

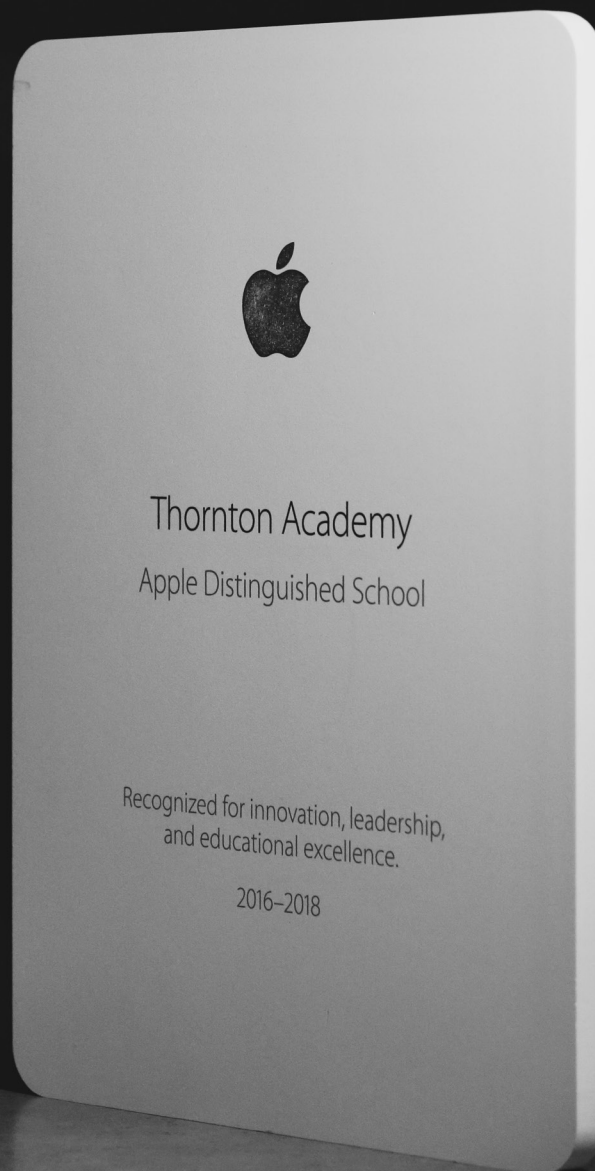
# POSTSCRIPTS

Thornton Academy's Alumni Magazine

Spring 2017 • Vol. 52, No. 1

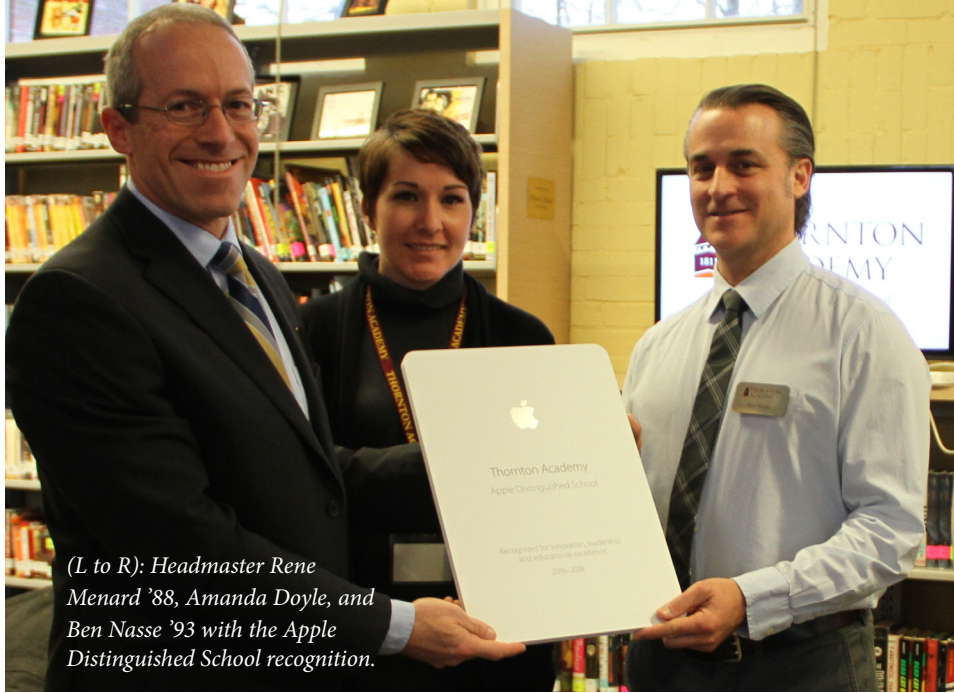
## Achievement

*The Educational Excellence of*  
**Benjamin Nasse '93**





# How tech guru, father, husband, triathlete, & creative artist Ben Nasse '93 rises to the top



(L to R): Headmaster Rene Menard '88, Amanda Doyle, and Ben Nasse '93 with the Apple Distinguished School recognition.

As Director of Technology at Thornton Academy, Ben Nasse '93 lives and breathes in a world of innovation. He's tasked with keeping the school not only up-to-date with the latest hardware and software, but also with envisioning how technology transforms learning in the classroom from a pedagogical perspective. His dedication garnered global recognition on November 29, 2016 when representatives from Apple visited campus to recognize Thornton Academy as an Apple Distinguished School. This distinction is reserved for programs that meet criteria for innovation, leadership,

and educational excellence, while demonstrating a clear vision of exemplary learning environments. Ben explained, "Apple came to us, recognizing that we were fulfilling many of their goals and asked, 'Would you consider applying?'"

Thornton launched a one-to-one iPad program in the fall of 2014 to equip students and staff with the tools necessary for success in a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment, strategically aligning professional development and curriculum objectives. Now in the third year of deployment, all students in grades 8—12 are issued an iPad

mini, while all students in grades 6 and 7 are issued an 11-inch MacBook Air. Faculty members receive iPad devices and 13-inch MacBook laptops. From interactive foreign language quizzes to statistical applications for physics experiments to movie-making programs used to interpret the texts of Shakespeare, teachers and students alike are discovering new possibilities for synthesizing content.

Senator Angus S. King, Jr., who first proposed a one-to-one technology program through The Maine Learning Technology Initiative in 2000 as Governor of Maine, said, "It's really

*The IT Department is responsible for hardware (tablets, computers, printers, phones, copiers, security cameras, and their infrastructure), software (applications like Microsoft), and services (including Moodle, Gmail, eBackpack, and PowerSchool). Ben is a member of the International Society of Technology and Education (ISTE) and attends their annual conference where the industry's best practices, standards, and goals are shared. He maintains relationships with vendors so that they are people he can trust—for example, he has known Apple Representative Tara Maker "since Day 1" of the initiative. In the photo at left, Ben discusses Thornton's program to visiting educators during the Apple School Visit in November 2016. The bins are used for organizing all iPad devices.*



*"I honestly feel like I won the lottery. I cannot imagine my life going any better."*

fantastic the way you've realized the vision of the one-to-one program and have taken it beyond hardware by integrating into the classroom. That was the dream. That was the vision. I always tried to communicate [that] this isn't a hardware project; it's a learning project. You've really taken that idea and realized it in very special ways, and that's why you've been recognized by Apple. I still think there are lots of things we can do to improve and

Mannequin Challenge went viral on the Internet earlier this academic year, Ben grabbed his camera and filmed students in his campus apartment as they appeared to be "frozen" while decorating an elaborate Christmas tree, strumming a guitar, snacking on cookies, and laughing with friends. It's just one small example of the caring environment the Nasses provide. "I cannot overstate how transformational the Residential Life program has

That's what differentiates Thornton from other boarding schools—there's a commitment to family life. Many of the dorm parents have their own children." With four daughters of his own, Ben is well versed in parenting. Harper (age 11) and Emerson (age 9) are at Burns School, Scout '22 is a student at Thornton Academy Middle School, and Isabella Rosado '11 resides in Rhode Island, is married, and has a baby boy. "I honestly feel like I won the



Ben's daughters (L to R): Emerson '26, Isabella '11, Scout '22, and Harper '24

build on the potential that technology gives us in our classrooms and you're leading the way in Maine."

Beyond overseeing technology at Thornton, Ben is involved in nearly all aspects of campus life. He and his wife Jodi serve as Dorm Parents in Stasio Hall, which welcomes girls from countries across the world, including Poland, Ukraine, Rwanda, Italy, Spain, Vietnam, China, Hong Kong, Korea, and Turkey. When the

been to Thornton Academy. The students are kind, polite, and they take their studies seriously," said Ben. This past November, Thornton held the first annual International Alumni Reunion [see page 35], which Ben said was an emotional and heartwarming experience. The international students "see Thornton as their second home. These are kids with whom I ate dinner every day for years. They talk about how they miss it, about the strong feeling of family.

lottery. I cannot imagine my life going any better," said Ben.

While a student at Thornton, Ben played soccer, serving as a captain his senior year, was a member of Student Council, and took an interest in history and English courses. He distinctly remembers creating a video about *Catcher in the Rye* for David Ruff's class, using a VHS camera that could edit by pushing the Start and Stop button, an amazing feature at



# “I cannot overstate how transformational the Residential Life program has been to Thornton Academy. The students are kind, polite, and they take their studies seriously.”

the time. He presented the video at the University of Southern Maine where he continued his education by enrolling in Media Studies. Immersed in video editing, he basically “lived in the computer lab” mastering Final Cut Pro, which provided a strong technical foundation and led him to sign up for a very challenging programming class. Ben remembers it as an invigorating and humbling experience. “I was so scared, but I remember saying, ‘I really like C++ and Java. I can do this.’”

After graduating from USM in 2003, he seized the opportunity to return to his alma mater to work in tech support where he could bring his experience to “add immediate value” to the school. Henry Beeukes was the Director of IT at the time. “It was so fun to go to work because it improved people’s lives. I loved being able to add that value,” said Ben. When the Director position opened in 2006 Ben transitioned into the role, moving the IT Department more towards the network side of operations because of the interconnected nature of educational technology.

Ben’s team currently includes Technology Integration Specialist Amanda Doyle, IT Assistant Bruce Van Der Riet, and IT Assistant Amanda (Tanguay) Normand ’06. Beyond

assisting with solving problems, they also work to empower staff and students to be able to find solutions independently, while encouraging faculty to innovate their teaching methods. Ben explained that they are constantly asking questions like, “How do we integrate? How do we get staff

faculty to use the exact same devices, and continuing to push forward with initiatives that enhance classroom experiences.

Whether he’s playing tug-of-war at Hill Stadium for the Dorm Olympics, watching his daughter dance

across Garland Auditorium’s stage in *The Lion King*, or serving dinner for students at his apartment in Stasio Hall on a snow day, Ben goes above and beyond any job description to ensure that the Thornton Academy experience is rewarding, distinguished, and fun. His hard work ethic carries over to his free time as he participates in several triathlons, including the iconic half Ironman—a demanding course consisting of a 1.2-mile swim, a 56-mile bike ride, and a 13.1-mile run. He likes that it’s a personal challenge requiring stamina. Motoring through the water, pedaling

down a paved road, or leaping across the finishing line, similar to when he’s tackling a complicated technology problem at school, he’s only competing with one person: himself.

So...how about a full Ironman?

“No, the half was enough for me!” he said with a laugh. But with Ben, you just never know.



*Students from all over the world love to spend time in the Nasse Family’s apartment in Stasio Hall.*

to adopt new technologies into daily practices?” From devices in classrooms to locking doors to overseeing the Residential Program’s needs, the IT Department’s responsibilities are far-reaching. Now that Thornton has been recognized as an Apple Distinguished School, what comes next? Technology doesn’t sit idly. The team is hard at work putting together long-term strategic plans and partnerships with goals that include moving students and



“Ben is a thoughtful, inspiring, and immensely supportive leader. His experience as an alum and TA parent contribute to his dedication to student achievement and ultimately impact the TA experience in so many (often invisible) ways. I once heard a fellow colleague say he’s the best example of what a dad should be. I’d add to that by saying that’s true of him as a leader as well. He’s a person who asks the right questions even when they’re tough ones.” - Technology Integration Specialist Amanda Doyle



“Ben is a pleasure to work with and for; he is a wealth of knowledge and always willing to help out in any way he can. It is refreshing to work for someone who lets us get on with the job and who only wants the best for his staff.” - IT Assistant Bruce Van Der Riet



“Whenever I’m asked about my job, one of the first things I say is how lucky I am to work with such remarkable thinkers. Ben is one of the most thoughtful people I know! The attention he puts into every decision, personal and professional, and its impact on others is profound and commendable.” - IT Assistant Amanda (Tanguay) Normand ’06



Ben’s family has strong connections to Thornton Academy. His mother, Mary Nasse, was an Associate Headmaster for Student Services at Thornton for several years and taught special education. Ben’s brothers are Jeffrey ’90 who is a Dean of Broward College, and David ’95, who is a lawyer in Washington D.C. Ben’s daughters will all be TA alumnae. Top photo (L to R): Kelly Munyuza ’16 of Rwanda, Nil Berke ’15 from Turkey, Jodi Nasse, and Scout Nasse ’22 compete at the Dorm Olympics. Right photo: Ben celebrates the wedding day of his daughter, Isabella Rosado ’11. Bottom left: Ben’s daughters congratulate him as he finishes a challenging half Ironman race.