

MGM Executive Endows Scholarship for Theatre Students

by Kristin Kemp



Anyone who watched television in the 1990s likely recalls the nerdy character of Steve Urkel on *Family Matters* and his signature line, “did I do that?”

Geoff Gordon (BA '73, theatre), retired vice president at MGM Worldwide Television, created the character and coined the line while he was an executive story editor at ABC. He helped break down racial divides by imbuing African-American narratives into mainstream television through his work on several shows, including *The Jeffersons*, *Roc* and *Baldwin Heights*.

Armed with his theatre degree from DU, Gordon entered the entertainment industry as an actor. One of Gordon’s earliest professional acting experiences introduced him to breaking new ground in Hollywood: he landed the voice role of television’s first cartoon rapper when he played Haggie in *The Gary Coleman Show*, a Hanna-Barbera cartoon.

In February 2015 Gordon made an estate commitment to endow a scholarship for DU juniors studying theatre. His gift is part of DU’s scholarship matching program that matches donations dollar-for-dollar to double the impact of an endowed scholarship fund. Gordon’s scholarship will be a gap-closure award to offset the burden of the recipients’ loans. Preference will be given to students from underrepresented populations, including self-identifying LGBTQA students.

“Geoff’s career path is nothing short of inspirational. He followed his dreams to be an actor. Then, as an executive in a predominately white industry, he helped close the racial divide with his groundbreaking work to put the Hollywood spotlight – literally – on African American characters,” said Danny McIntosh, dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. “So the scholarship he has endowed for underrepresented theatre students is perfectly fitting. He left an important legacy in the entertainment industry, and now he has created a legacy of fostering inclusive excellence at DU, too.”

When Gordon left Denver to pursue his dream of becoming an actor, he first found work as an NBC page in Burbank, CA, handing out prize envelopes to winners of Stump the Band on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*.

Soon afterward he starred in George Clinton’s music video “Last Dance,” where he played a love-struck nerd. Ironically, he later created the *Family Matters* break-out nerdy character, Steve Urkel. “I’m worried that the phrase ‘did I do that?’ may end up on my tombstone, so I’ve opted for cremation,” joked Gordon.

Gordon also wrote for several ground breaking television shows, including working with Norman Lear on *The Jeffersons*, and for Fox Network’s comedy series *Roc*. He created and wrote a TV pilot, *Baldwin*

Heights, which depicted the life of African-American upper-middle class families. Gordon's work carved the way for subsequent television programming to regularly feature more diverse main characters.

The second part of Gordon's career was as a studio executive at MGM Worldwide Television where he served as vice president of marketing, publicity and new media during the industry's volatile transition into the internet era.

Upon retirement, Gordon moved back to Denver in 2014. "I'm delighted to return to my Colorado roots and to be rejoining the DU family. But after living in California for 40 years, I just wish the winters weren't so cold here!" said Gordon, who recently accepted DU's invitation to join the [AHSS Advisory Board](#). "I'm looking forward to being part of this vibrant community. I've been spending a lot of time on campus meeting new people and attending theatre productions. I'm amazed by the energy and talent of today's theatre students."

Gordon's scholarship funding will be dispersed to students for the first time this spring. \$100 million in new scholarship support to students at DU has been generated since 2010 thanks to [DU's matching scholarship program](#).

[Photo: Dean McIntosh (left) and Geoff Gordon sign an endowed scholarship gift agreement.]