

POINT PARK

U N I V E R S I T Y

For Immediate Release

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Top 10 CNN Hero honoree, city Housing Authority official top speakers at Point Park graduation ceremonies

-- University presenting honorary degree to its sixth president, Katherine Henderson --

PITTSBURGH, PA – Dr. **Jim Withers**, named a Top 10 CNN Hero in 2016 for his street medicine program that developed into Operation Safety Net, will be Point Park University’s featured Commencement Speaker.

Katherine Henderson, Ph.D., who served as president of Point Park from 1997 to 2006, will receive an honorary degree. **Aster Teclay**, a senior project manager at the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, will give the keynote address at the 2019 Hooding and Degree Conferral.

Commencement Ceremony

Commencement will be at 12:30 p.m. Saturday, April 27, at PPG Paints Arena. Doors open at 11 a.m.

Dr. Jim Withers, the featured Commencement speaker, is a physician within the Pittsburgh Mercy health system and an Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh. In 1992, Dr. Withers began to dress as a homeless person and make “house calls” under the bridges and along the river banks of Pittsburgh in the company of a formerly homeless man. This led to the founding of Pittsburgh Mercy’s Operation Safety Net (OSN), one of the first full-time, comprehensive medical services of its kind for the unsheltered homeless. In 2009, Dr. Withers created the Street Medicine Institute to focus on helping communities establish Street Medicine programs, improve existing practice and promote the “classroom of the streets” model in medical education. There are now over 30 medical schools with associated street medicine programs.

“Point Park is proud of the work that’s been done on campus over the years to support Operation Safety Net. Jim’s incredible public service is reflective of the community engagement work our students, faculty and staff perform all the time,” said Paul Hennigan, president of Point Park University. “I can’t think of anyone better to inspire our graduates as they head out into the real world.”

Katherine Henderson, Ph.D., who will receive an honorary degree, was the sixth president of Point Park, serving from 1997 to 2006. Under her leadership, Point Park experienced significant enrollment growth and she successfully led the capital campaign to build the George Rowland White Performance Center.

"Dr. Henderson is a critically important figure in the history of Point Park University as it exists today," Hennigan said. "I am excited to welcome her back to receive this well-deserved honor and shine a spotlight on her accomplishments as president."

Ashley Williams, BA in theatre arts, will be the outstanding graduating senior speaker. **Bob O'Gara**, retiring professor of Public Relations & Advertising, will serve as Grand Marshal. It is expected that 713 students will graduate with degrees in 65 different majors.

Hooding and Degree Conferral

The Hooding Ceremony will be at 9 a.m. Saturday, April 27, at PPG Paints Arena. Doors open at 7:30 a.m.

Keynote speaker Aster Teclay is the Housing Authority's primary liaison with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and analyzes legislation and crafts policies to improve housing programs. A native of Montgomery County, Md., Teclay completed a dual degree from the University of Pittsburgh in 2010 before beginning her career in public service. In 2014, she earned an MBA in the Sports, Arts and Entertainment Management Program at Point Park University, and recently earned an MA in public management from Carnegie Mellon University.

Teclay is cofounder of Invest in Her, an organization with the goal to enhance the volume and sustainability of female entrepreneurs in the Greater Pittsburgh Region. She also serves on the Urban Redevelopment Authority's micro enterprise loan committee, which provides loans to small businesses.

"Aster is precisely the kind of student Point Park prides itself on developing and supporting," Hennigan said. "She has chosen to build a successful career that involves lifting others along the way. We couldn't be more proud of what she's accomplished and can't wait to see what she does next."

Kaisha Jantsch, MA in media communication, will be the outstanding graduate student speaker. **Jamie Talbott**, Ph.D., NCC, professor of Leadership and Community Engagement, will serve as Grand Marshal. It is expected that 234 students will receive graduate degrees across 18 master's programs offered at the University. In addition, eight students will receive Doctor of Education degrees in Leadership and Administration, and one student will receive a Ph.D. in Community Engagement.

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Point Park University, immersed in the heart of Downtown Pittsburgh, focuses on student success through innovative experiential learning opportunities. Point Park enrolls more than 4,000 students in over 100 undergraduate, master's and doctoral programs offered through its Conservatory of Performing Arts, Rowland School of Business, and schools of Arts and Sciences, Communication, and Education. The University's alumni and students represent all 50 states and 34 countries around the world. Visit PointPark.edu to learn more.