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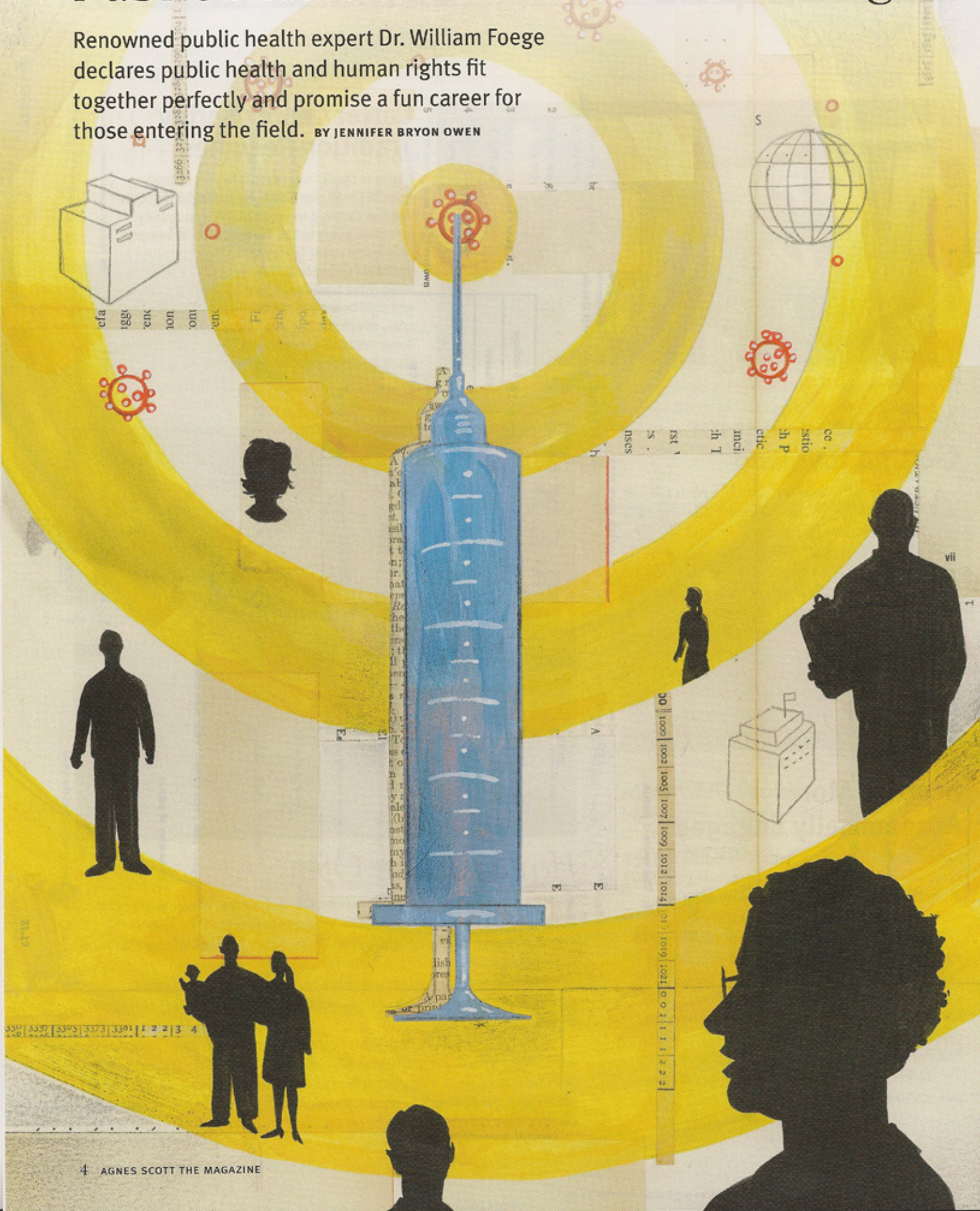
***Women
in Business***

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Public Health All About Human Rights

Renowned public health expert Dr. William Foege declares public health and human rights fit together perfectly and promise a fun career for those entering the field. **BY JENNIFER BRYON OWEN**



Achieving his goals doesn't really excite epidemiologist William Foege, M.D., M.P.H.

"My enthusiasm comes from being able to picture results," says Foege, who delivered the O.C. Hubert Lecture last fall. "Once I become convinced something is going to happen, I become less emotional when it actually occurs. I got my thrill at the time I saw that it could happen."

And he's envisioned—and realized—significant achievements. Foege, senior fellow at The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is a former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He has been executive director, fellow for health and policy and executive director of Global 2000 at The Carter Center and Presidential Distinguished Professor of International Health at Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health.

Foege worked in the successful campaign to eradicate smallpox in the 1970s; in the '80s, he and several colleagues formed a task force that successfully accelerated childhood immunization. A strong proponent of disease eradication and control, he played an active role in the eradication of Guinea Worm and River Blindness as well as in the advances against polio.

"Polio will be eradicated; it's just turned out to require more thought and resources," says Foege. "We can't stop at this point."

Now, he fears we're in danger of having another real problem because of parents refusing to have their children vaccinated, a trend exacerbated by an article in a leading medical journal, *The Lancet*, which said measles, mumps and rubella vaccines cause autism. While the article has been withdrawn and its writer discredited, many parents have bought into the claim.

"It's not that parents want to do the wrong thing; it's not that they are being stubborn. They actually believe it because the wrong information was put out. It became sensationalized."

Because this is a social issue, there's a social contract involved, and he says two things need to happen.

"Every mother during pregnancy should be reassured that her child does not have congenital rubella syndrome because [she knows] other children have been immunized," says Foege. "But it's not just the protection of the child; it's what we're doing to reduce transmission of organisms."

He recalls the early days of vaccinations, when parents wanting their children vaccinated had to sign consent forms stating they understood the risks.

"We should have someone sign a form when a child is not immunized that says 'I understand my child is not protected against these diseases; I

understand my child will be a risk to other children if they get the diseases; I understand that my child will be at higher risk if we travel to other countries.' Parents don't think about that.

"I worry this will ... become a global health problem."

Championing child survival and development is just one of the many issues Foege has tackled. Injury prevention, preventive medicine and public health leadership, particularly in the developing world, claim his attention.

Noting the influence of his mentor and friend of more than 50 years, Reimert Ravenholt, husband of alumna Betty Butler Ravenholt '67, Foege says "population pressures" also concern him.

"It is clear that our present difficulties in climate change, deforestation, water and food problems and the amount of malnutrition one sees in India and Africa are the result of population pressures," says Foege.

"There's this issue of how to balance public health work and population pressures. When one looks at where you have the highest birth rates, they're also the places where you have the poorest health."

Noting that new diseases will likely continue to develop—a new one has appeared yearly for the last 20—Foege says students entering public health have an exciting future. "What's happening right now is very exciting, and it means that students studying public health are going to be able to do things we never were able to consider," says Foege. "It is really a good time to be going into the field because of what can happen."

"I've watched the rates of HIV positivity in newborn children in Botswana go from 40 percent to 4 percent in eight years. In some districts it is down to 1 percent. Now that's real progress! Students today have a lot to look forward to."

He's encouraged by the idealistic students he's seeing. "It's so refreshing, so good to see these kinds of students," says Foege. "I tell them public health is actually trying to take the truth of all history and apply it to everyone, so that social justice is the bottom line for public health."

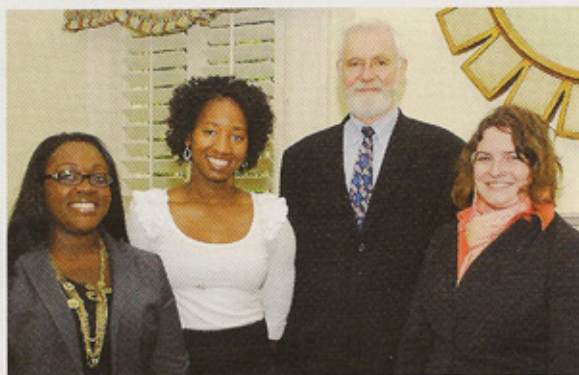
"It's hard to find a better career for social justice or one that is more fun than public health."

Jennifer Bryon Owen is director of creative services and editor of Agnes Scott The Magazine.

TO LEARN MORE

To hear Dr. Foege deliver the Hubert Lecture, go to Agnes Scott's iTunesU site: <http://goo.gl/5lw61>

To read about the work of Betty Butler Ravenholt '67 and her husband, Reimert, see pages 30–31 of *Agnes Scott The Magazine*, Spring 2009.



Visiting with Foege are Hubert Scholars (l.to r.) Senam Apaloo '11, Kirnel Daniel '12 and Britni Phelps '11.

About the O.C. Hubert Lecture

The lecture showcases strong examples of experiential learning combined with service to humanity. O.C. Hubert was a successful businessman who established Hubert Realty Company Inc. in the 1970s and built it into a thriving family-owned business still in operation. He died in 1986 but his commitment to community service survives today with the work of his family. His daughter-in-law is Linda Lentz Hubert '62, Agnes Scott professor emerita of English.