



David Wolfe Bender · Apr 1, 2020 · 5 min read

## Decision 2020 (No, Not the Election)



June 16, 2019: "Newsmania" trivia game at the AI Neuharth Free Spirit and Journalism Conference

I lived the first seven years of my life in Fairfax, Virginia, a place I sometimes still call home. I loved northern Virginia. But after I had fallen in love with my life there, my family moved, resulting in a four year pitstop in Charlotte, North Carolina. My mom's job moved us twice, and when we moved to Indianapolis in 2013, we knew that it would most likely be the last move I would make before graduating Upper School.

I never wanted to move away from the East Coast; I really did love it there. In fact, I remember saying to myself that I would move away from Indiana at my earliest opportunity. "Graduate and then leave" became my mantra.

That theme endured when I started applying to schools. From day one of my 9th grade year, I immediately engrossed myself in colleges and universities on the East Coast. And after finding school after school that I was interested in, I knew that it would take a truly extraordinary opportunity to convince me to stay in Indiana.

But after this long process, I truly believe that I have found that opportunity.

While in Upper School, an interest in politics and current events turned into an infatuation with journalism. Over the last few years, I've had some of the greatest opportunities that an admirer of journalism could ask for. I covered ten Presidential candidates for a professional radio station, shook hands with the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and created a podcasting network run entirely by students.

In the summer of 2019, I was honored to join a group of 51 student journalists from every corner of the United States as a part of the Al Neuharth Free Spirit and Journalism Conference. Being named a Neuharth Scholar of Journalism will forever remain one of my proudest accomplishments, and the amazing friendships I made will last for years to come.

When I returned from the conference, I had another incredibly exciting opportunity waiting for me: an internship with WFYI News, Indianapolis's NPR affiliate. It was so exciting to be able to go into an office

everyday and work with such a talented group of journalists. I want to say thank you to Sarah Neal-Estes for giving me that opportunity; I also *must* say thank you to Lauren Bavis and Lauren Chapman, who were kind enough to allow me to work in their office. I learned so much from them about radio reporting and the ins and outs of professional audio equipment. They are two of the most talented journalists I've ever met, and I highly recommend checking out the amazing work they do.

Those opportunities reinforced everything I knew and loved about journalism; I am so excited to continue

studying it in college.

After a nine-month process, full of essays, applications, and admission decisions, I have decided that, next Fall, I will attend Indiana University as part of their prestigious Ernie Pyle Scholars program. The selective journalism honors program provides students with travel experiences, networking opportunities, and working relationships with esteemed faculty mentors. I will join Indiana University's Hutton Honors College, majoring in both Journalism and Political Science.

From the minute I stepped onto Indiana University's gorgeous campus, I truly felt at home. The school's faculty truly cares about its students. The school boasts a student-centered atmosphere and program, placing a high premium on student-organized and student-led media platforms. Franklin Hall – the home of the Media School – is a beautiful, modern building filled with state-of-the-art technology built for professional journalists. And finally, a university that looks enormous from the outside has a perfectly sized Media School that supports and cares for its students.



June 17, 2019: Examining a brief in a mock First Amendment lawsuit before arguing the case in the District of Columbia Federal District Court.



October 17, 2019: In Front of the historic Indiana University Sample Gates



Photos: Indiana University Media

There are so many reasons why I am where I am today. This college process was not an easy one, and it wouldn't have been possible without a such an amazing, supportive group of people. It would be impossible to individually name every single person, but there are a few that I need to mention.

First, I need to thank my parents, who have sacrificed so much for me. They're the reason I've been able to go to a school I love, not to mention the countless opportunities they've provided for me.

There have been difficult days over the last few years, and on those days, it wasn't only my parents who were there, but also my brother MJ. When I think about what I'll miss most in college, you, MJ, fall at the top of that list (sorry, parents).

There aren't enough words to describe how thankful I am for Park Tudor School. I cannot have imagined a more supportive, student-centered, and welcoming community than PT. From the minute I arrived on campus in 6th grade, I have truly felt at home. I am so honored to become an alumnus of the institution I love, and I want to thank every teacher, sports coach, staff member, and administrator at the school for all the amazing work they do.

Mr. Summerville has been the best adviser I could have ever asked for. Mr. Summerville, from school decisions to personal ones, you've always been in my corner. Ms.

Stemen, my college counselor, helped me build an academic profile that I could be proud of. She spent countless hours working with me to refine every college essay, email, and letter. I cannot do justice to the thanks that Mr. Summerville and Ms. Stemen deserve for all the help they gave me in this process.

Mr. Sheldon Phelps – the coach of my robotics team – and Ms. Suzanne Phelps have both become wonderful mentors and friends. From every political debate to every programming skills run, I have learned so much from both of them, and I hope I will be able to continue to work with them in the future. One of my fondest memories of Upper School was being a part of the event staff for Indiana's first ever "Signature Event" at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway (see photo). Mr. and Ms. Phelps: thank you for being extraordinary mentors, not only in robotics, but also in life. (This was a cruel joke, by the way, to make me say nice things about you, Mr. Phelps. Just cruel.).

First Amendment advocate Mr. Charles Haynes, who I had the honor of meeting at the 2019 Al Neuharth Free Spirit and



March 19, 2017: Celebrating Matthew's birthday at Benihana



November 9, 2019: Standing in the Indianapolis Motor Speedway's "Mile-End Circle" after successfully beating one of





Speedway's winner's circle after successfully hosting one of Indiana's largest robotics events

Journalism Conference, fundamentally shaped how I feel about the First

Amendment and its principles. While Mr. Haynes may have not known it at the time, the conversation he and I had during his session inspired me to continue my desire to defend the First Amendment. Thank you, Mr. Haynes, for renewing my love for one of our nation's most important values: the Freedom of Speech.



June 17, 2019: Speaking with Mr. Haynes after his speech at the Knight Convention Center in Washington D.C.

Finally, I cannot say any "thank you" without recognizing my amazing friends. You are all the reason I am excited to wake up in the morning. These last few weeks (and soon, months) have been very difficult. None of us have stepped onto campus since March 12, 2020, and many of us haven't seen friends since we left school on the 11th. Not being able to see all of you every day has taught me something: I've taken for granted how supportive you all are. I've missed you so much these last few months.

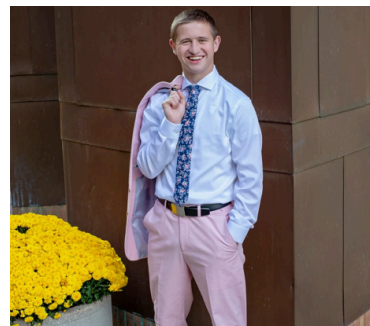
Ms. Webster, the head of Park Tudor's Upper School, sent the Class of 2020 an email earlier this year, just days before the school announced that they would be extending the school's closing well past Spring Break. In that email, I nearly teared up reading one of her messages: "You'll never stop being a Panther."

What I love about Park Tudor is that we are more than a school; we are a community.

Even as we all enter a new stage in our lives, we'll be together forever: as one class. As one Park Tudor. My friends: thank you for all the memories, and I love you all.

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*Here are some other memories and photos from these past few years:*







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