

MAX CLARK '04

BY MEGAN MC MORRIS

Max Clark is a person who believes that everything happens for a reason. He believes in serendipity, in reading the signs to follow the next step in front of you, even if you don't know exactly where it might lead.

In fact, this life philosophy is what the 45-year-old Wright State Boonshoft School of Medicine 2004 grad credits for getting him to where he is today: chief physician of Disney Cruise Line.

It seems like his path to Disney was destined all along, even if the route to get there was circuitous at times.

OHIO BACKGROUND, WANDERLUST SPIRIT

While Clark spent his high school years in Beavercreek, he was born in California at Travis Air Force Base. His dad is an Air Force physician, and grew up in Ogden, Utah; Cherry Hill, New Jersey; and Baton Rouge, Mississippi. "That was all before I started third grade," he said. "My parents loved to travel overseas, too, and they planted a travel bug in me as well."

He originally chose Miami University for undergrad, expected to study economics. "Growing up, I preferred social studies—history and geography—and did not expect to pursue medicine," he said.

One memorable class at Miami clued him in to his potential future in medicine: Human physiology professor noted his talent and encouraged him to pursue medicine. "In the back of my mind, I always thought medicine was interesting, of course, because, after all, I grew up around it," he said.

While he has always been a natural student, it was at Miami where he first felt that existential "where do I belong" feeling. "It was a really good school, but socially it wasn't the right fit for me," he recalled. "It's frat-heavy, and I'm the antithesis of a frat guy. I just wasn't finding my place."

Returning to Beavercreek, he decided to continue his collegiate education at Wright State, which was a familiar stomping ground (his dad is an associate professor emeritus of medicine).

Going back to his "hometown" college suited him. For one thing, as a self-described night owl, he enjoyed the flexibility of the university's night classes. And with a built-in social network of high school friends already attending Wright State, it felt more at home for him.

Still, he carried around that nagging feeling of wondering where he belonged.

"I was still figuring out who I was and where my place was in the world," he said. As his med school peers started choosing their specialties, the only thing he knew for certain was that he wasn't ready to start a practice. "I didn't know where I fit in with medicine," he said. "Frankly, I was starting to panic."

Then, he found a perfect solution that allowed him to practice general medicine and gave him an opportunity to explore the world: He enlisted in the Navy.

A 20-YEAR ODYSSEY LEADS HIM HOME

Clark's first stop in the Navy was San Diego, which had a "meant to be" factor. "It felt like it turned out the way it was supposed to be," he said. "I met some amazing people and made lifelong friends."

The Navy certainly allowed him to fulfill his wanderlust dreams. In addition to San Diego, he has been stationed in Key West, Hawaii, Japan, Bethesda, Maryland, and Oceanside, California.

Clark would go on to have a 20-year Naval career, adding a master's degree in health systems and administration at Georgetown and a master's degree in public health as part of his residency in preventive health through the Uniformed Services University.

He considers the height of his 20-year Naval career to be the time he spent with health policy in the Naval Headquarters. "I got to work with very impressive leaders," said Clark, who was tasked with drafting the Navy's transgender policy under President Obama.



On paper, it seems like he had done it all. Yet all this time, there was one more experience that had eluded him: He wanted to work for Disney.

NEXT STOP: DISNEY

"We were Disney freaks," Clark recounts, speaking of himself and his high school friend Steve Hankins (also a Wright State grad, 1995 with a bachelor's degree in accountancy). "We were obsessed with working in their college program, and didn't care if we sold T-shirts, we just wanted to work there."

While his Disney dreams were put on hold as his medical and military career took off, the desire to work at Disney was still in the back of his mind. He even worked part-time for two years as an occupational medicine physician at Disneyland while stationed in California.

Then, last year, everything seemed to align at once. Just as he was retiring from a 20-year Naval career, Disney Cruise Lines was expanding and they were looking to bring a medical director in-house.

"2024 was a banner year for me," he said. "I retired after a 20-year career, moved across country to Disney HQ in Orlando, and had a child," he said of son Samson with wife Jennifer.

His job at Disney entails leading the shipboard medical teams and providing clinical oversight of patient care. "Every day is a new challenge; the people, the conditions, and external factors are always changing," he said.

There have already been moments of drama on the high seas. Clark was onboard the Disney Treasure when it was summoned 230 miles off the coast of Bermuda to assist a sinking catamaran in November 2024. "It was exciting to see the crew respond and to see how well trained they are to respond to emergencies, so the best thing I could do was get out of the way."

Speaking with Clark, it's clear that he takes the Disney magic seriously—and that he's found his true calling. "I may be biased, but I do think Disney Cruises does the best job of creating the 'Disney Bubble' and providing that Disney magic, even during a medical experience."

The 2024-25 academic year has been a busy one for Wright State Athletics, both on the fields of competition for our current Raiders as well as our Raider alumni continuing to do great things.

Wright State graduate JoJynn Brown became just the fourth Director of Athletics in Wright State history, and the first woman to assume the role, when she was named to the position last July. A volleyball student-athlete for the Raiders from 1989-92, she also coached the volleyball program and has been a part of Wright State's athletics administration team since 2014.

The Raiders partnered with Southern Ohio Brewing and Wright State graduate James Williams to produce the first-ever Raider branded beer over the fall, with the Rowdy Blonde Ale released at the beginning of basketball season after rounds of voting and tastings to decide the first Raider brew. The Rowdy Blonde Ale is available at Wright State sporting events, Southern Ohio Brewing and local restaurants with pouring rights.

The Stars, Stripes, Flight Classic series was also introduced this season, with the Raiders facing the Air Force Academy on the hardwood and baseball diamond in a pair of matchups that celebrated the region's veterans and active-duty military, along with Wright State's partnership with Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and strong ties to the military. Wright State's largest crowd since 2009, the basketball contest drew 9,672 fans into the Nutter Center.

Brown created Wright State's first National Girls and Women in Sports Day networking luncheon in February, bringing together 110 current Raider student-athletes and staff with over 30 leaders from the community, including Wright State alumni.

Away from campus, Wright State men's basketball alumni Tanner

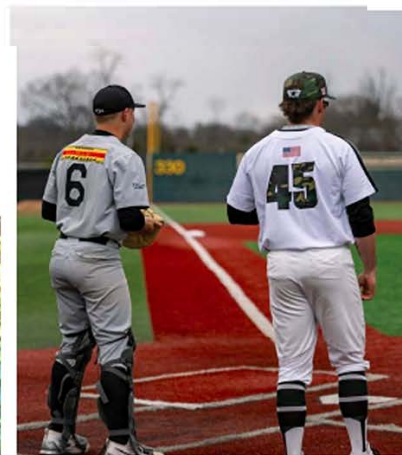


ATHLETICS DIRECTOR JOJYNN BROWN WITH REUNO

Holden and Loudon Love are each currently playing in the NBA G League, with the pair facing off on the court February 7 and 8, 2025. This marked the first time two Raiders players played against each other in the G League and was just the second time Wright State alumni have played against each other professionally in the United States, joining several meetings between Joe Smith

and Sean Murphy on the baseball diamond. In addition to Holden and Love in the NBA G League, Wright State continues to have a multitude of Raiders who have continued their basketball careers overseas on the men's and women's side.

Spring also signals the start of baseball season, with Murphy (Atlanta Braves) and Jesse Scholtens (Chicago White Sox) solidified as Major Leaguers to feed a crop of Raider alumni playing professional baseball. Former Wright State standouts Tyler Black (Milwaukee Brewers organization) and Quincy Hamilton (Houston Astros organization) each began the 2025 season in Triple A one step from the majors, highlighting a group of nearly 15 Raider alumni currently in the minor leagues.



WRIGHT STATE BASEBALL VS. USAF TEAM