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UM Graduate Juggles Life as a CPA, Trading Card Artist

Gordon Wills' second set of Marvel trading cards recently released

JUNE 20, 2018 BY MICHAEL NEWSOM

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University of Mississippi alumnus Gordon Wills designs Marvel-licensed art for Upper Deck trading cards. Images courtesy of Gordon Wills

OXFORD, Miss. – **University of Mississippi** alumnus Gordon Wills (BAccy 07, MAccy 08) is like a superhero in some ways. By day, he has a desk job, but by night, he finds himself in a world full of characters battling evil for the good of mankind.

He isn't Superman though. He's a husband, dad and CPA, but he's also been working as a sketch artist for the Upper Deck Co. on Marvel trading cards, drawing characters he grew up admiring. Wills, a Memphis native, had drawn for fun during his childhood but laid down his art

supplies until he was finishing his master's in accountancy at Ole Miss. Most of his friends had already graduated and moved on, so he found he had more time to draw.

He and another Ole Miss graduate, Megan Sellers Wills (BAEd 07, MA 08), married, settled in Metairie, Louisiana, and started a family. The family would watch TV shows on Disney Junior, and Gordon Wills became fascinated with the animation he saw on the screen. Spreading a large piece of butcher paper on the kitchen table for art time became something fun he and his daughter could do together.

"She would follow me around the table and color it in," Wills said. "It kind of got me used to the drawing the muscles again. It was something I could do with her that nobody else could do."

He also found that drawing helped him decompress from the stress of daily life. This outlet was extremely valuable to him while he was studying for the CPA exam. He was also using social media sites to connect with other artists. He posted short animation and other artwork to his Instagram page, and his profile was getting noticed.

He'd had Marvel comic trading cards during his childhood and started drawing his own Marvel cards for fun. He began talking to other artists on social media about finding opportunities to draw them professionally and came across an online form for submissions to be considered. The decision wasn't easy though.

"I was nervous about submitting to this for fear of failure," Wills said. "It took a while to take that step out there, but it was good for me to get the positive reinforcement to get the confidence."

His submission was well received. He was commissioned to do his first set of cards in August. In November, he delivered his first set, which featured Thanos, Spider-Man, Cyclops and Avengers characters. He was proud of how it turned out.

Earlier this year, Upper Deck ordered another set of Marvel characters from him. This time, the subject was "Black Panther," the international blockbuster movie that has smashed box office records and drawn critical praise for offering the world one of the first black superheroes. His "Black Panther" set was recently released. Wills joins Ole Miss alumnus Jesse Holland Jr. (BA 94) in having a connection to the film. Holland was commissioned by Marvel to author an origin story novel ahead of the film's release.

Wills continues to look for opportunities to draw professionally and has enjoyed networking with the community of comic book artists, editors and other creative professionals. One of those people was familiar. Trey Treutel (BBA 07), editor at The Cardboard Connection, a website about sports cards, entertainment cards and other collectibles, had also graduated from Ole Miss. The two had known each other from living in the same residence hall.

Treutel's website has checklists and other resources for artists such as Wills to use. Treutel said he's been impressed with his friend's success.

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Campus Briefs

Civil Engineering Professor Receives Most-Cited Paper Award

OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation's capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to

"I appreciate how he can capture the essence of these iconic Marvel characters but still maintain a style that is uniquely his," Treutel said. "I think it is very cool that my dorm neighbor from freshman year supplies drawings for Upper Deck and Marvel."

Wills will continue to work on art projects, in addition to his job at a bank in Covington, Louisiana. He's hoping to start selling his art at conventions. As a father of a young daughter and son, he's also hoping to get involved in a children's book project at some point.

He said his wife, family and friends have been supportive of him and his art, which brings him joy.

"It doesn't feel like work," Wills said. "It has really been a neat experience for me, and it kind of opened up a whole new world of opportunities for me."



Gordon Wills

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