

# North Carolina Teacher of the Year

*Of stuffed animals and dream jobs*

BY CAITLIN HARRISON ('10)

**I** played teacher to a 'classroom' full of stuffed animals when I was a child," says **Jessica Cantor Garner ('98)**. "The only dream I have ever had was to be a teacher."

Not only did Garner's dream become a reality, but it also turns out she is a top-notch instructor. She was named the 2009-10 North Carolina Teacher of the Year. Garner teaches Spanish to grades nine through 12 at Porter Ridge High School in North Carolina, but she has also taught every grade from four to 12 in urban, rural and suburban settings.

"I did a short stint as a regular fourth-grade teacher right after I got married, and I think that elementary school teaching is the toughest," says Garner. "As the sole classroom teacher, you are required to plan for every subject with minimal planning time. High school is my favorite, but it has its own challenges. You have to work hard at motivating high-school students."

Garner declared education as a major early in her Madison Experience, enabling her to take education classes right away. As a sophomore, she studied abroad in Salamanca, Spain. "I had the opportunity to live with a host family and experience the culture in an authentic way," she says. "I also attended classes at the University of Salamanca, experiencing college life in another country and culture. It was an educational opportunity that has shaped who I am today as a person and as a teacher."

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— JESSICA CANTOR GARNER ('98)  
*North Carolina Teacher of the Year*


After graduation, Garner taught in a variety of settings. She taught in Shenandoah County for nearly two years, until she married her college sweetheart, **Nelson Garner ('98)**. Garner then moved to Charlotte, N.C., and taught for about two years. Then, she moved again, this time for her husband's new job as a kicker in the Arena Football League in Indianapolis, Ind.

Nelson Garner, was a placekicker on the JMU football team from the 1994 through the 1998 seasons. He earned All-Conference and All-American honors. After graduating, he trained with the Baltimore Ravens at their camp and also played with the Canadian Football League for a short time. He then played in the Arena Football League for seven years, playing in Albany, N.Y.; Indianapolis, Ind.;

Phoenix, Ariz.; and Atlanta, Ga.

He currently teaches middle-school physical education and coaches men's and women's high-school soccer. Last spring, he was named Conference Coach of the Year and won Regional Coach of the Year for the women's soccer season.

After three and a half years in Indianapolis, Jessica, Nelson and their Future Duke moved back to North Carolina to be closer to family.

JMU's College of Education has a long history of producing top-notch teachers. Garner credits the faculty and hands-on learning. She says that students in JMU's education program student-teach before they actually begin their first teaching job. Yet, Garner was hired as a Spanish teacher even before serving as a student teacher. "My educational experience at JMU was absolutely integral in my preparation for the classroom," she says. "My studies were the springboard for my love of research and willingness to try new ideas. I am very grateful to all of my professors at JMU for the lessons that I learned." 



**North Carolina Teacher of the Year Jessica C. Garner ('98) says she is living her dream.**

in Virginia and West Virginia. The selection process included peer nominations from more than 19,000 Virginia lawyers and a blue-ribbon panel review. Rack focuses his practice in estate planning, probate and trust administration, elder law, fiduciary and tax litigation, and representation of tax-exempt entities and small business owners.

**81** In December, *Computer Reseller News* / Channel-Web recognized **Michael Haley** as of one 25 "mavericks" in the IT industry for 2009. The magazine reported, "Only a maverick would start an IT solution provider business when more than a few are closing their doors. That's just what Michael Haley did when he launched Edge Solutions one



**Michael Haley ('81)**

year ago. ... One of the secrets to the company's success is Haley's 20 years of experience in selling technology solutions. Before starting Edge, he was vice president and general manager of the HP selling division at Arrow Electronics, where he led the team to more than 200 percent sales growth." Haley is No. 19 on the CRN "top 25 mavericks." \* **Deborah Diehl Hawkins** has a son, **Rick ('13)**, who is a freshman at JMU. He is majoring in history and plans to earn a master's in education. He hopes to teach high-school history/government classes and coach football after he graduates. Deborah writes, "Our family tradition of teachers graduating from JMU continues!"

**82** **T. Michael Clayton** earned a Ph.D. in management with a concentration in organizational leadership from the University of Phoenix on July 31, 2009. His dissertation, presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree, was titled "Leadership Perceptions of Information Technology Employee Career Development: A Phenomenological Study." \* **Michael Damiano**, an 11-year veteran Edward Jones financial adviser from Selinsgrove, Pa., was named a principal with the firm's holding company, the Jones Financial Com-