Schoolwide News

The Sky’s Not the Limit
MIT Sloan Fellow and pilot has endless possibilities

By Amy MacMillan

At the age of 3, Ellen Kwame Corkrum, SF ’10, knew she wanted to be an airline pilot. As a young girl in Liberia, her family and teachers laughed it off as a delusion. But young Ellen was serious and remembers the moment she discovered her calling: she had accompanied her family to the port where one of her aunts boarded a ship for Ghana. Ellen looked out at the expansive Atlantic Ocean and thought about traveling to a faraway country. “I thought about how great it would be just to have the freedom to explore, but I didn’t want to do it on the sea. I wanted to fly,” she said.

Ellen received a stellar grammar school education at St. Teresa’s Convent, an all-girls’ Catholic school in Liberia – and briefly considered becoming a nun – but focused on flying. In 1986, at the age of 13, she moved to Minnesota to live with her aunt, the family’s matriarch. Leaving her mom, dad, and 10 siblings back in Liberia was frightening, but Ellen knew it was her ticket to a better life. “I think that in most African countries, coming to the States is a big deal. We understand that this is a place where the possibilities are endless,” she said.

She landed in New York in February and was thrilled by the snow. “It was what I was the most excited about – my first taste of snow,” she laughed. “But, I still remember that feeling of leaving home and the intensity of the separation from my family.”

In high school – her first time at a public, co-ed institution – she immersed herself in sports, where at just a mere 5’7” she excelled in basketball as a “shooting forward.” After she graduated in 1989, she joined the Army as a way to obtain financial support and to alleviate the feeling of being an outsider in American culture. “Some kids might join a fraternity or a gang to feel a sense of belonging, but, I think I found my sense of belonging within the military,” she said.

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The hardships of basic training at Fort Dix were compounded by the First Liberian Civil War which broke out in 1990. Ellen’s parents and brothers and sisters quickly fled to Ghana, but were unreachable for several months. “We were only allowed to make a few phone calls during basic training, but even with that, I still couldn’t contact my parents because they were in transit… it was quite a few weeks of not knowing if they were alive or dead,” she said. Ultimately, her parents arrived safely at the refugee camp in Ghana.

Ellen trained to be a combat medic in the Army, although she still wanted to fly. She needed money to send back home to her family and funding for her own education. “You have to start somewhere. You don’t always get what you want initially,” she mused. While serving in the Army Reserves, she married and had two children – a daughter, Michelle, born in 1991, and a son, Michael, born in 1993.

In 1996, Ellen graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in political science. She began serving on active duty with the military in her new country. Her military compensation also helped her pay for the flight lessons she had always dreamed of. She was stationed at the Oak Harbor Naval Air Station in Washington State after she was commissioned as an officer. By now a single mom, Ellen finally received her commercial pilot and instructor licenses by early 2001.

After September 11, airlines cut back and flying jobs were scarce. Ellen was then offered a position with the Missouri Air National Guard as a navigator. She turned it down. “My goal has always been to be a pilot. If I deviated from that goal, who’s to say how many other goals I would deviate from?” she asked. She was then offered a helicopter pilot slot, which at first she was not keen about, but later, came to understand and appreciate. “As I look back, I’m so glad I took it. It was a very humbling experience! I went into training thinking, ‘This will be easy,’ because I was already a ‘fixed-wing’ pilot, but helicopter flying is so much more difficult.”

After she earned her helicopter license – “It makes you a very fine pilot because of the finesse required to fly helicopters” – she stayed in the Missouri Guard until 2005. In 2007, she landed her first commercial airline pilot position with the Mesa Air Group, where she flew Canadair Regional jets 200, 700, and 900 series. She continues to fly the Utility Combat and Assault helicopter, the Black Hawk, for the National Guard part-time.

A short article in USA Today last year piqued her interest in the MIT Global Airline Industry Program. Ellen had always

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wanted to run an airline either in the United States, where she’s now a citizen, or perhaps in her native Western Africa. The interest led her to the MIT Sloan School and ultimately to the MIT Sloan Fellows program where she felt she’d fit the Sloan Fellow profile.

Now that she’s here, Ellen is thrilled to be a part of the Fellows Program. “Sometimes I still pinch myself that I’m actually here. I am really here at MIT as a Sloan Fellow! It’s an awesome program,” she added.

She’s eagerly soaking up the material, and she particularly found Professor Gabriel Bitran’s class on Management of Supply Networks for Products and Services (15.778) to be relevant and interesting. “We talked a lot about logistical operations, which of course applies to any industry, but particularly to the airline industry,” she said. In addition to her Fellows courses, she is taking electives within the Global Airline Industry Studies Program.

It’s a topic she’s passionate about. The anemic airlines industry needs to learn from effective leaders in order to turn around. She’s also willing to learn from such leaders and eagerly listened when former American Airlines President and Chairman Robert Crandall addressed the Sloan Fellows last month. According to Ellen, he said, “Leaders have only one role in life – fix the problem, don’t make any excuses. Your objective is not to make money, so if you talk about shareholder accounts, you will not succeed. Behave in a way that deserves respect.”

The decline in employee morale at the airlines affects customer satisfaction with service and airline performance. Ellen said, “One of the concepts I learned in the military is that the impact of leadership decisions trickle down from senior leaders to troops on the battlefield. This applies in the civilian sectors as well.”

She continued, “What can we learn from strong leaders within the airline industry? How can we employ this to serve our customers better, build strong airline companies, and improve shareholders’ value?”

When Ellen graduates with an MBA in the spring, she hopes that her total experience as a Sloan Fellow will position her to answer these questions and perhaps ultimately, lead her to senior leadership roles within the airline industry.

**Financial Services: Prospects for your Future**

On Thursday, September 24 at 12:00 p.m. in Wong Auditorium, the MIT Sloan Community will welcome Lawrence K. Fish in conversation with MIT Sloan’s own Simon Johnson to kick-off this semester’s Dean’s Innovative Leader Series. Larry Fish led Citizens Financial Group, Inc. for over 20 years. Simon Johnson is a Professor of Global Economics and Management here at MIT Sloan. A light lunch will be available beginning at 11:30 a.m. in Ting Foyer and, as usual, we ask that people arrive early, if possible, to have time to eat before the presentation begins promptly at noon. There will also be an opportunity for a small group of students to attend a private lunch with Mr. Fish immediately following the presentation. To be considered for this opportunity, please send e-mail as soon as possible to Cessy Cook at crcook@mit.edu and include your name, program and class year, and contact information.

Larry Fish began his financial career at First National Bank of Boston in 1972, after graduating from Drake University in 1966, and completing an MBA at Harvard. By 1988, Fish was the Chief Executive Officer of Rhode Island-based Citizens Bank and became Chairman four years later. By 2006 and under Fish’s leadership, Citizens had become the eighth-largest retail bank out of the 8,000 in the United States.

Fish is involved in many business and philanthropic activities as well. In July 2003, he was named to the MIT Corporation. In 2007, he was elected as a Fellow into the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. He serves on the FDIC Commission on Economic Inclusion, a panel that provides the FDIC with advice and recommendations on expanding access to banking services by under-served populations.

Infusing his personal mantra, “customers, colleagues, and community,” into the culture of Citizens, Fish
Taylor Schilling (Courtesy of Google Images)

is widely recognized as leading the financial institution towards success. “At Citizens, we focus on people.” Fish believes that in a service industry, there’s little else on which to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

Join us on September 24 for a lively discussion with two of the world’s leading financial experts. The Dean’s Innovative Leader Series is co-sponsored by the MIT Leadership Center and the MIT Sloan Office of External Relations. It brings to campus some of the most influential and innovative leaders from both the public and private sectors who will share lessons learned from their experiences in leading some of the world’s most significant and innovative organizations.

Upcoming Events:
Tuesday, October 27, S.D. Shibulal, Chief Operating Officer and Member of the Board, Infosys Technologies, Ltd.
For more information about upcoming events visit: http://mitsloan.mit.edu/corporate/dils.php.

MIT Sloan Marketing Award Honoring GM Research Pioneer Buck Weaver Is Presented To Columbia University Professor

From the MIT Sloan Media Relations Office

Donald R. Lehmann was honored last week with the Seventh Annual Buck Weaver Award for Marketing, which was presented by MIT Sloan School of Management and General Motors Corp. (NYSE: GM). First established by MIT Sloan in 2003, the award recognizes individuals who have made important contributions to the advancement of theory and practice in marketing science.

Glen Urban, Dean Emeritus and Professor of Marketing at MIT Sloan, and Andy Norton, General Director, Global Consumer and Product Research, presented the award to Lehmann during a two-day symposium of the same name held at the MIT Faculty Club. Lehmann’s presentation was entitled, “Exploring, Explaining and Exploiting Diffusion.” According to Urban, Lehmann was selected by a distinguished committee of marketing specialists.

Did You know...

That Taylor Schilling, daughter of Tish Schilling, Program Director in MIT Sloan’s Office of Executive Education, is playing Veronica the lead role in the new TV show Mercy?

Mercy premieres Wednesday, September 23, at 8:00 p.m., on NBC. The show is set in a gritty New Jersey hospital, and focuses on Veronica Callahan (Taylor), a smart, tough-as-nails nurse who has post-traumatic stress after two tours in Iraq. Callahan is trying to navigate life with alcoholic parents, the blue-collar husband she cheated on and Dr. Sands (James Tupper), the surgeon she had an affair with while stationed overseas. “Veronica’s straddling two worlds; the life that has been chosen for her and this doctor, who represents the possibility of something more,” says Executive Producer Liz Heldens.

For more information on the show visit: http://www.
MIT Sloan Doctoral Student Finalist in Competition

This year’s finalists in the INFORMS/Organization Science Dissertation Proposal Competition, included 65 proposals from doctoral students at 51 universities. Eight finalists were chosen based on evaluations by three reviewers. Thus, the acceptance rate was about twelve percent. The competition was extremely fierce, with many innovative and high-quality proposals submitted. The eight individuals will present their dissertation proposals in October in San Diego, CA, to a distinguished panel of judges who will select the winner and runner-up. Jason Greenberg, a PhD student from MIT Sloan, was nominated for his dissertation entitled, “Lifeblood or Liability? Schumpeter, Stinchcombe, and the Double-edged Sword of Strangers in the Startup Process.”

Jason Greenberg

MBA News

Spring 2010 MIT Sloan MBA International Study Tours

Request for Proposals

The MIT Sloan School supports a number of student-led MBA International Study Tours each year during spring break. If you are interested in planning a Study Tour, the information session for prospective organizers is Wednesday, September 23, from 12:00-1:00 p.m., in E51-335.

What is the fall timeline?

September 23  Information session for prospective organizers from 12:00 – 1:00 p.m. in E51-335
September 23  International study tour RFP posted
October 1  International study tour proposal deadline
Week of October 12  Organizing teams present proposals to Study Tour Selection Committee
Thursday October 20  International study tour selection announcement and International study tour organizers’ guidelines posted
October 20- October 26  Participants’ guidelines posted and organizers start recruiting
October 26  An information session for all trips in Wong Auditorium from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.- all trips are required to present
November 8  Deadline for international study tour participants to submit applications
November 20  International study tour participant decisions announced

Who can answer additional questions?

If you are interested in submitting a proposal, please direct your questions to Paul Buckley, pbuckley@mit.edu in MBA Student Affairs.
$30,000 Lemelson-MIT Student Prize- Applications Open

The $30,000 Lemelson-MIT Student Prize is awarded annually to an inventive MIT graduate student or graduating senior. The Student Prize seeks to serve as a catalyst for burgeoning inventors. In addition to the financial reward, publicity surrounding the Prize results in attention to the recipient’s inventions and exposes students to the scientific, business, and investment communities.

Applicants can be individual inventors or have developed a key invention(s) within a team environment. All applicants benefit from networking opportunities with each other, the MIT community, and Lemelson-MIT Award Winners. Deadline for applications is Thursday, December 10. This event is open to the MIT community only.

For more information contact Ed Canton, 617-452-2145, or lemelson_awards@mit.edu, or visit: http://web.mit.edu/invent/a-student.html.

Movies
Now Playing on Campus...

*Watchmen (2009)*

300’s Zack Snyder brings Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ critically acclaimed comic book *Watchmen* to the big screen, courtesy of DC Comics and Warner Bros. Pictures. Set in an alternate universe circa 1985, the film’s world is a highly unstable one where a nuclear war is imminent between America and Russia. Superheroes have long been made to hang up their tights thanks to the government-sponsored Keene Act, but that all changes with the death of The Comedian (Jeffrey Dean Morgan), a robust ex-hero commando whose mysterious freefall out a window perks the interest of one of the country’s last remaining vigilantes, Rorschach (Jackie Earle Haley). His investigation leads him to caution many of his other former costumed colleagues, including Dr. Manhattan, Night Owl (Patrick Wilson), Ozymandias (Matthew Goode), Sally Jupiter (Carla Gugino), and her daughter, The Silk Spectre (Malin Akerman). Heralded for bringing the world of superheroes into the literary world, *Watchmen* gave the super-powered mythos a real-life grounding that had been missing in mainstream comics to that point.

Playing on September 25, at 6:30 and 10:00 p.m. in 26-100 and again September 27, at 6:30 p.m. in 26-100.

*From the Lecture Series Committee website. All movies are just $4.*
Kilimanjaro: A Photographic Journey To The Roof of Africa

Author Michel Moushabeck and photographer Hiltrud Schulz will talk about exploring and climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro. *Kilimanjaro: A Photographic Journey to the Roof of Africa* combines their story with hundreds of color photographs of their ascent of Africa’s highest mountain. They’ll discuss their preparation for the climb, travel to Africa, trekking from jungle to arctic climates on the Lemosho route, photographed views, and the experience of reaching the 19,340 foot Uhuru Peak summit.

This event takes place Wednesday, September 30, 6:00 p.m., American Repertory Theatre Meeting Room at Two Arrow Street, Cambridge. Admission is free. For reservations call 617-649-5700 x21 or events@geb.com.

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**Quote of the Week**

“Creative ideas flourish best in a shop which preserves some spirit of fun. Nobody is in business for fun, but that does not mean there cannot be fun in business.”  
Leo Burnett

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**SUSTAINABILITY@SLOAN**

Here’s a simple way to reduce your carbon footprint. Leave your car at home just twice a week and you can cut greenhouse gas emissions by 1,600 pounds per year. Combine errands and shopping trips so you need to drive fewer times. *(Source: Environmental Protection Agency)*
This week the Career Development Office and Alumni Relations

Name: Kerri Paris
Department, title: Career Development Office-Assistant Director, Recruiting
Office location: E51-203
I last worked at: Atlantic Associates, Inc. (IT Staffing Firm)
The last book I read was: Keeping Faith by Jodi Picoult
Starbucks or Dunkin’ Donuts? Dunkin’ Donuts
Red Sox, Patriots, Celtics, or Bruins? Or another favorite team: Red Sox
When I’m not at work, I like to: Try new restaurants, travel or plan the next time I am going to travel.

Name: Danielle Anger
Department, title: MIT Sloan Career Development Office, Recruiting Coordinator
Office location: E51-203
I last worked at: American University’s Kogod School of Business
The last book I read was: Most likely something by Jodi Picoult
Starbucks or Dunkin’ Donuts? Dunkin’ Donuts
Red Sox, Patriots, Celtics, or Bruins? Or another favorite team: Toss-up between the Sox and the Pats; Celts are a close third too!
When I’m not at work, I like to: Spend time with my husband and our two boxers; Relax with family and friends; I also enjoy reading, movies, event planning, and being at the beach.

Name: Elizabeth Laipson
Department, title: Associate Director, Alumni Relations
Office location: 30 Memorial Drive, E60
I last worked at: an investment firm.
The last book I read was: Behind the Scenes at the Museum
Starbucks or Dunkin’ Donuts? Hmmm... depends on the day. I think I’d have to say Dunkin’ Donuts.
Red Sox, Patriots, Celtics, or Bruins? Or another favorite team: Chicago Bulls (I hail from Chicago)
When I’m not at work, I like to: play tennis and be with friends.

Sarah Foote