

Winning Whiskers

An engineer finds his avocation right under his nose.

Alfred Nash wasn't always an idol of hirsute achievement. "My facial hair didn't really start to grow until I was about 30," he says. In 2011, he grew a mustache for Movember—a month when guys grow 'staches and beards to raise awareness of men's health issues, or simply to see if they can—and an avocation was born. For the past 10 years, Nash, '86, has traveled around the United States, presenting his face full of award-winning follicles at the National Beard and Moustache Championships. In 2016, he commanded the stage at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tenn. Two solid, slender spears of hair jutted out from either side of his upper lip. The judges declared Nash's 'stache, measuring 21 inches from tip to tip, the best English-style mustache in the country.

A physicist by training, Nash has spent two decades at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Southern California, helping test infrared telescopes for space missions and working on projects like the Mars sample return. So naturally, there's a scientific flair to his method of mustache manipulation. Coercing the temperamental tresses into stick-straight form can take hours. Armed with a blow-dryer and a plasticky hairspray that's pliable when warm and hardens as it cools, "you



spray a little, style a little, and just work from the roots on out," Nash says. The results are bristles so stiff they click when flicked with a fingernail.

But winning requires style that extends beyond the jawline: "Everybody's in costume, so it's not just the facial hair—it's the whole gestalt." The year Nash won at the Opry, he was in full safari garb, with a helmet, goggles, shorts, and knee-high socks. For the 2023 World Championships in Germany, he'll be changing things up with a costume that complements not only his mustache but also the

thick beard he grew during quarantine. The judges at these contests—often barbers, sponsor representatives, and former champions—use preset criteria for each mustache and beard category. Still, ultimately, their decision comes down to personal preference. The competitions, where success is subjective and participants are in it for the fun, are "the complete opposite of my job," Nash says. Not that his work with NASA isn't enjoyable, but "it's only rocket science," he says. "It's actually easier than knowing what's going on in a mustache competition." ■

THE TICKER



Graduate School of Business professor and former Microsoft chief economist **Susan Athey**, PhD '95, has joined the Department of Justice as its top antitrust economist, though due to her previous work, she'll likely be recused from upcoming high-profile Google and Apple cases.... Speaking of high-profile gigs, Stanford history professor **Priya Satia**, '95, served as a consultant for Marvel's *Ms. Marvel* TV series, the first of the franchise's productions to center on a Muslim superhero. Satia specializes in British and British empire history, especially in South Asia and the Middle East.... In other marvel-ous TV

news, anthropologist and Emmy award-winning filmmaker **Paul Espinosa**, MA '76, PhD '82, produced *Singing Our Way to Freedom*, which will air on public television stations this fall in time for National Hispanic Heritage Month.... By that time, Stanford professor of bioengineering and of applied physics **Stephen Quake**, '91, MS '91, will have settled into his new role as head of science at the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. He's been co-president of CZI's Chan Zuckerberg Biohub since the health research endeavor began in 2016.

