

# POINT PARK UNIVERSITY

**For Immediate Release**

**April 14, 2022**

## **Elena LaQuatra, Point Park alum and WTAE anchor, featured speaker for Point Park's return to full Commencement ceremony at PPG Paints Arena**

-- Posthumous doctoral degree will be presented to late Mt. Lebanon High principal --

**PITTSBURGH, PA – Elena LaQuatra**, a 2014 graduate of Point Park University and news anchor for WTAE, will be Point Park University's featured 2022 Commencement speaker.

Dr. **Jim Withers**, named a Top 10 CNN Hero in 2016 for his street medicine program that developed into Operation Safety Net, will receive an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters. Dr. **Leatra Tate**, a graduate of Point Park's Community Engagement Doctoral Program and a professor at Erie County Community College, will give the keynote address at the 2022 Hooding and Degree Conferral.

Brian McFeeley, former principal of Mt. Lebanon High School, will be awarded a posthumous Doctor of Education degree in Leadership and Administration. McFeeley died in March at the age of 49 before he could complete work on his dissertation in Point Park's program.

"Brian dedicated his life to education and demonstrated all the characteristics of a great leader. He brought integrity, fairness and encouragement to his work and relationships," said Dr. Karen McIntyre, director of the Doctoral Program. "Brian's commitment to completing his doctoral degree was evident in how he approached his coursework and research. Awarding this degree to Brian is representative of the program's motto: Who you are is how you lead."

Both ceremonies will include members of the 2020 and 2021 graduating classes who wanted to come back to experience a full graduation ceremony.

### **Commencement Ceremony**

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

Elena LaQuatra, the featured Commencement speaker, is the morning traffic anchor and noon news anchor for WTAE, Pittsburgh's ABC affiliate. LaQuatra graduated from Point Park in 2014 with a bachelor's degree in Broadcast Reporting. She joined WTAE as a digital content creator after graduation, then spent time as a reporter and anchor for TV station in Erie before returning to WTAE as a reporter in 2018.

When she was 4 years old, LaQuatra lost all hearing in both ears due to bacterial meningitis. After receiving Cochlear implants, she spent years rehabilitating her listening and spoken language skills. She is an ambassador for numerous nonprofit organizations and was crowned Miss Pennsylvania USA in 2016.

“Point Park University is so immensely proud to be associated with Elena. Her talent, work ethic and resiliency are extraordinary,” said Don Green, President of Point Park. “It’s enormously beneficial for our graduates to hear Elena’s inspirational story as they head out to chart their own paths and make an impact in the real world.”

Dr. Jim Withers, who will receive an honorary degree, 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 riverbanks of Pittsburgh in the company of a formerly homeless man. This led to the founding of Pittsburgh Mercy’s Operation Safety Net, 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 more than 30 medical schools with associated street medicine programs.

“Point Park has long worked with Operation Safety Net through our clinical-community psychology program and we’ve seen first-hand the impact it has on the ground,” Green said. “Jim is an extraordinary public servant, and highly deserving of this honor.”

**Zachary Reed**, BA in screenwriting, will be the featured student speaker. **Dr. Channa Newman**, Professor of French and Cultural Studies, and Chair of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, will serve as Grand Marshal. It is expected that about 330 students will graduate with degrees in 65 different majors, while more than 100 members of the Classes of 2020 and 2021 also will be honored.

### **Hooding and Degree Conferral**

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

Keynote speaker Dr. Leatra Tate is a full-time professor at Erie County Community College in Pennsylvania, where she develops essential elements of the Social & Behavioral Sciences Department and curriculum. Dr. Tate also is self-employed, offering individualized writing support and editing for graduate students through LBT Dissertation Coaching & Editing. She earned an M.A. in clinical-community psychology from Point Park in 2015 and a Ph.D. in community engagement from Point Park in 2019.

“Leatra is a first-generation college graduate who has worked tirelessly to build a successful career while being an advocate and support system for other young people trying to follow her path,” Green said.

“She is representative of the type of high-caliber people Point Park sends out in the community from our graduate programs.”

**Maria Lewis**, MEd with certification in Pre-K through Grade 4, will be the featured student speaker. **Dr. Steven Hallock**, Professor of Journalism and Director of the School of Communication Graduate Programs, will serve as Grand Marshal. It is expected that about 140 students will receive graduate degrees across 18 master’s and doctoral programs across the university.

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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](http://PointPark.edu) to learn more.*