers (insets).

