Virginia Tech Collegiate Assistant Professor and Gloria D. Smith Professor of Black Studies Brandy Faulkner created a video game that she uses in her community activism trainings and workshops and in the classroom. Besides her role within the Department of Political Science, Faulkner’s passion is helping grassroots and social change-based organizations. Her video game—Team Yellow—teaches community activists and organizers who are working to create social, political, and economic change how to understand and build power by understanding the decision-making process.

We all have a role. Claim yours... vt.edu
ON PARADE: The annual parade through downtown Blacksburg is a highlight of Virginia Tech Homecoming weekend.

"Her gifts are at a level so removed from the rest of us that all we can do is feel the appropriate awe and then wonder on the mysteries of nature."
—The New York Times on Sarah Chang

One of the most sought-after violinists playing today, Sarah Chang performs violin sonatas by Brahms and Franck, as well as Bartók's Romanian Folk Dances for her Moss debut.

Tuesday, April 19, 7:30 PM
SARAH CHANG, violin
SONYA OVRUTSKY FENSOME, piano

Reflecting on my own place in history, I am the first Black female board president. The board I lead is one of the most diverse we have ever had. That fills me with immense pride, and it is my expectation that our board will continue to be representative of our diverse alumni population.

Looking back on my tenure, there is so much that I am proud of including the creation of our Black Alumni Society, our innovation through COVID-19, and the growing number of engaged Hokies.

The creation of our Black Alumni Society has come to fruition after countless years of planning and the tireless work of so many alumni. The society will celebrate the rich history of our Black alumni. Through the pandemic we found new ways to stay connected. Our community came together during the last two years, and we faced an unprecedented pandemic together.

As board president, I was able to attend so many Hokie gatherings and connect with Hokies virtually. This would not have been possible if I had to physically travel to each area. COVID-19 was difficult, but it made us look at things differently and demonstrated that Hokies show up for each other no matter what. And even through such challenging circumstances, we grew our alumni engagement and giving. So far, more than 74,500 alumni have engaged with the university in meaningful ways over the course of our Boundless Impact campaign.

As my term comes to an end, I want to encourage you to give back to our alma mater and challenge you to share your reasons for believing that being a Hokie is special.

I often tell people that I never say no to Virginia Tech. There has never been anything that when asked I did not do for our great university. In the spirit of Ut Prosim, I will continue to work tirelessly for the Hokie Nation.

I charge you to do the same. Say yes. There are many ways to be involved, spend time with your local alumni chapter, mentor a student, serve on your reunion committee, or come back to campus for an event.

Thank you to Mark Lawrence, our immediate past president, for your support and guidance. I am excited about all the things that Nathan Lavinka, our next leader, will do for the board. I hope you will join me in Blacksburg this fall for Homecoming Oct. 15-16 and for the Black Alumni Reunion, April 14-16, 2023.

Go Hokies!

Deseria Creighton Barney '86, who earned a degree in communications, is a regional director of people development at WayForth and president of the Virginia Tech Alumni Association Board of Directors.

To learn more about ways to say yes to Virginia Tech, visit alumni.vt.edu/yes.

COUNT ME IN!
Return to Blacksburg to be with friends and explore campus during our four-day reunion.

Enjoy dinner on the Drillfield, campus tours, happy hours, presentations from university leaders, and more. Registration includes access to all scheduled events, including meals and drinks.

ALUMNI.VT.EDU/REUNION2022
When Virginia Tech began admitting women in 1921, male and female students were held to different rules and standards, a practice that persisted for decades. The L Squadron, which was formed in the 1973-74 academic year, was the first unit of women in the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets. Women were in a separate squadron from male cadets until 1979. Learn more about these female trailblazers on page 34.

In a span of 100 years, the influence of women at Virginia Tech has grown remarkably. Meet several women whose experiences as students and faculty marked significant milestones in the progress of women at the university. Their voices span decades, and their personal accounts demonstrate how individual experiences collectively lay a path for future generations.

Randolph Hall houses multiple College of Engineering departments that serve more than 2,300 undergraduates and 500 graduate students, and award more than 650 degrees each year. The largest-ever gift by a Virginia Tech alumnus will advance a long-awaited project to replace the aging engineering building with what will be the largest building on the university’s Blacksburg campus.

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SPRING FORWARD

Over the next few weeks, our campuses in Blacksburg, Roanoke, and the greater Washington, D.C., metro area will shake off the remnants of winter in anticipation of the return to warmer weather. The longer days of spring will also herald the return of many special campus activities.

We look forward to seeing alumni, friends, and families at events like the Run in Remembrance, the Big Event, and Family Weekend. This spring, there will be numerous opportunities to celebrate milestones in the university’s 150-year history as we recognize Virginia Tech’s sesquicentennial.

This edition of Virginia Tech Magazine highlights 100 years of community. More Hokies.

The longer days of spring will also herald the return of the climate milestones in the university’s 150-year history as we recognize Virginia Tech’s sesquicentennial.

This edition of Virginia Tech Magazine highlights 100 years of community. More Hokies.

As I walk across our Blacksburg campus, I can imagine what it might have been like 150 years ago, especially when the Corps of Cadets is marching on the Drillfield. Despite all the history around us, though, Virginia Tech doesn’t feel old.

In 2022, as we reflect on the past and celebrate the present, we also anticipate a dynamic future. We are positioned as a leading global research university, an institution respected for our inclusive, service-oriented community and recognized as a top destination for the world’s best talent.

Your investment in our present and future is central to our success. Your support helps advance every aspect of Virginia Tech, from access and affordability to faculty recruitment, athletics, facilities, and academic programs.

Last year, your contributions eclipsed $200 million. And Giving Day 2022 not only broke records for amounts raised and the number of donors but also briefly overwhelmed our website. That’s what I call Hokie Spirit.

In a few months, we will gather in Lane Stadium to confer degrees on the Class of 2022, and a new generation of alumni will make its mark on the world. I’m convinced that’s exactly what the world needs: More Ut Prosim (That I May Serve). More sense of community. More Hokies. ■

Tim Sands is Virginia Tech’s 16th president.
According to Lance Collins, vice president and executive director of the Innovation Campus, “This kind of programming really allows students to get focused, to get exposure, to get excited, but also to be prepared because eventually that’s required if they’re to enter the STEM fields.”

Jim Egenrieder, professor and director of the Virginia Tech Thinkabit Lab in the greater Washington, D.C., metro area, helped Polk teachers integrate the devices into their curriculum.

“This device has a number of sensors: temperature, humidity, motion detection, light detection, sound detection,” said Egenrieder. “All these great things that give students this tangible way to study the world around them.”

Teachers say giving these students the chance to build software and to see themselves working in STEM fields will have a tremendous impact on laying the foundation for their futures. “Our students are now going to be able to have opportunities that they may not have had if we didn’t have this partnership with Virginia Tech,” said Gregory Hutchins Jr., ACPS superintendent.

ACPS and Virginia Tech expect to expand the program to other schools in the near future.
A STAR IN THE WORLD OF CERAMICS ENGINEERING

Ling Li

A STAR IN THE WORLD OF CERAMICS ENGINEERING

Ling Li

COMPARSED TO METAL AND POLYMER-BASED MATERIALS, CERAMICS CAN BETTER WITHSTAND HIGH TEMPERATURES AND CORROSION ENVIRONMENTS, BUT THEIR BRITTLE NATURE OFTEN MAKES THEM SUSCEPTIBLE TO BREAKAGE.

WILL PLAY FOR FOOD DONATIONS

BRANDON TEAGUE, A MEMBER OF THE MARCHING VIRGINIANS, TYPICALLY PLAYS HIS TRUMPET FOR THE CROWD IN THE LANE STADIUM.

HOWEVER, ON NOV. 13, HE PLAYED SOME FAMILIAR VIRGINIA TECH TUNES, SUCH AS "HawkPlay" BY FITZ AND THE TAOUSMANS AND "Uptown Funk" BY BRUNO MARS, FOR TAILGATERS.

HOKIES FOR THE HUNGRY HAS BEEN A TRADITION FOR MORE THAN 25 YEARS. THE MARCHING VIRGINIANS PARTNER WITH ORGANIZATIONS THROUGHOUT THE NEW RIVER VALLEY, INCLUDING THE NEW LIFE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP AND THE MCGOMONY COUNTY CHRISTMAS STORE, TO PROVIDE A VARIETY OF DONATIONS FOR THOSE IN NEED.

THIS YEAR, THE BAND TOPPED ITS PREVIOUS COLLECTION EFFORTS, RAISING APPROXIMATELY $20,000 AND GATHERING MORE THAN 20,000 FOOD ITEMS, THE HIGHEST TOTALS IN THE INITIATIVE'S HISTORY.
QUANTUM CENTER UNITES VIRGINIA TECH’S BROAD EXPERTISE IN A VITAL FIELD

AS VIRGINIA TECH’S RESEARCH PROGRAMS CONTINUE TO EXPAND, ONE SOURCE OF MOMENTUM DRIVING NEW DISCOVERIES AND FORGING INGENIOUS SOLUTIONS TO STUBBORN PROBLEMS WILL BE A NEW CENTER DEDICATED TO QUANTUM RESEARCH. VIRGINIA TECH PRESIDENT TIM SANDS ANNOUNCED THE CREATION OF THE VIRGINIA TECH CENTER FOR QUANTUM INFORMATION SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING AT THE 2022 STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS.

“The remarkable talent and expertise on this campus gives Virginia Tech the potential—and the responsibility—to address the most significant research questions unfolding in an increasingly interconnected and interdisciplinary world,” Sands said. “Quantum science and engineering will shape our interconnection and collaboration, we will enable our researchers to tackle these formidable challenges from a collaborative, transdisciplinary perspective and forge a way forward that addresses these challenges from multiple angles.”

Sophia Economou, a professor of physics and Hassing Senior Fellow of Physics in the College of Science, will direct the center. Economou is an expert on quantum information science and a member of the Co-design Center for Quantum Advantage, a U.S. Department of Energy center led by Brookhaven National Lab.

The new center creates an official umbrella for work that has flourished at Virginia Tech for many years. The university has been at the forefront of the emergence and evolution of quantum information science, producing research in key areas including quantum computing, networking, materials, and cryptography, and helping set research agendas through national science foundation-sponsored workshops and faculty collaborations with national laboratories.

In November, Northrop Grumman, a longstanding strategic partner of Virginia Tech, committed $12.5 million to found the Center for Quantum Architecture and Software Development at the Innovation Campus in Alexandria, Virginia. That center will complement the broad range of ongoing work in Blacksburg by building substantial research capabilities with targeted investments in coding and software.

In this rapidly expanding and increasingly crucial research landscape, the Virginia Tech Center for Quantum Information Science and Engineering in Blacksburg solidifies Virginia Tech’s role.

“Quantum is one of our four research frontiers because it has potential to maximize the impact Virginia Tech research can have at regional, national, and global scales,” said Dan Sui, senior vice president of research and innovation. “With the establishment of this center, Virginia Tech is well positioned to better organize its interdisciplinary expertise to advance the quantum frontier.”

The center will be administratively housed under the Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science, a research investment institute headed by Stefano Duma, the Harry Wyatt Professor of Engineering.

NEW SOFT ROBOT MORPHS FROM A GROUND-TO-AIR VEHICLE USING LIQUID METAL

IMAGINE A SMALL AUTONOMOUS vehicle that could drive over land, stop, and flatten itself into a quadcopter. The rotors start spinning, and the vehicle flies away.

A team at Virginia Tech led by Michael Bartlett, assistant professor in mechanical engineering, is working on a new approach for shape-changing at the material level. These researchers use rubber, metal, and temperature to morph materials and fix them into place with no motors or pulleys. The team’s work has been published in Science Robotics.

This project was funded through Bartlett’s DARPA Young Faculty Award and Director’s Fellowship.

GROUND BROKEN ON HITT HALL

ALTHOUGH FEB. 2 MAY HAVE BEEN A day with gray skies in Blacksburg, an extraordinarily bright moment took place for Virginia Tech as leaders and donors broke ground on Hitt Hall, a 100,000-gross-square-foot facility that will house the Myers-Lawson School of Construction, add critical dining capacity, and provide general assignment academic classroom and collaboration space.

“This building is a tribute to what is possible when academia and industry collaborate to address the workforce needs of the 21st century, supported by generous friends and alumni,” Virginia Tech President Tim Sands said. “Hitt Hall will be an appropriate home for a nationally ranked and respected school that is developing the leaders and innovators who will define the industry’s future.”

The Board of Visitors approved design and funding for the Hitt Hall project in August 2021. Located in the North Aca- demic District and close to a new transit hub, Hitt Hall will serve thousands of stu- dents, whether for classes or meals, each day. Spring 2024 is the target for com- pletion of construction. The building is named in recognition of a lead gift by the Hitt family, which founded one of the nation’s largest construction firms, HITT Contracting. Prior to the event Brett Hitt, co-chairman of HITT’s board of directors, reflected on the passion for education and innovation in construction felt by his father, Russell Hitt, who died in 2020.

“This is an exciting and inspiring moment,” Brett Hitt said. “We appreciate Virginia Tech’s leading role preparing today’s students to become tomorrow’s deci- sion-makers in our industry.”

QUANTUM LEAPS: Physics Professor Sophia Economou (center) will direct the new Virginia Tech Center for Quantum Information Science and Engineering. Nick Mayhall (left), an associate professor of chemistry, and Ed Barnes (right), an associate professor of physics, will serve on the center’s executive committee along with four other quantum researchers from the College of Science and the College of Engineering.
Virginia Tech students pitched commercialization ideas for biomedical innovations to a "Shark Tank"-style panel of judges during the annual Health Sciences and Technology (HS&T) Hokie Pitch at VTC in Roanoke in December 2021.

The competition involved students from the Translational Biology, Medicine, and Health graduate program, who selected intellectual property, worked with real-world business mentors, and created an entrepreneurial plan to develop and commercialize biomedical discoveries as new companies.

"Hokie Pitch is always exciting," said executive director of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute, and director of the institute’s Center for Vascular and Heart Research. "It really shows how far they have come professionally."

"The talent to bring a discovery forward and provide a solution to help people in Virginia and the world is essential to keeping the promise of the biomedical science enterprise and is an example of the Virginia Tech Ut Prosim [That I May Serve] ethos," said Michael Friedlander, Virginia Tech’s vice president for diversity and inclusion.

"That Ut Prosim ethos, the Virginia Tech ethos, was what the judges were looking for success. Using the printer to create a model of Lily’s spine, Arendse and the team practiced the surgery they would perform to help Lily walk again. Being able to physically hold, manipulate, and view the spine from all angles was a benefit in knowing what they needed to do and where."

Avril Arendse was pleased with the results. "Postoperatively, Lily was doing just as well as preoperatively, and that’s what we want to see." Typically, that would be the end of the story: a few follow-up visits to check on progress as Lily healed and some rehab at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital or with a local veterinarian. But Lily’s owners had other ideas. They were so grateful for the life-changing successful outcome they made a TikTok sharing Lily’s remarkable journey. Her story tugged on the heartstrings of many viewers, helping the surgical prowess of the team of veterinarians go viral. Visit vtx.vt.edu/magazine to see the video.
KEVIN PITTS NAMED DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF SCIENCE AT VIRGINIA TECH

Kevin Pitts has been named the next dean of the Virginia Tech College of Science. Pitts will officially step into his new role June 13, taking over from Ron Fricker, who has served as interim dean since January 2021. Pitts will also be a professor in the Department of Physics.

“Kevin’s recent experience as chief research officer at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory and his leadership of undergraduate instruction at the departmental, college, and university levels position him exceptionally well to lead the College of Science to even greater accomplishment,” said University Presidentoxel Espinoza.

Before joining Fermilab, Pitts was vice provost for undergraduate education at the University of Illinois. Pitts received a bachelor’s degree in physics and mathematics from Anderson University in Indiana, and his M.S. and Ph.D. from the University of Oregon. His career achievements and honors are significant, including: a Fellow of the American Association for the Advance

ment of Science, a Fellow of the American Physical Society, U.S. Department of Energy Outstanding Junior Investigator, and a recipient of a National Science Foundation (NSF) CAREER award.

Parallel to his research, Pitts’ teaching and administrative work is notable for the connections he established with undergraduate and graduate students. He was among University of Illinois teachers listed as “outstanding” by students for 12 consecutive years, and he received the University of Illinois Engineering Council Award for Outstanding Undergraduate Advisor multiple times.

He led the university’s NSF-funded Red-shirt Consortium, a program aimed at improving the ability of academically talented students who are PELL-eligible, underrepresented minority, or women to enroll and graduate in STEM fields. He also served in the national chair-line for the American Physics Society’s Conferences for Undergraduate Women in Physics.

“I am honored to join the College of Science at Virginia Tech, a college with a track record of transforming lives through education and groundbreaking research,” said Pitts. Fricker, will transition into a new role, vice provost for faculty affairs, a position to which he was named in December 2021.

KEVIN PITTS, CHIEF RESEARCH OFFICER AT FERMILAB NATIONAL ACCELERATOR LABORATORY

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“Kevin’s recent experience as chief research officer at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory and his leadership of undergraduate instruction at the departmental, college, and university levels position him exceptionally well to lead the College of Science to even greater accomplishments in its research and educational missions,” said Cyril Clarke, executive vice president and provost.

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TEAM SELECTED AS FINALIST IN ALEXA PRIZE SIMBOT CHALLENGE

A Virginia Tech team was selected as one of 10 finalists in the Alexa Prize SimBot Challenge, Virginia Tech’s team meets regularly for updates and overall progress on their project.

CRIMINOLOGISTS TO STUDY THE IMPACT OF CYBERCRIME ON VIRGINIANS

When most people discuss ways to stop cybercrime, they focus on the technological realm.

But James Hawdon’s work in combating cybercrime doesn’t involve designing programs or firewalls. As director of the Center for Peace Studies and Violence Prevention and a professor of sociology at Virginia Tech, he believes researchers must also look at the human side of the problem.

“If you don’t take that social element into consideration, we’re always one step behind,” he said. “We’re chasing the next way that people find to hack into your system, rather than trying to design environments that are safer.”

To understand the social factors at play in cybercrime, researchers first need a clear picture of where and how cybercrime is occurring. That’s what Hawdon and his team of criminologists in the Department of Sociology are hoping to find with their new project, “Cybercrime in Virginia: Impacts on Industry and Citizens (CIVIC).”

Working with Hawdon on the project are Karinah Parti and Thomas Dearden, both assistant professors who specialize in criminology. The team will conduct a survey of individuals and 400 businesses to determine how cybercrime has affected residents of Virginia.

A grant from the Commonwealth Cyber Initiative, a Virginia-funded collaborative effort that supports cybersecurity research at universities across the state, is funding the project.

A RECORD HIGH FOR FIRST-YEAR ADMISSION

Virginia Tech has charted a historic high in first-year applications for admission. A school record 45,214 first-year applicants poured in for fall 2022 admissions—an increase of 8 percent over the previous record of 42,084 set a year ago.

Noteworthy gains include a 19 percent increase in applicants identified as first-generation college students. Gains were also achieved across every underrepresented and underserved group. Black or African American applications surpassed the 2021 mark by 6 percent. Hispanic/Latino applications rose 8 percent.

“A school record 45,214 first-year applicants poured in for fall 2022 admissions—an increase of 8 percent over the previous record of 42,084 set a year ago. Noteworthy gains include a 19 percent increase in applicants identified as first-generation college students. Gains were also achieved across every underrepresented and underserved group. Black or African American applications surpassed the 2021 mark by 6 percent. Hispanic/Latino applications rose 8 percent. When you remove barriers to admission, everyone wins. We are very excited to see how this entering class takes shape,” said Rolando Espinoza, vice provost for enrollment management and director of undergraduate admissions.

In 2018, Virginia Tech implemented changes in its admissions process, which have helped deepen the pool of applicants vying for a spot in Virginia Tech’s entering class.

“When this diverse pool of talented students is evidence that our admissions process is working and we are very excited to see how this entering class takes shape,” said Espinoza.

THE FUTURE IS NOW: Prospective students prepare to take a campus tour during Virginia Tech’s fall 2021 Open House.
Helmet Lab puts snow sport helmets to the test
The Virginia Tech Helmet Lab has released ratings for snow sports helmets, the first to evaluate how effectively headgear worn by skiers and snowboarders protects against head injuries like concussion.

Windows into traditional world dress
Students studying fashion merchandising and design created a window display showcasing vintage kimonos and other traditional clothing from Japan, China, and Korea, for a Clothing and People class project.

Using technology to make visible the invisible past
HistoryLab: Creative Technologies, Hidden Histories, Informal Learning is a new course that bridges STEM fields, the humanities, education, and the creative arts.

Senior merges art, engineering, and activism in exhibit
Mariam Hasan is an Honors College senior studying biomedical engineering. She’s also an artist, a designer, a scientist, and an activist fighting for social justice through her art and her engineering projects.

April 16 marks 15 years since the tragic events that took the lives of 32 members of the Virginia Tech community in 2007.

The students and faculty members lost that day will be remembered through a variety of ceremonies and activities, including the annual 3.2 Run in Remembrance and a candlelight vigil on the Drillfield. The run, held in-person on the Blacksburg campus for the first time since 2019, begins at 9:43 a.m. Remote alumni chapter runs and virtual participation opportunities on social media will also be available. The candlelight vigil convenes at the April 16 Memorial at 7:30 p.m.

“We Remember” is the title of an exhibit featuring items sent to the university by children from all over the world following the tragedy. Items in the exhibit include letters, drawings, and other mementos sent to the university by children from all over the world.

Visit weremember.vt.edu to learn more about these and other events.

In Blacksburg, across the country, and around the world, as we gather together this spring, we reaffirm our sense of community and our commitment to one another.

WE ARE VIRGINIA TECH. WE WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER.
The largest-ever gift by a Virginia Tech alumnus will advance a long-awaited project to replace an aging engineering building with what will be the largest building on the university’s Blacksburg campus.

Norris Mitchell ’58 and his wife, Wendy, have committed $35 million to the Virginia Tech College of Engineering (COE). The gift will go toward construction as well as activities and programming for a showcase building for the college, which will replace the more than 60-year-old Randolph Hall. Randolph Hall was built between 1952 and 1958 in the university’s North Academic District. After more than a half-century of use, there is a recognized need to replace the building.

Per approval of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, the new building will be known as Wendy and Norris E. Mitchell ’58 Hall. Mitchell Hall is projected to be more than 70 percent larger than Randolph Hall, providing needed space to accommodate growth in the university’s engineering programs and account for shifts in how research and teaching take place today.

The building will include 284,000 square feet of space for classrooms, instructional labs, student team projects, research labs, and offices for faculty, staff, and students. Also, the space will support a variety of collaborative uses for students and faculty, as well as student advising.

Total project costs are projected at $248 million, most of which would come from state funding. The gift from the Mitchells satisfies the university’s obligation to provide funding to the project. Depending on the timing of approvals from the General Assembly, the project could be ready for construction funding by summer 2023, according to the university’s capital budget request to the state.

Randolph Hall is connected to one of the largest university-owned stability wind tunnels in the U.S. Plans call for Mitchell Hall to accommodate the wind tunnel and potentially enclose it. The wind tunnel is expected to remain open for research and teaching throughout much of the building.

The Mitchell gift comes at a pivotal moment for COE, which is growing as part of the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Tech Talent Initiative, a statewide push to increase graduates in key computing fields. As the university’s largest college, with programs spanning 12 departments and two schools, engineering’s total enrollment grew to more than 12,000 in 2020.

Expanding—and improving—COE’s physical infrastructure is a key component of the college’s strategic priorities. Other notable projects include a renovated and expanded Holden Hall, home of the materials science and engineering and mining and minerals engineering programs, which is set to open to students in fall 2022. Space in the new Data and Decision Sciences Building, as well as several other facilities, will welcome computer science programs and faculty.

“This record gift is a historic moment for our college, as well as the entire university,” said Julia M. Ross, the Paul and Dorothy Torgrimson Dean of Engineering. “It comes at an exciting time of growth in our student programming, research enterprise, and new statewide initiatives. It supports an absolutely crucial project that will enable our students and faculty to remain on the leading edge of engineering education and research for decades to come. And it also endows permanent, flexible support that makes it easier to act quickly to address needs and pursue new opportunities as it relates to academic programming within the building. We are incredibly grateful to the Mitchells for their long-standing and game-changing generosity.”

Building a tradition of giving
Norris Mitchell’s personal story began in Virginia’s Carroll County, where he grew up without running water or electricity in his home. He entered college on scholarship and worked his way through Virginia Tech as a co-op program. He earned a bachelor’s degree in aerospace engineering in 1958.

“My mother was a schoolteacher and principal, and the value of education has been clear to me ever since I was a boy,” said Norris Mitchell, who worked as an aerospace executive before transitioning to real estate and banking. “Virginia Tech equipped me with the knowledge and skillset to have an extremely fulfilling career across several industries. I appreciate the university’s key role in my life. Wendy and I are happy to be able to make this gift to help Virginia Tech prepare tomorrow’s engineers.”

Wendy Mitchell attended Virginia Tech for a brief period before leaving to help address a family emergency, then embarked on a career in banking that saw her rise to senior leadership positions at several institutions.

“Out of all the ways that we could give money to Virginia Tech, we thought this building project was the right choice,” she said. “You can have as many bright students as possible, but if you don’t have places for them to get together and work on projects, they’re not going to get as far.”
“That meeting left an impression on me, our programs and impact,” Paterson said. “They wanted to welcome me to the department and stress the importance of being involved. Our success will depend on what we contribute. That, to me, is everything.”

For many years, Norris Mitchell has generously supported his alma mater. He and his wife are members of Virginia Tech’s Ut Prosim Society. There is an endowed Mitchell Professor of Aerospace and Ocean Engineering position, now held by Rakash Kapania, and a Mitchell scholarship in the Kevin T. Crofton Department of Aerospace and Ocean Engineering. A robotics lab in the College of Engineering’s Goodwin Hall also is named for the couple.

Eric Paterson, the Rolls-Royce Commonwealth Professor of Marine Propulsion, recalls a 2012 meeting with Mitchell and other notable graduates from the Class of 1958 just after he became head of the Crofton Department of Aerospace and Ocean Engineering. A robotics lab in the College of Engineering’s Goodwin Hall also is named for the couple.

“I tell him we need to retire, and he says that word is not in his vocabulary,” Wendy Mitchell joked. “We enjoy meeting with students and listening to all their great ideas,” she said. “They’re so enthusiastic and can’t wait to tell you what they are working on and their ideas for the future.”

Today, the Mitchells stay busy managing their investment properties. Norris Mitchell also serves on the board of directors of Meridian Energy Group, a company that is trying to establish a more environmentally friendly oil refinery in North Dakota.

“We are deeply grateful to Willis, Mary, Morgan, and Nolen for supporting the Blackwood Program. Their recent gift to the real estate program is in keeping with an emphasis on philanthropy that he and his wife have shared with their children, who are both now leaders alongside him at the Blackwood Development Company. “Both our children are now with the company and bring new blood with fresh ideas,” he said. “Making this significant investment allows our children and their children to participate in classes, chair the industry advisory board, and supports student scholarships. He’s been as active as an alumnus could be in enhancing student successes and advancing recognition of the program. Quite simply, we would not be where we are today without his support.”

“We want to welcome you to the department and stress the importance of our programs and impact,” Paterson said. “That meeting left an impression on me, and it’s a reminder that Norris has been a longtime advocate for the department and university. Norris has invested in engineering faculty, students, and programs in a number of impactful ways. His support of our faculty through an endowed professorship helps us retain world-class talent, and the robotics lab in Goodwin Hall ensures that our students can engage with hands-on work at different levels. He realizes that what we do is a team effort—and that alumni are a part of that.”

“Our children have fully embraced the idea,” he said. “Making this significant investment allows our children and their children to participate in classes, chair the industry advisory board, and supports student scholarships. He’s been as active as an alumnus could be in enhancing student successes and advancing recognition of the program. Quite simply, we would not be where we are today without his support.”

“Willis has worked with us from the very start of the program,” Boyle said. “He has provided financial and personal support from when it was just a start-up idea. He participates in classes, chairs the industry advisory board, and supports student scholarships. He’s been as active as an alumnus could be in enhancing student successes and advancing recognition of the program. Quite simply, we would not be where we are today without his support.”

“Both our children are now with the company and bring new blood with fresh ideas,” he said. “Making this significant pledge represents our philosophy of helping others. We have addressed what we consider the reasonable future needs of our children and their children. Every family’s situation is different in terms of what you feel about how much to donate. In our case, we all agree it is important to support organizations and individual efforts in which we believe. Our parents instilled the concept of giving back, as did Virginia Tech’s motto of Ut Prosim. Our children have fully embraced the idea.”

“The Mitchells’ inspiring story illustrates that so many years later Norris and Wendy are one day and feeling eager coming out of that meeting hoping to be working in a company that is trying to establish a more environmentally friendly oil refinery in North Dakota.”

Although Norris Mitchell worked as an engineer for only the first 16 years of his career, he said he has continued to draw on skills from that field throughout his life. “Engineering teaches you to think,” he said. “It teaches you how to determine what’s important and what’s not important, how to determine what makes sense and what doesn’t. That, to me, is engineering, and it can be broken down and applied in a lot of fields.”

“We are deeply grateful to Willis, Mary, Morgan, and Nolen for supporting the Blackwood Program in Real Estate in recognition of their extraordinary generosity and engagement,” said Virginia Tech President Tim Sands. “The program, which has been rising rapidly in reputation and rankings, will continue advancing as a national leader, thanks to the support of this great Hokie family.”

Today, the Mitchells stay busy managing their investment properties. Norris Mitchell also serves on the board of directors of Meridian Energy Group, a company that is trying to establish a more environmentally friendly oil refinery in North Dakota.

“We want to welcome you to the department and stress the importance of our programs and impact,” Paterson said. “That meeting left an impression on me, and it’s a reminder that Norris has been a longtime advocate for the department and university. Norris has invested in engineering faculty, students, and programs in a number of impactful ways. His support of our faculty through an endowed professorship helps us retain world-class talent, and the robotics lab in Goodwin Hall ensures that our students can engage with hands-on work at different levels. He realizes that what we do is a team effort—and that alumni are a part of that.”

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The program that now bears the Blackwood family’s name recently ranked third among the nation’s top 25 real estate programs, according to Great Business Schools. College Factual ranked the program fourth among the most popular real estate schools.

The Blackwood family has a long and powerful history of engagement and philanthropy at Virginia Tech, spanning several colleges and programs, as well as two generations. Willis Blackwood said the family’s recent gift to the real estate program is in keeping with an emphasis on philanthropy that he and his wife have shared with their children, who are both now leaders alongside him at the Blackwood Development Company.

“Our children are now with the company and bring new blood with fresh ideas,” he said. “Making this significant pledge represents our philosophy of helping others. We have addressed what we consider the reasonable future needs of our children and their children. Every family’s situation is different in terms of what you feel about how much to donate. In our case, we all agree it is important to support organizations and individual efforts in which we believe. Our parents instilled the concept of giving back, as did Virginia Tech’s motto of Ut Prosim. Our children have fully embraced the idea.”

The Blackwood family’s generosity will help generations of students launch fulfilling careers in real estate, said Kevin Boyle, who directs the program. Based in the Pamplin College of Business, the program is an interdisciplinary curriculum that draws courses for students from multiple Virginia Tech colleges.

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FOR LT. COL. EDIE MANGIBIN FAIRBANK
95, joining the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets staff felt a lot like coming home. "The Upper Quad is where I learned so much about myself, personal and professional relationships, leadership, and followership," said Fairbank, a Corps of Cadets graduate who retired from the U.S. Army in October 2020 after 24 years of service.

Fairbank is now the alumni director assistant, working alongside Cmdr. Nate Brown ‘98, also a corps graduate. Brown retired from the U.S. Navy this fall after 23 years and now serves as the corps’ new alumni director.

"I always thought I would enjoy a leisurely retirement from the Army, playing golf and riding my Harley," Fairbank said. "But when I attended Corps Reunion 2021, I knew the Upper Quad was where my heart belonged."

Nearly a quarter of the corps’ staff are alumni, bringing diverse career experiences to the cadets they mentor.

"Having faculty and staff members from all different experiences, not just Virginia Tech, provides our students and cadets the best possible resources as they develop into the young adults who will venture out and make our nation a better place," Brown said. "Having said that, the opportunity to have Corps of Cadets alumni in such plentiful numbers provides people whom cadets can instantly relate to and receive mentorship from."

Brown and Fairbank are hard at work looking to strengthen the bond between corps alumni and Virginia Tech.

In addition to Brown and Fairbank, alumni on staff include:

• Katie Mallory ’94, executive officer
• Ken Mallory ’96, assistant director of the Citizen-Leader Track program
• Capt. Jamie McGrath ’90, U.S. Navy (retired), director of the Maj. Gen. W. Thomas Rice Center for Leader Development
• Lt. Col. Travis Sheets ’05, U.S. Air Force (retired), deputy commandant
• Col. Robert Shelton ’95, U.S. Air Force (retired), deputy commandant

"Many consider their Hokie experience to be the years that they spent as a student," Brown said. "Our firm belief is that those undergraduate years were only the cost of admission to a lifelong Hokie experience."

SB

BACK HOME ON UPPER QUAD

WHY IS EVERYONE SO ANGRY?

IT IS LIKELY AN UNANSWERABLE QUESTION.

What can individuals do to curb angry feelings? Geller said a good place to start is to reestablish a sense of empowerment. He suggests asking three questions about potentially stressful tasks:

1. Do I believe I can do this? If not, what training do I need to be able to do this?
2. Do I believe this will help make a difference and reach some goal or vision?
3. Do I believe the outcome is worth the effort?

During any task, project, or goal, Geller suggests reflecting on each bit of progress. "Don’t just celebrate the achievement, celebrate the steps, the small victories," Geller said.

When dealing with others, as well as behaviors that might cause friction, he suggests exploring motivations and intentions and focusing on connectivity and community.

"The best you can ever be is not to be self-actualized, but self-transcendent in that you go beyond yourself for someone else," Geller said. "If we can move from valuing independence to interdependence—if we develop the mindset that nobody can do it alone—we’re going to be nicer, kinder."
A DOGGED COMMITMENT TO DOG SLEDDING

IN 2004, PAIGE DROBNY ’97 MOVED to Alaska for a job as a fisheries biologist, but her love of dogs and exploring the beautiful Alaskan landscape led to an unexpected passion project. Though she and her husband, Cody Strathe, have several “real” jobs, they spend much of their time, energy, and investment participating in dog sledding events. The couple originally adopted a few dogs as companions for their explorations throughout Alaska. Now, they’re mushers on a national scale.

“We were adopting dogs from the shelter and just having a bunch of fun with them and going on trips and doing a bunch of winter exploration,” Drobny said. “Then, someone was like, ‘Oh, you should try racing with them and just having a bunch of fun with them and going on trips and doing a bunch of winter exploration’,” Drobny said. “So, I signed up for the Yukon Quest 300. I was told that was the hardest 300-mile race in the state, so I thought, ‘OK, I will do this one, and I’ll hate it, and we can go back to our normal life of traveling with dogs.’”

Drobny finished sixth. But something happened at the finish line.

“The dogs were having so much fun that it’s definitely a passion project,” Drobny said. “It’s definitely a passion project,” Drobny said. “It’s definitely a passion project.”

This year’s Iditarod marked the ninth event. Drobny has pocketed more than $75,000 in prize money, with a career-best finish of seventh, but the prize money barely covers the costs of caring for the 49 dogs in their kennel. Drobny, who graduated from Virginia Tech with a degree in biology, and Strathe supplement their income in different ways. She runs a fisheries consulting business, writing grants and proposals for research projects, and he builds skin-frame kayaks, wooden paddles, and dogsleds. They also give tours of the Alaskan wilderness, and this summer, they’re opening a lodge.

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On March 5, Drobny and her team of barking canines took off on the Iditarod—the nation’s premier dog sledding event. The Iditarod is a 1,000-mile gauntlet that forces mushers to survive a snow-packed, treacherous route and occasionally bear temperatures that dip to 40 below zero.

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“On a random February afternoon, shortly after a visit to the sports medicine area to see new places and explore new trails,” Drobny said. “It just emphasized the family environment here,” Elizabeth said. “They actually cared about me on a deeper level than just basketball.”

Brooks and Virginia Tech showed that love for the Kitleyes this past fall when the women’s basketball team designated its Dec. 12 nonconference game against Radford as an “Autism Awareness Game,” The team partnered with VT SAFE (Supporting Autism Friendly Environments) and the Virginia Tech Autism Clinic & Center for Autism Research.

Before tipoff, Brooks brought Raven to halfcourt for a special presentation.

“You can imagine that she’s overshadowed a lot because baby sister gets a lot of attention, but this was her day,” Brooks told Evan Hughes, Virginia Tech’s radio play-by-play announcer, following the game.

“More than basketball,” Hughes said.

“Her biggest fan was trying to reach her. You can imagine that she’s overshadowed a lot because baby sister gets a lot of attention, but this was her day,” Brooks told Evan Hughes, Virginia Tech’s radio play-by-play announcer, following the game.

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FROM ITS INCEPTION, THE BUILDING that houses the Creativity and Innovation District Living Learning Communities (CID LLC) was created to serve a special purpose. “The driving philosophy behind the CID LLC was that students live just one life, and where they live and learn should reflect that integration,” said Frances Keene, assistant vice president and chief of staff for Student Affairs at Virginia Tech. “When I visit this building, I see our students’ academic and co-curricular lives integrating in a new and exciting way.”

A collaboration between Student Affairs, the Provost’s Office, academic units, and Virginia Tech Athletics, the 232,000-gross-square-foot residence hall opened in fall 2021. It is currently home to nearly 600 Hokies, including 176 Virginia Tech student-athletes and more than 400 students who are a part of one of the building’s three living-learning communities—Studio 72, Rhizome, and Innovate. Residents are able to interact closely with Tim Baird, the live-in faculty principal and an associate professor of geography, as well as his family and their dog, Winnie.

The building also features a visiting scholar apartment that regularly hosts influential scholars, professionals, and leaders who, as part of their stay, offer special engagement opportunities for building residents. In addition, 33 combined School of Visual Arts or School of Performing Arts courses call the building home, taking advantage of the creative lounges, performance studios, auditorium, and outdoor learning hubs, which each include larger-than-life whiteboards. Classes frequently use the building’s makerspace lab, wood shop, and metal shop.

With so much going on, the spaces were designed to allow students, staff, and visitors to observe each other’s work, offering a high level of visibility and openness to generate curiosity and stimulate conversations.

“The whole building was built around transparency,” said Lauren Oliver, associate director of the LLCs. “The building naturally cultivates community because we felt that gathering, when our culture has felt so much loneliness recently, was really important.”

Found on the key values of hope, creativity, friendship, artistry, learning, and service, the building’s ability to showcase student work has been appreciated by many residents, including Alexander Ismael.

“I see a lot more of the work coming out of the School of Visual Arts because [this year] it’s right in front of me rather than being tucked away somewhere,” said Ismael, a third-year architecture student and resident assistant in the building. “The fact that the building switches between being a residence hall and a space with actual classes is super unique and brings a diverse level of ages and interest levels and majors into the building.” — TW

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

LIVING LEARNING COMMUNITIES

INNOVATE — A community for students interested in becoming entrepreneurs, visionaries, and business leaders.

RHIZOME — A community that explores the roles of art, design, construction, planning, and analytical interventions in shaping environments and bringing about change.

STUDIO 72 — A community that encourages creativity and artistic development, with an emphasis on collaborative art-making outside of the classroom.

WHAT’S IN IT?

GLASSWORKS: The Creativity and Innovation District Living Learning Communities feature 534 windows that offer visibility and openness to generate curiosity and stimulate conversations.

MAKERSPAces

MAKERSPACE LAB — Ultimaker 3D printer, WASP 3D printer, benchtop CNC milling machine, two laser cutters, vinyl cutter, soldering iron

WOOD SHOP — Large format CNC, table saw, drill press, band saw, wood lathe, panel saw, miter saw, scroll saw, planer, jointer, spindle, and belt disk sanders

METAL SHOP — HAAS CNC mini mill, welders, plasma cutter, plasma water table, cold saw, grinder, drill press, metal bench lathe, vertical mill, 60-ton iron worker, vertical band saw, horizontal band saw, belt, disk sander, box brake and slip roller, roll bender and hand bender, sandblaster

BY THE NUMBERS

52 miles of IT cables
534 windows totaling 27,740 square feet of glass
30,240,000 pounds of building concrete
704 shrubs
2,543 perennials/ground cover
72 trees
In the spring of 2011, Raffaella De Vita crossed the Virginia Tech campus every day. She was eight months pregnant. As the professor and associate department head of the Department of Biomedical Engineering and Mechanics navigated the distance between her office and her classroom, she felt a taut pressure, like something was pulling within the lower sides of her abdomen.

“I remember coming back from class and Googling it,” De Vita said. “What’s going on? Why do I feel this kind of stretch?” Her searches gave her a general sense of what the pulling could’ve been.

“What happens is, the uterus is getting bigger, and there are ligaments attached to it that are holding it in place,” De Vita said. “But as the baby gets bigger and bigger, these ligaments get overstretched. At that point, I remember thinking, ‘I wonder what happens if these ligaments are overstretched to the point that they can get damaged.’”

This knowledge led De Vita to widen her research focus, first to the ligaments that interested her and then to the pelvic organs. Now, as head of the Soft Tissue Research: Experiments, Theory, and Computations by Hokies (STRETCH) Lab, she’s among a small but growing number of researchers studying women’s reproductive biomechanics and their changes during pregnancy, delivery, and the postpartum period.

Nearly a decade has passed since De Vita began asking questions about women’s reproductive biomechanics, and with this growing focus on the mother’s experience and the toll on her body, De Vita believes they are better positioned to try to understand fully the inner mechanics. “I don’t think I’ll solve any problems yet,” she said. “But I think if I can start looking at the problems, and if I can invite other people to look at them ... it’s going to take time to find solutions, but at least we can start.”

Suzanne Irby is the assistant director of communications for the College of Engineering. She navigated the distance between her office and the classroom, feeling a taut pressure and her classroom, she felt a taut pressure, like something was pulling within the lower sides of her abdomen.

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SHAKE IT UP

BASKETBALL AND FOOTBALL AT Virginia Tech wouldn’t be the same without the popular Dairy Club delicacy—the milkshake.

"I have been buying them for years," said Roger Weeks '70, while sipping a chocolate milkshake at a men’s basketball game in January.

"This is all I’m eating tonight," he said, chuckling.

The Dairy Club, a student organization of the Department of Dairy Science at Virginia Tech, has been selling milkshakes at football games since 2001 and at basketball games since 2002.

The club sells, on average, 3,200 shakes during football season and 6,000 combined for men’s and women’s basketball games.

Proceeds from the milkshake sales fund a variety of events throughout the year, from study abroad opportunities for club members to the Little All-American Dairy Show and Hokie Dairy Day. For Hokie Dairy Day, the club invites elementary and middle school students to campus to learn about dairy farming and milk production.

Milkshake connoisseurs will find the Dairy Club milkshake booth inside Cassell Coliseum for basketball games and at Lane Stadium during football season. For $6, fans may choose from chocolate or vanilla-flavored shakes. Strawberry shakes are available occasionally.

At a recent basketball game, he said he always seeks out the milkshake booth, walking the full circle around the coliseum until he finds it.

"It’s kind of a tradition," Shelor said. He prefers the vanilla shakes.

His friend, Becca Stephens, described her Dairy Club chocolate shake as creamy and not too sugary.

"Amazing," she said as she sipped the shake. ■ JKB/SW
Although little is officially noted about them, early records indicate that women have helped staff Virginia Tech since its founding in 1872. One early female faculty member, Ella Graham Agnew, known as the founder of home demonstration work in Virginia, became the nation’s first female field agent in 1910 and served as an Extension agent for Virginia Tech from 1914-19.

While Virginia Tech admitted the first female students in 1921, and by the 1932-33 academic year, the number of enrolled women topped 100.

Over the past 100 years, the numbers of female faculty, staff, and students have continued to grow. In 2022, women on campus number in the tens of thousands.
IN 1921, THERE WERE FIVE. NOW, THERE ARE 12,711.

In a span of 100 years, the number of undergraduate female students at Virginia Tech has grown remarkably.

Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute, an all-male institution commonly called VPI, enrolled the first full-time female students a century ago. This set the stage for future throngs of women who would not only receive a Virginia Tech education, but shape the university and the world through their skills, talents, and sheer might.

Turn the page to meet several Hokies whose experiences as students and faculty marked significant milestones in women’s progress at Virginia Tech.

Their voices span decades—each story a micro-cosm of what life was like for women at the university then and now—and offer personal accounts that reflect how individual experiences collectively lay a path for the generations who follow.
It began with VPI President Julian Burruss, who had previously served as the first president of Harrisonburg State Normal School, a teacher’s college for women, now James Madison University. Burruss argued to the VPI Board of Visitors that allowing women to enroll was a good idea on many accounts. World War I had opened new lines of work for women, female scientists already were making strides in the world, and two other state institutions—the University of Virginia and William & Mary—had found women “satisfactory,” according to “Generations of Women Leaders at Virginia Tech,” a book written by Clara Cox to celebrate the 75th anniversary of women at the university.

To be sure, there were some female students at VPI before 1921. Women were allowed to sit in classes for no credit, and they could attend summer classes. A few female staff members worked at the university, including Lizzie Arabella Jenkins, a home demonstration agent who was also one of the first Black employees.

Even so, VPI was one of the last five or six land-grant institutions in the nation formally to admit women, who initially were called co-eds on the Blacksburg campus.

The change did not come without growing pains.
History can be hard to find. Kira Dietz and Anna LoMascolo are on a mission to share the history and untold stories of the women of Virginia Tech. After thumbing through thousands of historic campus photos, yellow-aged handwritten letters, class notes, and other rarities, the duo has organized an interactive virtual timeline.

The History of Women at Virginia Tech, rwomenshistory.lib.vt.edu, is a digital effort to share the history of the roles that women, including students, staff, faculty, and administrators, have played on campus even before women were first admitted as full-time students in 1921. The site includes scanned documents and images, oral histories, and university publications.

Dietz, University Libraries’ assistant director of Special Collections and University Archives, and LoMascolo, co-director of programming for Virginia Tech’s Women’s Center, are leading the project. However, they said the impetus and energy behind the launch of the project was Patricia Hyer, associate provost emerita, who was inspired by the Virginia Tech LGBTQ+ Digital History and Timeline.

“Women are central to Virginia Tech’s story and at the core of our success, growth, and impact as an institution of higher education,” said LoMascolo. “Unfortunately, women have historically been excluded from the telling of that story.”

The timeline also includes some full stories told by the women themselves, such as in the collection of Black Women at VT Oral Histories.

Women’s history at Virginia Tech is continually evolving as the team has opportunities to explore more historical materials.

“There are many more places to look on campus that might reveal more of this story,” said Dietz.

Lucy Lee Lancaster was among the first five women to enroll at Virginia Tech.

Lancaster, who grew up in Blacksburg, decided to major in biology because it was a general topic, and she initially planned to become a teacher, according to a Blacksburg oral history project record available through Special Collections and University Archives in the University Libraries.

In “Generations of Women Leaders at Virginia Tech,” Lancaster recounts the feelings of male students toward their first female classmates.

“The students individually were not polite to the women students, but as a whole they did not like the idea of co-education.”

The trouble came from the upperclassmen, she surmised, because they “were used to all-male classes and thought that having women around spoiled the sacred traditions of Tech.”

As a junior, Lancaster took a job in the Virginia Tech library as a student assistant and decided that she wanted to become a librarian.

After graduating in 1925, Lancaster enrolled in New York State Library School.

Soon after completing her training, Lancaster returned to Virginia Tech, working in the campus library until she retired in 1975.

When Lancaster died in 1989, she donated her house on Washington Street to the YMCA at Virginia Tech. The Lancaster House still serves as the offices for the organization.

Everyone was buzzing.

The high school students all talked about Linda Edmonds, new Linda Turner, valedictorian at Mary McLeod Bethune High School in Halifax County, Virginia.

"Linda’s going to Virginia Tech,” they said.

Most of her classmates were headed to predominantly Black colleges. For years before that, Turner thought she was, too. Her sights were set on Hampton University.

But after visiting Virginia Tech’s campus the previous summer for a scholarship competition, Turner made a decision that would change Hokie history.

“I was so young, and it seemed like such an opportunity,” she said. “I didn’t consider myself to be Rosa Parks or anything. I just wanted to do it.”

Turner received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and participated in the federal work-study program to finance her education at Virginia Tech.

For the first few years, she described her experience on the Blacksburg campus as “being on a stage 24 hours a day.”

“Walking across campus, there were a few people who would be nice to you, but they were rare, and the professors, the same way,” she said. “I didn’t hear a whole lot of negative talk, but the stares. I remember that there was always somebody watching you.”

Students and professors rarely spoke to Turner in classes, but she did befriend several female students, both Black and white.

Still, some of the white students who would greet her in the all-female residence hall, Hillcrest Hall, would ignore her if their parents visited for the weekend.

“One of my classmates would tell her kids, ‘Sent her to Hillcrest Hall and she doesn’t have many friends, she’s just a token,’” Turner said.

“She would say, ‘Why don’t we all be nice to her?’”

It was what they had learned, Turner said. “It’s all they knew.”

When she was feeling down, Turner would go to the university bookstore and find Mrs. Perdue, a store employee who was always nice to her.

“I would go in there feeling down, but when I came out, I felt like the sun had come out,” Turner said.

Those bookstore visits helped compensate for the support Turner missed so much from her Black teachers and community back in Halifax County.

She recalled attending gatherings off campus as part of a Black social fellowship, Groove Phi Groove. Congregating with other Black male and female students, she felt comfortable, and she said “you could just be you.”

Nationally, it was a time of change and uncertainty. The Vietnam War was unfolding, and Turner’s brother, a student at Howard University, was drafted, as were the family members and friends of many of her classmates. Entertainment also was evolving. Black music was moving into the mainstream, and entertainers, such as Marvin Gaye, Tammi Terrell, and the Impressions, performed on campus.

Hair styles, including variations of Afros, gained popularity.

“I always say, ‘When I entered Virginia Tech, I came in color, and I left Black,’” Turner said of the way the culture shifted while she was an undergraduate student.

And although change did happen, it was gradual. The evidence of what Turner describes as discrimination was subtle.

Turner was the only female student in a chemistry lab During class, someone knocked a bottle of solution off
a table. The contents spilled onto Turner’s legs and ate away her panty hose.

The professor, who never spoke to her directly, advised the students to be more careful, never asking about her legs. A male student poured water onto her legs to help remove the chemical. Turner left the lab and ran into her chemistry lecture professor, who expressed concern and encouraged her to shower to eliminate any remaining solution.

She received a B for the labwork that day. The lab instructor deducted points, denying her an A because she left class before the end of the instruction period.

A highlight of Turner’s time at Virginia Tech involved the close relationship she developed with Laura Jean Harper, the dean of the School of Home Economics and namesake for Harper Hall. Turner held a work-study position under Harper, who ultimately became her mentor.

Turner credits Harper with encouraging her to return to Virginia Tech to earn her Ph.D., after Turner received a master’s in general ecology at Michigan State University.

In 1973, Turner entered a business program in the Pamplin College of Business, where she earned an MBA and ultimately, a Ph.D in marketing and business administration.

She recalls being one of very few women in her classes. She received fewer stares during those years, but Turner said it seemed that people did not believe she belonged in the program.

“They were surprised when you did well,” she said. “You don’t forget those things. You don’t forget how people make you feel.”

Turner has taken these lessons with her. Throughout her career, she has held top marketing positions for corporations and numerous leadership roles in higher education, including serving as president of Urban College of Boston and interim president of Roxbury Community College in Massachusetts.

In higher education, her passion was working with students who were trying to determine their career direction and forging a way for themselves.

“One thing I took from Virginia Tech—I always spoke to everybody,” she said.

Turner retired in 2019 as director of the Massachusetts Department of Industrial Accidents. She plans to move back to Halifax County, Virginia, this year.

She often speaks to Virginia Tech groups about her experiences as a Hokie.

“Virginia Tech taught me how to stand in the storm,” she said.

A clipboard with four pages of questions. This was what Emily Pillsbury Davis carried with her in 1973 during her first meeting with Brig. Gen. Earl Acuff, then the commandant of the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets. Davis visited Virginia Tech’s campus with her parents to inquire about the university’s plans to welcome the women into the Corps of Cadets that fall.

Davis’ father was a U.S. Army colonel, and her siblings all were in the military. Davis planned to follow in her family’s footsteps.

By then, women were serving in the military but there were few, if any, in academic military corps. Davis, who lived in Springfield, Virginia, wanted to be one of them.

“I thought, ‘I’d love to be a part of the beginnings of this, because it’s so fresh and new,’” she said.

She arrived for the meeting with Acuff armed with questions about daily life, uniforms, and integration into the corps. Acuff admitted that some of Davis’ questions hadn’t yet been fully addressed.

Suddenly, Davis was swept up into a new chapter at Virginia Tech, and her questions were leading the way that decisions were made.

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“Virginia Tech taught me how to stand in the storm,” she said.

It was 1973, just after the Vietnam War. Interest in the corps had dwindled, and there were fewer than 300 cadets. Admitting women could help to increase its numbers.

That year, 18 freshmen and seven upperclassmen women entered the corps, forming L Squadron.

Davis recalls having to make copies of the cadet manual for the women, because initially there were only two copies available for them all to read and memorize.

There also was a limited plan for uniforms for women in the beginning. As the first winter approached, representatives of L Squadron found an overcoat at Leggetts’a, a former department store chain on South Main Street, and each woman ordered...
her own. They took them to the tailor shop, where the tailor stitched each woman’s rank and other information onto them. The male cadets weren’t so sure about the females, Davis said. She became a commander her junior year and when she attended commanders’ meetings, the men were not very receptive.

“They thought they could drive us out, but the girls were very resilient,” said Davis, who remembers going to local high schools in her hometown over school breaks to recruit members to the corps. “We just kept doing our thing and we followed every rule.”

Eventually, the men began to accept the females, and some ended up dating one another.

Davis recalls spearheading the effort to stop female cadets from having to wear heels to class. She reached out to her sister, Nora, an officer in the U.S. Army, who recommended orthopedic or “granny” shoes as she called them. This helped eliminate the issue of sore feet for the women. They would bandage their feet after marching in heels across campus.

“We can’t have our feet bandaged when we are trying to march,” Davis said. “Heels are ridiculous.”

Davis also pushed for women to have warmer uniforms. They had blue pants or a blue skirt, all polyester, and they often were freezing outside, while the male cadets had wool clothing. Davis received demerits for telling the women to wear their overcoats on a cold day when they had to wake to raise the flag at 6 a.m.

The challenges helped to bring the women together. Davis recalled that in 1975, she and other members of L Squadron, along with other members of the corps, even shared their experiences with representatives from some U.S. military academies who were bringing in their first classes of women following VTCC’s lead.

“We may not have had the easiest time those years, but the learning was incredible,” said Davis, who majored in human nutrition and foods. “If you could adapt and roll with the punches and become a unified group that was really good. I feel like I gave the corps 150 percent. I did it because I loved it and I believed in it.”

Davis, who married a corps member and has two sons and two granddaughters, lives in Reno, Nevada, and is looking forward to returning to the New River Valley in the future.

It was like stepping back in time. That’s how Pat Hyer felt when she and her husband, Mike, arrived at Virginia Tech in 1978. Mike Hyer had accepted a faculty position in the College of Engineering.

After finishing graduate degrees at the University of Michigan, the couple had spent several years at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, where Pat Hyer helped to start a women’s center and served as president of the faculty women’s caucus.

The women’s movement had little impact on Virginia Tech in the 1970s, according to Pat Hyer. The institutional culture remained strongly male-centered, with an all-male leadership at the time. Sandra Sullivan, vice president of student affairs, was the anomaly.

“The legacy of segregation by race and gender, along with its military history, still permeated the culture,” Pat Hyer said. “The most vivid memory I had was feeling like an endangered species. There were so few women faculty members on campus, period.”

Although she was a doctoral student, she joined a newly formed Women’s Network that aimed to address specific concerns, such as increasing the number of female faculty, equal pay, and support for women’s studies. Pat Hyer’s dissertation topic, affirmative action for women faculty, also reflected this activism.

At Virginia Tech, in that era, some women faculty found themselves in hostile territory; they were denied tenure, or they left the university for more supportive environments.

After finishing her doctorate in 1983, Pat Hyer left Blacksburg for a policy and planning position at the University of Maryland for several years, and Mike Hyer eventually joined her. They returned to Virginia Tech in 1987, when Mike Hyer was recruited to manage a large grant program.

Pat Hyer did not want to come back.

“I had no reason to believe that it was going to be a good place to pursue my own career,” she said.

But 1987 was a time of great change in institutional leadership at Virginia Tech, and this opened up the possibility of cultural change. Pat Hyer went to work in the provost’s office.

Soon, James McComas was named president of Virginia Tech, and he was an advocate of diversity. He hired Fred Carlisle...
as provost, who also was deeply committed to race and gender equity. Change began, though it came in baby steps, Pat Hyer said.

“Although the institution admitted women long ago, little had been done to make it a place that nurtured their presence and development,” she said.

That changed over the next decade with institutional support for women’s studies, a women’s research institute, funded positions to work with victims of sexual assault, and the creation of the Women’s Center in 1994. Virginia Tech also made investments for and changes related to issues of race and eventually sexual orientation.

In 2002, Pat Hyer and several faculty women in the sciences and engineering prepared an application for a National Science Foundation Advance grant. Virginia Tech received the $3.5 million grant in 2003, and with it created AdvanceVT, an initiative to advance the careers of female faculty in the fields of science and engineering through institutional change. The project initiated many policies to assist faculty in balancing the responsibilities of professional and personal life, such as extending the tenure clock for a new parent and offering job assistance for dual career hires.

“STEM fields are still very high pressure, but at least we have a set of policies to work from,” Pat Hyer said.

Virginia Tech took the grant commitment for institutional change seriously and applied the new strategies to all of the colleges, not just science and engineering.

Pat Hyer retired from Virginia Tech in 2010 as associate provost for academic administration.

“All of the provosts I worked for allowed me to be at the table, helping to make change for the institution,” she said.

Pat Hyer’s strengths were running committees, writing policies, collaborating with colleagues, and ushering in change from within.

“There are many different ways to create change. Some of them are in your face and aggressive. That’s not what I was trying to do,” Pat Hyer said. “I was trying to do it from the inside, which means you are making choices every day about what things you let go and what things you speak out about. I needed to figure out ways to make a difference without falling out of the boat that I was rocking.”

“It didn’t happen overnight. It happened over decades, and it’s not done yet,” she said.

In her retirement, she helped to found and now has a leadership role in the Lifelong Learning Institute at Virginia Tech, a volunteer organization that provides intellectual, cultural, and social experiences for adults 50 and older.

Anna LoMascolo has a unique perspective on Virginia Tech history. Her family is part of the fabric of the university, literally.

Her great-grandfather, Angelo LoMascolo, was the university’s first tailor and from his small shop on campus, he outfitted the Corps of Cadets.

It was no surprise that his great-granddaughter would attend Virginia Tech one day. But the university where Anna LoMascolo earned both a bachelor’s degree and a doctorate and now is a full-time employee differs from the one that her great-grandfather knew.

In 1992, LoMascolo graduated from Virginia Tech with a bachelor’s degree in communication studies. She went on to earn a master’s degree in sociology at Humboldt State University in California. In 2000, she returned to Virginia Tech to pursue a Ph.D. in sociology, and in 2004, she landed an education and outreach role at the Women’s Center, which promotes a safe and equitable community for women at Virginia Tech.

LoMascolo’s interest in women’s studies was sparked by her experiences living in New York City after graduating from Virginia Tech in 1992. As a young woman, she was a target of street harassment and aggression, something that she wasn’t accustomed to growing up in Blacksburg.

“It sparked a fierce curiosity in me, about the way those kinds of hostilities manifest themselves and being able to clearly understand the time at that it’s because I’m a young woman that I am confronted with these things,” she said. “These persistent experiences permeated my young life in NYC, and it made me angry.”

Now LoMascolo is co-director of the Virginia Tech center. And throughout the years she has worked there, she said the center’s focus has remained steadfast. Many of the same issues and concerns surrounding women persist, she said, and they include everything from power and gender-based violence to implicit bias in the classroom and workplace.

The Women’s Center provides counseling and support services and offers programs to address and advocate for many of these issues. It also sponsors several student groups that reinforce its mission, including the peer education team, Sexual Assault and Violence Education by Students (SAVES), and the award-winning AWARE team, which is a mentoring program that pairs Virginia Tech women with middle school girls.

Other actions by the university have helped to bolster these topics, such as the formation of the Sexual Violence Culture and Climate Work Group last fall. The goal of the group, established by President Tim Sands, is to advance Virginia Tech’s commitment to end sexual violence and enhance the university’s preventative programming.

One of the center’s primary missions is to ensure that all people feel welcome, even if a person doesn’t identify with a particular gender. It is even considering a name change that would be more inclusive, LoMascolo said.

“We want to be a women’s center for people of all identities at Virginia Tech,” she said. “We can’t just be a center where white women feel comfortable.”

Virginia Tech’s work in creating a supportive environment for everyone, in particular women, is ongoing.

“We are not perfect, but we are committed,” LoMascolo said. “We all want to leave Virginia Tech better for future generations.”

“We want to be a women’s center for people of all identities at Virginia Tech.”

-Anna LoMascolo
WINDING ROAD LEADS TO CAREER IN WINE COUNTRY

ANISYA FRITZ IS QUICK TO SAY THAT HER LIFE JOURNEY from India to California wine country has been winding, unscripted, and definitely enhanced by having gone through Blacksburg.

Her career has spanned academia, disaster relief, and overseeing the customer experience at a winery in California’s Sonoma County. Though each of those roles have been very different, Fritz credits her graduate education at Virginia Tech’s Pamplin College of Business with preparing her to adapt to different situations and make an impact across multiple fields.

Fritz arrived in the United States from India at age 17, carrying just one small red suitcase, to begin her college studies at Loyola University Maryland. She earned her master’s degree in 1989 and Ph.D. in 1990 from Pamplin’s management program, with a focus on strategy, and served as a graduate assistant to former Professor and Department Head Robert Litschert.

“One thing Dr. Litschert told me and I’ve used in any endeavor I’ve ever done is that if you ask the right questions, the answers will become apparent, and if they don’t, then keep going and ask better questions,” Fritz said while sharing her insights with Pamplin students and faculty as part of the Wells Fargo Distinguished Speaker Series.
Through her work with the institute, Fritz literally helped define the field of humanitarian supply chain management. Starting in the early 2000s, the Fritz Institute became a driving force for research and collaboration that has led to numerous improvements in how humanitarian relief is provided.

The institute launched conferences and played a key role developing a humanitarian logistics software platform, HELIOS, that is used by Oxfam and other leading relief groups. Today, the Fritz Institute partners with more than 150 groups, including humanitarian organizations such as the United Nations and Red Cross/Red Crescent Society, government agencies such as the World Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development, multiple global corporations, over 25 universities, and more than a dozen foundations and charitable organizations.

Owning and operating a small winery also offers numerous complex challenges, Fritz said, adding that when they decided to focus on Lynmar Estate full time, "My husband and I didn’t know much about wine, but we did know about business.”

They recognized that in a crowded industry such as wine, they would have to find ways to differentiate themselves in order to succeed. The solution they came up with was to engage customers directly, providing not just bottles of wine but unforgettable experiences for people who visit their vineyard. A guiding insight, Fritz said, was that “the wine business is not just a product business but a joy business.”

To build on that insight, she and her husband made dramatic changes to how their winery operates compared to how their winery operated before they acquired it. Fritz said she recognized the power of setting up local networks while working in disaster relief, and has since applied that concept in her new field to good effect.

The whole is greater than the sum of the parts,” she explained. “The concept is that once you get a community together then your access to resources is multiplied—not necessarily financial resources but skills and knowledge and experience, which are equally important to share.”

"The Virginia Tech experience did change me—and it opened up the world to me,” Anisya Fritz M.S. ’89, Ph.D. ’90
IN FALL 2021, VIRGINIA TECH CHALLENGED students, alumni, and fans to prove just how “Hokie” they are. Hokies were invited to enter a Hokie Spirit Contest featuring four categories: Best Hokie Pet, Best Hokie Home, Best Hokie Workspace, and Best Hokie Birthday Bash. Staff in alumni relations selected a student and a friend/alum winner from each category. Each winner received a theme-based Hokie prize. For example, the winning pet entry received a Hokie food bowl. This page includes some of the winning entries.

JR

HOKIE SPIRIT CONTEST

BOLD DECISIONS LEAD TO SUCCESS

TORRI HUSKE SET AN AMERICAN record in the 100-meter butterfly, qualified for the Summer Olympics in Tokyo, won a silver medal in a relay event at the Olympic Games, and now competes on the Stanford University women’s swimming and diving team.

She accumulated all of these accomplishments as a teenager, though not without guidance and support from others, including her mother, Ying, who understated her role in Torri’s development.

“It takes a village to raise an Olympian,” Ying Huske said. “I was just a cheerleader throughout Torri’s Olympic journey.”

Ying Huske may not sport the Olympic pedigree of her daughter, but her own achievements are impressive. The Virginia Tech alumna, who graduated with a master’s degree in civil engineering in 1995, overcame the hardships of life in the remote countryside of China, having grown up during the Cultural Revolution under leader Mao Zedong. She graduated from college with a degree in architecture, and later, got a master’s degree in architecture design. She worked as an architect for several years.

Huske wasn’t happy as an architect, so she decided to do something different. She came to the U.S. and enrolled at the Ohio State University to pursue a master’s degree in urban and regional planning.

Huske was not comfortable at Ohio State, with its large student population and urban environment—a setting unfamiliar to her—and tuition costs worried her. Academically, her classes focused on urban planning, and Huske wanted to explore engineering. After a semester in Ohio, she transferred to Virginia Tech.

“IT was so happy when I got to Virginia Tech,” Huske said. “The feel of the campus was so different. It was smaller in the sense of community. I felt like the faculty were more engaging to students. It just felt like home when I went to Virginia Tech.”

Huske received an Eisenhower fellowship that not only covered tuition and fees, but also provided a stipend. The fellowship brought her to the Washington, D.C., area to work for the U.S. Department of Transportation, which created an opportunity to collect data for her thesis. After completing her degree, Huske found employment in D.C., where she has remained.

“I reflect about my decision every so often,” Huske said of coming to the U.S. “It was just the best decision that I’ve ever made. I’m just so lucky to have been able to come to the States and meet my husband and have my daughter.”

Despite the rugged circumstances, Huske thrived in school. She graduated from college with a degree in architecture, and later, got a master’s degree in architecture design. She worked as an architect for several years.

JR

Kim Shanahan, Brittany Turley, birthday bash

Jennifer Sowers, home

Jennifer Sowers, home

Kim Shanahan, pet

Brittany Turley, birthday bash

Kerry Gray, workspace

BOLD DECISIONS LEAD TO SUCCESS

ALUMNA PROFILE | HOKIE NATION | 51
TALKING ABOUT HIS FATHER, HIS father’s 1942 Virginia Tech class ring, his mother’s miniature ring, and the opportunity to add to his family’s legacy with Virginia Tech brought forth a mix of emotions from Travis “Rusty” Unterzuber ’72.

As the Unterzuber family carefully weighed the options for what to do with the rings, one possibility stood out. That possibility led the siblings to donate to the Hokie Gold Legacy Program, which allows alumni or families of alumni to donate class rings to be melted to create Hokie gold that is included in casting of rings for future generations of Hokies.

“At first, it was emotional, but there was no indecision,” Unterzuber said. “When we realized what we could do, we knew it was what we had to do—and wanted to do.”

A ring-melting ceremony has taken place annually at the VT FIRE Kroehling Advanced Materials Foundry on campus since 2012. Jesse Fowler and Jim Flynn, classmates from the 1964 M Company of the Corps of Cadets, came up with the idea that bridges the past and future.

Laura Wedin, associate director for student and young alumni engagement, coordinates the program, collecting rings from alumni who want them melted and removing the stones. She also oversees the melting ceremony.

Unterzuber, who earned a degree in agricultural engineering, brought three rings to be melted—his father’s class ring, his mother’s miniature ring, and his wife’s engagement ring. Unterzuber’s own class ring was placed in a “time capsule” near Burruss Hall as part of the university’s sesquicentennial celebration.

Unterzuber attended the melting ceremony along with members of the ring design committee and 2023 Class President Prince Wang. Alan Druschitz, an associate professor in materials science engineering, oversaw the melting process in which a ring-filled crucible was placed into a small furnace and heated to 1,800 degrees. Eight donated rings produced a gold bar weighing 6.315 ounces. The bar was shipped to Balfour, the company that makes Virginia Tech’s class rings, to cast the class ring for the upcoming year. A small amount was reserved to include in future years’ ring melts.

Each gold class ring today consists of 0.33 percent of Hokie gold. So, each student symbolically is connected to alumni from the past.

“We have the ability to help people look ahead and have impact going forward and to make people think about things like, ‘How do I support causes?’ and ‘How do I continue traditions?’” Unterzuber said. “The Hokie Gold Program does both. It continues tradition and looks forward to how we’re going to make the next class ring.” JR

HOKIE GOLD LEGACY PROGRAM
To learn more about the Hokie Gold Legacy Program or to donate a ring, visit alumni.vt.edu/classrings/hokiegold, call 540-231-6285, or email lwedin@vt.edu.

A GOLDEN LEGACY: Travis “Rusty” Unterzuber takes a photo of the cooled molten gold nugget created from eight donated Virginia Tech class rings that were melted at the VT FIRE Kroehling Advanced Materials Foundry for the Hokie Gold Legacy Program.

Listen to this
To celebrate 100 years of women at Virginia Tech, we’ve compiled a special Spotify playlist. All My Hokie Ladies features 100 tracks by today’s top artists and timeless classics, such as:

- Beyoncé
- Aretha Franklin
- Alicia Keys
- Helen Reddy
- Lady Gaga
- Martina McBride
- Whitney Houston
- Tracy Chapman
- Francesca Battistelli
- Sara Bareilles

Follow Virginia Tech on Spotify.
With women comprising only 10 percent of people working in construction, it may seem difficult for young female professionals entering the construction industry. Hart has recognized the importance of peer support in the construction industry. Hart has felt drawn to the question of how to urge young female professionals in construction to find their voice.

“Women on construction sites can easily feel isolated and miss having another woman to go to for advice or support. That is not to say we don’t appreciate our male co-workers who have supported and mentored us, because we do. There are just situations where having another female’s perspective makes more sense,” said Hart.

Space to Build provides resources for young female professionals in construction. They learn from other professionals who came to speak stressed the importance of and their desire to support the students. Hart felt drawn to the question of how to urge her fellow students to come together and actively support one another. She was given the opportunity to create a sustainable project in one of her courses, and the idea for Building Women in Construction (BWIC) took root. BWIC provides resources for women interested in construction careers.

Anyone interested in getting involved with the BWIC student organization can visit its Facebook page, BWIC at Virginia Tech, or email bwic.vt@gmail.com.

ANURADHA BHOWMIK

STARRETT POETRY PRIZE ‘MADE MY YEAR’

One afternoon in January, during a work-related call, Anuradha Bhowmik received an email from the director of the University of Pittsburgh Press with “Starrett Prize” in the subject line. A student advisor by day and writer by night, Bhowmik had submitted a collection of her poetry in hopes of winning the Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize.

The email informed Bhowmik, who earned a Master of Fine Arts from Virginia Tech in 2018, that she had been selected as the winner of the award—one that goes to a poet writing in English who hasn’t had a full-length book of poetry published. Bhowmik’s collection, entitled “Brown Girl Chromatography,” examines race, class, gender, and sexuality in a post-9/11 world.

“I definitely wasn’t expecting it, but it made my year,” she said.

Bhowmik started writing in fourth grade. She described herself as ‘nerdy,’ and that, along with being from Bangladesh and living in a mostly white community in South Jersey, left her feeling isolated. The Sept. 11 attacks negatively impacted Bhowmik’s world, too. People mistakenly viewed her and her family unfavorably because of their immigrant roots.

Bhowmik started writing in a language arts class as an escape.

“Writing poetry was a distraction for most of my life at home and at school, where I always felt isolated,” she said. “It was nice that my teacher validated my writing because that validated me as a person. That was around the first time I was told by an adult that my writing was a skill and a talent that I had.”

Bhowmik focuses mostly on poetry today and mixes in creative nonfiction essays. She plans on continuing to write and has set goals for herself.

“I do think that I will—regardless of how much time it takes or how many other work and life responsibilities I’ll have that aren’t related to writing—be publishing multiple books of poetry and creative nonfiction as I get older,” she said.

The award was not the first for Bhowmik, who earned her undergraduate degree in women’s and gender studies from the University of North Carolina in 2015. Her poetry has won her awards and fellowships in the past, and her poetry and prose have appeared in numerous national publications.

The Starrett prize came with a $5,000 grand prize, and the University of Pittsburgh Press plans to publish her collection as part of its Pitt Poetry Series later this fall.

DOMINIC PEDROTTY

GRADUATION GOAL HELPED DOMINIC PEDROTTY HEAL AFTER DEVASTATING CAR CRASH

The scars are there, forever reminders of the worst day of his life. Dominic Pedrotty carried these scars with him when he walked across the stage at Virginia Tech’s commencement ceremony in mid-December to receive a degree in mechanical engineering. These unwanted souvenirs came from a car crash on May 31, 2018. Pedrotty, who had just completed his junior year, had no history of health issues, but 10 minutes from Kingsport, Tennessee, on the way to Knoxville, he lost consciousness and veered in front of a tractor trailer. The driver slammed into Pedrotty’s vehicle and veered off the road.

Dominic Pedrotty carried these scars with him when he walked across the stage at Virginia Tech’s commencement ceremony in mid-December to receive a degree in mechanical engineering. These unwanted souvenirs came from a car crash on May 31, 2018. Pedrotty, who had just completed his junior year, had no history of health issues, but 10 minutes from Kingsport, Tennessee, on the way to Knoxville, he lost consciousness and veered in front of a tractor trailer. The driver slammed into Pedrotty’s vehicle and veered off the road.

Pedrotty had suffered an aneurysm—when an artery in the body breaks, it can cause severe internal bleeding. The Sept. 11 attacks negatively impacted Bhowmik’s world, too. People mistakenly viewed her and her family unfavorably because of their immigrant roots.

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The award was not the first for Bhowmik, who earned her undergraduate degree in women’s and gender studies from the University of North Carolina in 2015. Her poetry has won her awards and fellowships in the past, and her poetry and prose have appeared in numerous national publications.

The Starrett prize came with a $5,000 grand prize, and the University of Pittsburgh Press plans to publish her collection as part of its Pitt Poetry Series later this fall.

DOMINIC PEDROTTY

GRADUATION GOAL HELPED DOMINIC PEDROTTY HEAL AFTER DEVASTATING CAR CRASH

The scars are there, forever reminders of the worst day of his life. Dominic Pedrotty carried these scars with him when he walked across the stage at Virginia Tech’s commencement ceremony in mid-December to receive a degree in mechanical engineering. These unwanted souvenirs came from a car crash on May 31, 2018. Pedrotty, who had just completed his junior year, had no history of health issues, but 10 minutes from Kingsport, Tennessee, on the way to Knoxville, he lost consciousness and veered in front of a tractor trailer. The driver slammed into Pedrotty’s vehicle and veered off the road.

Pedrotty had suffered an aneurysm—when an artery in the body breaks, it can cause severe internal bleeding. The Sept. 11 attacks negatively impacted Bhowmik’s world, too. People mistakenly viewed her and her family unfavorably because of their immigrant roots.

Bhowmik started writing in a language arts class as an escape.

“Writing poetry was a distraction for most of my life at home and at school, where I always felt isolated,” she said. “It was nice that my teacher validated my writing because that validated me as a person. That was around the first time I was told by an adult that my writing was a skill and a talent that I had.”

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Pedrotty spent seven months rehabilitating. He worked with physical therapists to get stronger and retrain muscles for balance and coordination. Pedrotty needed more rehab, but he wanted more of a purpose to his life than rehab. Graduating gave him that purpose.

“I was always interested in finishing what I had started,” he said. “I don’t know yet what all those are about, but it’s certainly nice to have options,” he said. “I don’t know yet what all those are going to be. In theory, I’m going to be getting better.”

In the summer of 2017, Adam Hendrix found himself facing a high-stakes decision regarding a possible career change.

Hendrix’s enthusiasm.

He worked a well-paying, albeit mundane, position for a government contractor in Northern Virginia. The job offered steady income and nice benefits, but the drudgery of working 8 to 5 and dealing with traffic gridlock every day dulled Hendrix’s enthusiasm.

Hendrix quit his job in July 2017 and joined the world of professional poker. He headed to the World Series of Poker in Las Vegas, and at his first tournament, he joined a tournament playing Pot Limit Omaha 8 or Better. Out of 850 players, he finished second for $137,992.

Today, Hendrix plays all over the country—everywhere from Las Vegas, where he and another player rent a home on “The Strip,” to California and North Carolina. His schedule varies, but he has played seven days a week in tournaments that last 10- to 12-hour days.

CAREER CHANGE TURNS UP ACES

ADAM HENDRIX

Hendrix first picked up the game as a child when he and relatives played for small change at his grandmother’s home in Homer, Alaska—Hendrix’s birthplace. But he somewhat lost touch with it while bouncing around the world. His father worked in the oil and gas industry, and his job took the family to places such as Aberdeen, Scotland, and Cairo, Egypt.

As a student at Tech, Hendrix came across some friends playing poker in a community room at now-demolished Thomas Hall, where he lived. He tried his luck and ultimately won big that night. That rekindled his interest, and he later joined a poker club. In 2015, he graduated and found a job, but poker was never far from his thoughts.

‘It’s certainly nice to have options,’ he said. ‘I don’t know yet what all those are going to be. In theory, I’m going to be getting better.’

Life nearly ended for Dominic Pedrotty three years ago. Now, it seems as if his life is just beginning.

In the summer of 2017, Adam Hendrix first picked up the game as a child when he and relatives played for small change at his grandmother’s home in Homer, Alaska—Hendrix’s birthplace. But he somewhat lost touch with it while bouncing around the world. His father worked in the oil and gas industry, and his job took the family to places such as Aberdeen, Scotland, and Cairo, Egypt.

Returning to coursework presented hurdles. But his advisor, Heather Whedbee, navigated new curriculum requirements and hatched a plan.

“Just thought, ‘Wow, we have so much to do for this student,’” Whedbee said. “We can’t just be, ‘Oh, everyone needs to be treated fairly.’ It doesn’t apply in this situation.”

Pedrotty’s first engineering class upon his return was a design class. He and a team of classmates designed a threshing machine to help Rwandan farmers harvest grain.

They designed the machine in fall 2019. The following spring, they built and tested it, while navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. That project propelled Pedrotty forward. He took his final two classes this past fall.

Pedrotty isn’t quite ready for the work —he needed more rehab, but he hopes to pursue a career working with agricultural machinery.

“Life nearly ended for Dominic Pedrotty three years ago. Now, it seems as if his life is just beginning.”

Hendrix’s enthusiasm.

He worked a well-paying, albeit mundane, position for a government contractor in Northern Virginia. The job offered steady income and nice benefits, but the drudgery of working 8 to 5 and dealing with traffic gridlock every day dulled Hendrix’s enthusiasm.

Hendrix bet on himself and joined the world of professional poker. A 2015 Virginia Tech graduate with a degree in economics and a minor in statistics from the university’s College of Science, he finished 2021 ranked No. 10 in the Global Poker Index rankings and No. 6 among American players.

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When Harper Scott attended a Hokie football game for the first time, she was horrified as the Highty-Tighties and the cheerleaders marched out carrying the largest Confederate flag she’d ever seen. The game was televised. Her mother saw and called, telling Harper Scott that she could come home to Virginia Beach. But she didn’t.

“The more people who didn’t want me there, the more I wanted to be there,” Harper Scott said.

Harper Scott joined the student senate and pushed for change. The students’ efforts resulted in the elimination of not only the Confederate flag display, but also the playing of “Dixie” at football games.

Harper Scott graduated in 1970 from what is now the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences and became a teacher. Now retired, she taught and inspired generations of students for almost 40 years.

Last fall, Harper Scott returned to campus for her 50th reunion and induction into the Cornerstone Alumni. She currently serves on the Cornerstone Advisory Board.

Cornerstone Alumni are Virginia Tech’s most passionate and respected alumni who have served as the foundation of the university for more than 50 years. "Having to go through what I did made me a very resilient person. It helped me focus on what I wanted to do in life, which was to teach others," she said. "In my own way, I fought for social justice reform."

Today, Harper Scott is among Virginia Tech’s more than 111,000 living female alumnae, and her story stands out as the embodiment of a key milestone as Virginia Tech marks its sesquicentennial. After graduating, Harper Scott did not return to Virginia Tech often. It wasn’t until a trip to the Blacksburg campus 26 years ago to mark the 75th anniversary of women at the university that she realized the significance of her place in history.

“That’s when I first realized that I had made some history—and that honestly the truth," she said. "I knew we were the first girls, but it didn’t mean anything. That put my life into perspective. Maybe I did make a difference and change some minds and hearts of people. I hope I still do.”

Harper Scott’s story has been chronicled for Virginia Tech history, and inspired countless Hokies, and stands as a symbol for change and progress. ■ AM

Alumni, we want to hear what you’ve been doing. Mail career, wedding, birth, and death news to Class Notes, Virginia Tech Alumni Association, Holtzman Alumni Center, 901 Prices Fork Road, Blacksburg, VA 24061; email the information to classnotes@vt.edu; or submit the news online at vtmag.vt.edu/submit-classnote.php, where photos may also be uploaded for consideration. For assistance, call 540-231-6285.

In 2020, Mary Parker Davis ’81 and husband Mark, a former chemical engineering professor at Virginia Tech, established the Mary P. and Mark E. Davis Scholarship, which provides financial support for up to three years for qualified students. In December 2021, three students became the inaugural recipients of that scholarship.

To qualify, students must apply to the College of Engineering’s scholarship program, demonstrate academic excellence, and participate in an organization that supports women in STEM.

Mark and Mary Parker Davis
"In 2021, we logged our Hokie Hike at Blackwater Falls State Park in Davis, West Virginia, along with not one, but two sons, Carter and Wyatt." — Dan Laird ’09, Laurel, Maryland, who along with Brynn Ishler Laird ’09, welcomed a son, Carter, 10/27/21.

"Oliver is ready to cheer on the Hokies!" — Tyler Dotson, MADCIS ’17, Pulaski, Virginia, who welcomed a son, Oliver Ash, 1/19/21.

"With twins, there’s always two times the fun and double the Hokie Spirit." — Bonnie Hamilton ’08, and Quentin Penn-Hollar ’09, Richmond, Virginia, who welcomed twins, Elizabeth and Rhys, 4/12/21.

"Our wedding celebration included friends, family, and lots of Hokies." — Austin Dunkham Traylor ’16, Richmond, Virginia, who married Brandon Traylor, 7/17/21.

"Our Hokie wedding took place in the Big Apple. We got married in New York, where we both reside, surrounded by our Hokie friends." — Michelle Clare Arroyo Mullen ’17, New York, New York, who married Michael Mullen ’18, 10/9/21.

"Ours is a true Hokie love story. We met at Virginia Tech as sophomores in 2015 and have been together ever since!" — John Michael Payne ’17, Virginia Beach, Virginia, who married Holly Waide ’17, 8/14/21.

"We wanted to share a Hokie Welcome with our Virginia Tech family." — Ashley Rood Spinetto ’07, Reston, Virginia, who along with Jonathan N. Spinetto ’07 welcomed a son, Ryker, 9/1/21.
IN MEMORIAM

Listing includes notices shared with the university from May 1, 2021, through Sept. 15, 2021.

[In memoriam notices from various university departments and individuals]

[Continued list of names and dates of passing]

[In memoriam notices from various university departments and individuals]
OBITUARIES


Antoine Hobeika, professor emeritus of civil and environmental engineering in the College of Engineering, died on Sept. 20, 2021. Hobeika served at Virginia Tech for 43 years, teaching courses in transportation infrastructure and systems engineering before retiring in 2016. He was the founding director of the Virginia Tech Center for Transportation Research, now known as the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute.

David S. Lindsay, professor of parasitology at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, died Nov. 17, 2021. Lindsay taught parasitology to graduate and undergraduate students for 24 years before retiring in 2021. Before joining the faculty at Virginia Tech, he was a senior research fellow at Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine.

Reginald Glenn Mitchiner, a professor emeritus of mechanical engineering at Virginia Tech, died Sept. 5, 2021. Mitchiner taught for more than 20 years at Virginia Tech, working with more than 7,000 students and pioneering technology across the campus. His mentorship of a student group yielded the first U.S. patent in Virginia Tech history awarded to such a group. He also helped to establish the Computer-Aided Engineering Design Program, and was a member of the Virginia Tech College of Engineering committee for the personal computer initiative, pressuring the expansion of computers available to students in the late 1980s.

FACULTY/STAFF

Michael A. Barnes, professor emeritus of dairy science in the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, died Oct. 10, 2021. Barnes taught numerous undergraduate courses. He served as an academic and administrative advisor to the college’s Dairy Club. Barnes also coached the Dairy Cattle Judging Team, which won four national championships.

Barbara Sutton Cowles, associate director of Virginia Tech’s Honors College and member of the university community for 45 years, died on Aug. 17, 2021. Cowles won the Golden Key Atlantic Regional Advisor of the Year in 1994 and the Provost’s Award for Excellence in Advising in 2007.

Donald A. Drapeau, professor of theatre arts, died Nov. 18, 2021. Drapeau led the Department of Theatre Arts at Virginia Tech for more than 30 years. He served as president of the National Association of Schools of Theatre, president of the Southeastern Theatre Conference, and president of the Virginia Tech Theatre Association and was an active consultant and adjudicator for countless area high schools and colleges. He was inducted into the prestigious College Fellows of the American Theatre.

Robert Heller, professor emeritus of biomedical engineering and mechanics in the College of Engineering, died on Nov. 3, 2021. Heller joined Virginia Tech’s faculty in 1967. He served as the J. Frank Mahler Professor Emeritus, and his research interests included elastic behavior of structures, fatigue, reliability, and safety of structures and probabilistic mechanics.


Adam A. Serafin, Chesapeake, Va., 4/29/2021.

In 1921, Ruth Terrett Earle, then Ruth Terrett, was one of the first five women to enroll full-time at Virginia Tech, then known as Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute. In 1925, Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and the YMCA of Roanoke. And Teacher's College, while losing to Radford over Blacksburg High School and Concord College and the YMCA of Roanoke. And the 1925 Tin Horn, an alternative yearbook created by the female students, highlights the early women's basketball team.

Earle also is credited with spearheading the university's first women's basketball team, which legend says came about partly due to skills female students developed from avoiding water thrown at them by cadets. “We became exceedingly alert and quick to dodge water that we decided to extend our athletic ability even further, and as a consequence of this we had a basketball team,” one female student of the time reportedly said.

The first team, the “Sixtettes,” formed in 1923 with Earle as the captain. Despite the male students attending games and rooting for the opposition, the team went 3-2 that season. The women scored victories over Blacksburg High School and Concord Teacher’s College, while losing to Radford College and the YMCA of Roanoke. And the 1925 Tin Horn, an alternative yearbook that the women created after being denied entry into the Bugle, said Earle “stirred up an enthusiasm for basketball.”

“She [Earle] mentioned that they [the university] didn’t have much for the women to do, so I guess basketball was the easiest thing to organize,” said Sherod Earle, who lives in Maryland. “I don’t remember her talking too much about it, but I know that she did enjoy her classes and she did enjoy her time down there.”

Sherod Earle said his mother also spoke of riding a train to Christiansburg and then taking the Huckleberry Line into Blacksburg. As a student, Earle often demonstrated the characteristic determination described by her son in response to the misogyny of the day.

One such response is described in the university archives. “One day, Ruth Terrett, a civil engineering student, decided to show the men she could do just as well as them. She donned a cadet uniform and climbed the university’s water tower, a tradition the male cadets undertook to prove their strength and ability. That day, Ruth proved that women, when given the chance, could do what men could,” according to “Climbing the Water Tower: How Women Went from Intruders to Leaders at Virginia Tech.”

Earle also served at least one term as chair of the women students, a group that formed after female students were denied the ability to join most other campus organizations.

After graduating, Earle worked in a Washington, D.C., architect’s office for six years. She married Sherod L. Earle Sr. in 1931 and left the workforce for a time before returning in 1950 to work as a statistician for the Chesapeake Bay Institute of Johns Hopkins University. She was a member of the Society of Women Engineers and the College Woman’s Club of Annapolis and went on to breed and exhibit dachshunds before her death in 1995.

Sherod Earle said his mother stayed connected with the university throughout her life, went to reunions when possible, and even gave him some tips on attending Virginia Tech athletic events. “She said, ‘When you go down there, say, ‘Hokie, Hokie, Hokie, hi,’ and they’ll know what you’re talking about,’” he said.

Women’s basketball at Virginia Tech would continue after Earle’s 1925 graduation, with the team rebranding itself the “Turkey Hens” sometime before 1929. Around that time, it’s been said that the women began charging the male students, who were often still cheering on the opposing team, exorbitant fees to attend games.

It wasn’t until 1972 that the university officially sanctioned women’s basketball as a club sport. In 1976, it became a varsity sport. In 1977, Helena Flannagan received partial aid, becoming the first women’s basketball player to earn a scholarship, and Kim Albany, who played from 1978-82, was the first player with a full scholarship. The 2021-22 team opened the season ranked No. 24 by the Associated Press and proudly hung a banner from its NCAA tournament appearance the previous season.

Although the water-dodging tale connected to the origin of women’s basketball at Virginia Tech may be more legend than fact, Sherod Earle believes his mom would be happy the story is being shared, and the game is being played. “She would be proud of what y’all are doing,” Sherod Earle said. ■ TW
SPARK OF GENIUS: Advanced Welding Technology class, led by Christian Mariger, trains Ware Lab students so they can use various kinds of welding and cutting equipment and perform hot work processes.

“I think what the student walks away from, as engineers, is they have a much better understanding of how things are fabricated using these techniques. And that lends some insight into designing not only the product, but the process,” Mariger said.

See more at vtx.vt.edu/videos.
IT IS HARD IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE TO PUT into words how special it is to be a Hokie. How do you adequately describe the power of our community, the experiences we all share, the common bond of *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve)? Virginia Tech is a place, of course—a beautiful and special one—but for me and so many of you, it is so much more than that. Virginia Tech is a feeling.

As president of the Virginia Tech Alumni Association Board of Directors, I have been able to share with the world what it means to be a Hokie and give back to our alma mater.

It has been an honor to serve you. This year, Virginia Tech’s 150th, is my final year as leader of the alumni board. Thinking about my time as president, I am proud of what we have accomplished together and how far our university has come.

As part of our sesquicentennial, we celebrate our present while also honoring our past. This March marks 100 years of women students at Virginia Tech.
ON PARADE: The annual parade through downtown Blacksburg is a highlight of Virginia Tech Homecoming weekend.

Her gifts are at a level so removed from the rest of us that all we can do is feel the appropriate awe and then wonder on the mysteries of nature.”
—The New York Times on Sarah Chang

Reflecting on my own place in history, I am the first Black female board president. The board I lead is one of the most diverse we have ever had. That fills me with immense pride, and it is my expectation that our board will continue to be representative of our diverse alumni population.

Looking back on my tenure, there is so much that I am proud of including the creation of our Black Alumni Society, our innovation through COVID-19, and the growing number of engaged Hokies.

The creation of our Black Alumni Society has come to fruition after countless years of planning and the tireless work of so many alumni. The society will celebrate the rich history of our Black alumni.

Through the pandemic we found new ways to stay connected. Our community came together during the last two years, and we faced an unprecedented pandemic together.

As board president, I was able to attend so many Hokie gatherings and connect with Hokies virtually. This would not have been possible if I had to physically travel to each area. COVID-19 was difficult, but it made us look at things differently and demonstrated that Hokies show up for each other no matter what.

And even through such challenging circumstances, we grew our alumni engagement and giving. So far, more than 74,500 alumni have engaged with the university in meaningful ways over the course of our Boundless Impact campaign.

As my term comes to an end, I want to encourage you to give back to our alma mater and challenge you to share your reasons for believing that being a Hokie is special.

I often tell people that I never say no to Virginia Tech. There has never been anything that when asked I did not do for our great university. In the spirit of Ut Prosim, I will continue to work tirelessly for the Hokie Nation.

I charge you to do the same. Say yes. There are many ways to be involved, spend time with your local alumni chapter, mentor a student, serve on your reunion committee, or come back to campus for an event.

Thank you to Mark Lawrence, our immediate past president, for your support and guidance. I am excited about all the things that Nathan Lavinka, our next leader, will do for the board.

I hope you will join me in Blacksburg this fall for Homecoming Oct. 15-16 and for the Black Alumni Reunion, April 14-16, 2023.

Go Hokies!

Deisia Creighton Barney ’86, who earned a degree in communications, is a regional director of people development at WayForth and president of the Virginia Tech Alumni Association Board of Directors.

COUNT ME IN!
To learn more about ways to say yes to Virginia Tech, visit alumni.vt.edu/yes.

Tuesday, April 19, 7:30 PM

SARAH CHANG, violin
SONYA OVRUTSKY FENSOME, piano

One of the most sought-after violinists playing today, Sarah Chang performs violin sonatas by Brahms and Franck, as well as Bartók’s Romanian Folk Dances for her Moss debut.

$20-$45, $10 students and youth 18 and under

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