MED Researcher, Alum Make TIME’s Most Influential People List

Ann McKee “may have saved my life,” former San Francisco 49ers linebacker Chris Borland writes in TIME magazine’s annual list of the world’s 100 most influential people. Her research into chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), the progressive brain disease crippling many athletes and soldiers, persuaded Borland to abandon pro football after just one season.

Joining McKee, a School of Medicine professor of neurology and pathology, on TIME’s list is Carmen Yulín Cruz Soto (CAS’84, Hon.’18), mayor of San Juan, P.R., cited for her “passionate, courageous and articulate” advocacy for the island after it was devastated by Hurricane Maria last September. The storm caused up to $95 billion in damage and plunged the island into a humanitarian crisis.

Cruz, who spoke at BU’s Baccalaureate Service May 20, received an honorary degree at the University’s 145th Commencement (see page 4).

McKee says TIME’s honor is a tribute to her research team. They also made news this year with a study suggesting that the disease may not be caused by concussions, as had been suspected, but by repeated head injuries. If true, efforts to protect athletes from concussions would have to be redirected toward the more difficult task of reducing head impacts and “the fundamental danger these activities pose to human health,” McKee said at the time.

In December the Boston Globe anointed her 2017 Bostonian of the Year. RICH BARLOW

BU Hub Debuts This Fall

More than 400 classes in University-wide general education program will span disciplines

Scientists who defy authorities, and the social and moral consequences of their defiance, are the subjects of Richard Samuel Deese (GRS’95,’07), a College of General Studies lecturer in social sciences. “It requires courage.” Deese backs his statement with examples. In addition to Galileo’s famous flip-off to the Vatican when he showed that the Earth circled the sun, Albert Einstein’s political views prompted the subversion-obsessed FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to open a file on the brilliant physicist. Chemical companies spent money smearing Rachel Carson for her exposé of the pesticide DDT’s toxicity in the 1960s.

Less known to Americans, Chinese astrophysicist and human rights activist Fang Lizhi fled to the United States in the 1980s after the People’s Republic spilled blood at Tiananmen Square in 1989.
Meet Warren Towers’ Omelet Lady

CECILIA LOPEZ

Dining Services employee is a campus celebrity

Cecilia Lopez makes more than 300 omelets on a typical day.

Students may not know her name, but chances are that if they’ve ever had an omelet at Warren Towers, they know her face. Cecilia Lopez has been a Dining Services employee for 25 years, and could rightly be called a campus celebrity, as famous for knowing the orders of her regulars as she is for her delicious omelets.

While her shift technically starts each day at 5 am, Lopez likes to arrive at work 30 minutes early to change clothes and arrange her hair. She boils water for the oatmeal and then begins stocking the omelet station with onions, tomatoes, peppers, ham, and more. “Everything has to be perfect by 7 am,” she says through a translator (her first language is Spanish).

She greets each customer, always asking first how they are, then how they want their omelet prepared. Lopez has a college-age daughter and takes a genuine interest in the students, serving as a kind of mother figure, commiserating with them if they are sick or have pulled an all-nighter. “When I see a student that is very tired, I try to encourage them,” she says.

Born in El Salvador, Lopez came to the United States at the age of 19, arriving in Houston, Tex. “At that time the revolution and guerrillas were emerging in my country,” she says, “and they were kidnapping young women my age, so my mother was very worried.”

In 1992, she moved to Boston and started working at BU part time. Her first job was as a dining hall custodian. At the time, she says, she didn’t know much English. One day, a coworker asked if she would like to serve food, and from there, she went on to work the grill and prepare burritos before becoming an omelet chef 15 years ago. By her own estimate, a typical morning sees her making more than 300 omelets.

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When she isn’t working, she loves to watch the Discovery Network and cook for her daughter, but only on weekends. One of her specialties is the traditional Salvadorean dish pupusa, a corn tortilla stuffed with a savory filling. Other favorite dishes include tamales, enchiladas, and soup. Eggs are almost never on the menu, she says. “I don’t buy any eggs because I see too many eggs here.” AMY LASKOWSKI