

# VIRGINIA TECH. MAGAZINE

SPRING 2025

## THE NEXUS

## OF NEXT

Virginia Tech's new building in Alexandria is more than a technology hub.  
**IT'S A GATEWAY TO THE FUTURE.**



**Well-connected at work**  
Alumni Corporate Networks are bringing Hokies together

**Can AI help in an emergency?**  
University researchers explore the role of AI in disaster response and other crises



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# chucho valdés and irakere 50

sat., may 10, 7:30 pm

Grammy winner and world-famous pianist Chucho Valdés closes the season with a tribute to 50 years of Irakere, featuring a new iteration of the band that revolutionized Afro-Latin jazz.



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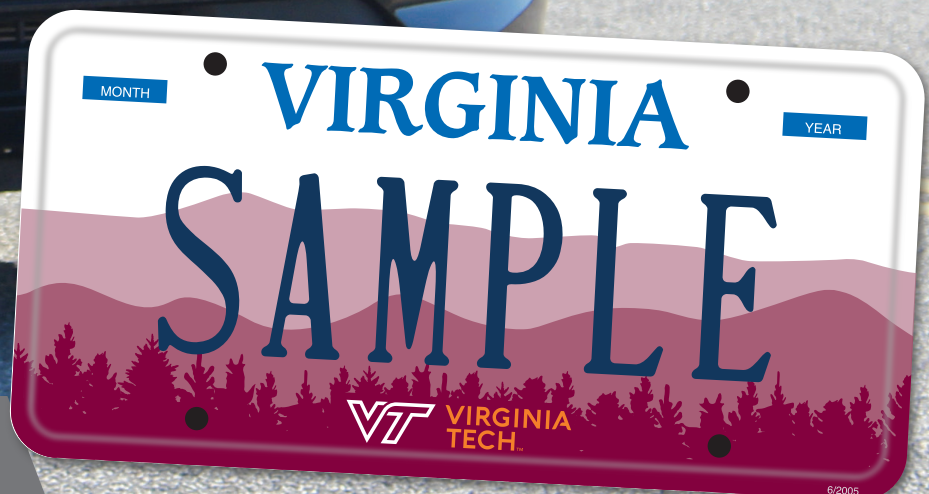
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## FEATURES

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Virginia Tech celebrated the grand opening of Academic Building One in Alexandria this spring. The growing presence and network of innovation in the D.C. area supports new partnerships, advances research, and creates opportunities for learning.

### 46 ALUMNI CORPORATE NETWORKS

When Hokie alumni connect at work, there's an instant kinship and a dynamic rapport. Virginia Tech's Alumni Corporate Networks create opportunities for mentorship, fellowship, and networking in the workplace.

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ON THE COVER: Academic Building One in Alexandria, Virginia, opened for spring semester 2025. Photo illustration by Natalie Ferguson for Virginia Tech.

(above) Friends, alumni, and special guests from across the commonwealth gathered for the grand opening of Academic Building One on Feb. 28. Illustration by Steven White for Virginia Tech.



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



(from left) Dr. Laura Sands, President Tim Sands, and HokieBird at the grand opening celebration for Academic Building One in Alexandria, Virginia on Feb. 28. Photo by Luke Hayes for Virginia Tech.

# EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES

VIRGINIA TECH IS BUILDING A DYNAMIC GLOBAL NETWORK

The past decade has been a period of transition for Virginia Tech, advancing the university as a truly global institution. With our commitment to a strategic plan inspired by the Beyond Boundaries vision, and the combined efforts of the entire Hokie community, we have achieved milestones that many would have considered beyond our reach a few years ago.

The opening of Academic Building One in Alexandria this February is one of our many recent accomplishments supporting an expanding innovation network (page 28). This new epicenter for technology education and research gives graduate students in computer science and computer engineering access to project-based learning opportunities right in the heart of the greater Washington, D.C., metro area's innovation economy (page 40).

It is much more than a collection of classrooms and offices, I see it as a front door to Virginia Tech in a place with an incredible concentration of talent, opportunity, and potential partners. Its strategic location connects us with industry, policymakers, and our alumni who live and work in the region and now have a home base where they can gather as Hokies (page 24).

This new nexus broadens opportunities for Virginia Tech across the commonwealth. For example, while the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute is based in Roanoke, its researchers recently established a laboratory on the Children's National

Hospital Research & Innovation Campus in Washington, D.C., to advance pediatric cancer research (page 31). The Virginia Tech National Security Institute is engaged in both Blacksburg and Arlington, we have an emerging Coalition for Smart Construction in Falls Church, and many other initiatives have developed in the region over the years. Adding Academic Building One in Alexandria's Potomac Yard creates an opportunity to weave them into a network that will become a signature feature of a Virginia Tech education.

We want every student, employee, partner, and alum, regardless of their location, to feel like they are part of a dynamic global network with the resources, spirit, and character of one university—one Virginia Tech. This is the innovation network I know we can become.

Senior Vice President for Advancement Charlie Phlegar has played a crucial role in these achievements, including this year's successful Giving Day (page 11). He recently announced his upcoming retirement, leaving some very big shoes to fill. We wish him the very best and appreciate his service to the university as one of our most dedicated Hokies (page 42).

Thank you for your remarkable enthusiasm and support for Virginia Tech as we take the next step on our journey. Together, we are truly traveling Beyond Boundaries.

Tim Sands,  
President ■



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# LETTERS

## FROM THE EDITOR

### BAND OF BROTHERS

A photo on page 58 in Virginia Tech Magazine's fall 2024 edition features alumni of the Highty-Tighties, not the Marching Virginians as noted in the caption.

The Highty-Tighties, the Corps of Cadets' regimental band, are Virginia Tech's longest-serving musical organization and the oldest collegiate band in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Highty-Tighties perform at home football games, and the Pep Band attends home women's basketball games. As a regimental band, they provide the musical component for all formal military

parades for the Corps of Cadets.

Long after graduation, many alumni recognize the regimental band as one of the most influential organizations in their lives.

Founded in 1975, the Highty-Tighty Alumni Inc. has generously supported the band by funding scholarships and financially supporting other initiatives.

Highty-Tighty alumni mentor first-year students, and each year, more than 100 Highty-Tighty alumni return to campus for homecoming; many participate in the Highty-Tighty Alumni Band in the parade and at the pre-game show.



Highty-Tighty alumni march in the parade celebrating Homecoming 2019. Photo by Christina Franusich for Virginia Tech.



# AROUND THE DRILLFIELD







EXTRA  
EXTRA

To read more news from Virginia  
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[alumni.vt.edu/news-spring](http://alumni.vt.edu/news-spring).

# NEWS

## PUBLIC HEALTH STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT HEALTH CARE BARRIERS WHILE WORKING WITH EMS

On top of a full-time class schedule, some public health students at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine are volunteering their free time to the Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Roanoke County, and other rescue squads.

The students are bridging the gap between rural communities and health care by providing emergency medical services (EMS). They are helping rural residents away from more populated areas understand better what health services, such as EMS, are available for them, but they are also learning from those rural residents about obstacles to care.

“When they go to a rural or underserved area, they’re learning from these communities about the real challenges with access to health care,” said Laura Hungerford, department head of population health sciences, who also has volunteered for the Floyd County and Blacksburg Volunteer rescue squads as an EMT. “With their EMS and public health training, they will continue to bring help to people in need and new solutions for the larger rural health crisis.”

Andre Asarian said social determinants, such as availability of health care, often paint a more complete picture of health for residents in a particular area. “Especially since you form those interpersonal relationships with people who aren’t necessarily students, but active members of the community,” said Asarian, an undergraduate student in the accelerated Master of Public Health program who works with Roanoke County Fire and Rescue. ■

(From left) Public health students Sydney Sokol, Andre Asarian, Miranda Jones, and Albert Annan. Photo by Margie Christianson for Virginia Tech.





Participants gather at the starting line for the 2019 Run in Remembrance. Photo by Erin Williams for Virginia Tech.

## WE REMEMBER

Virginia Tech's 3.2-Mile Run in Remembrance is held annually to honor and remember the 32 individuals who lost their lives on April 16, 2007. Thousands of alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends of the university come together to participate in the event each spring, either in-person or virtually.

The 2025 event is scheduled for 9 a.m. Saturday, April 12.

The in-person 3.2-mile loop around the Blacksburg campus begins in front of War Memorial Hall, passing iconic landmarks such as The Grove, Lane Stadium, and the Pylons, before concluding at the April 16 Memorial.

Numerous Virginia Tech alumni chapters around the country also host runs and other remembrance events each April.

The 32 individuals lost in 2007 ranged in age from 18 to 76 and represented a variety of academic areas and faith and ethnic groups. We encourage you to take a moment this year, wherever you are, to reflect on the tremendous promise each of them embodied for our world with creativity, intelligence, humility, and humanity.

To learn more about the run and other memorial events that are held each spring and to read about the 32 students and faculty lost, visit [weremember.vt.edu](http://weremember.vt.edu) ■

## RESEARCHERS ASK: HOW MANY ATTEMPTS DOES IT TAKE TO QUIT SUBSTANCE ABUSE?

Relapse is common for those who are trying to overcome substance abuse, regardless of whether they are giving up opioids or alcohol or cigarettes.

To better inform treatment, researchers with the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC's Addiction Recovery Research Center wanted to better understand how the experience of quitting differed across substances.

The work, published in the Feb. 1 issue of *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, found that:

- Substance use disorder is a chronically relapsing condition that often requires multiple attempts to quit before successful abstinence.
- The number of quit attempts varies by substance, with opioids and pain medication requiring significantly more attempts than all other substances.
- Hallucinogens are less challenging to quit, requiring fewer attempts.
- People who meet the criteria of having a more severe or longer history of substance use disorder might need more attempts before achieving abstinence.

The findings suggest that early intervention improves success and reduces relapses, according to Allison Tegge, corresponding author on the study and a research associate professor at the institute. ■

(from left) Allison Tegge and Rafaela Fontes







Kathleen Mulvaney, assistant professor with the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute Cancer Research Center in Washington, D.C., is working to identify treatments for childhood cancers. *Photo by Craig Newcomb for Virginia Tech.*

## VIRGINIA TECH RESEARCH CONTINUES TO GROW FEDERAL SUPPORT

Virginia Tech was responsible for almost half of the growth in federally sponsored research expenditures in Virginia's institutions of higher education in fiscal year 2023, according to the National Science Foundation's latest Higher Education Research and Development (HERD) survey.

The annual report showed the university accounted for 47 percent of Virginia institutions' collective growth in federally sponsored research expenditures and revealed Virginia Tech to be the commonwealth's only R1 university whose ranking for federal funding increased, rising from No. 67 to No. 62.

"The HERD report is yet another reflection of Virginia Tech's upward trending trajectory of externally sponsored projects and robust partnerships," said Dan Sui, Virginia Tech's senior vice president and chief research and innovation officer.

This most recent report also comes in the midst of the university pursuing one of its core aspirations—Virginia Tech Global Distinction—which is a commitment to institutional excellence across research, scholarship, and creative activities that makes the university a destination for the best faculty, students, and partners from the commonwealth, the nation, and the world. ■

## NEWSREEL

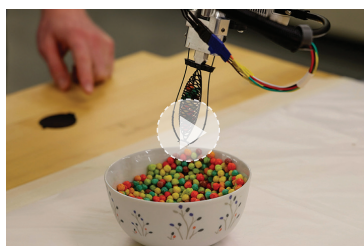
VIRGINIA TECH VIDEOGRAPHERS HAVE BEEN HARD AT WORK CAPTURING THE UNIVERSITY'S NEWS AND EVENTS.

CHECK OUT THIS SAMPLING AND MANY OTHERS BY SCANNING THE QR CODE OR VISITING [ALUMNI.VT.EDU/VIDEOS-SPRING](https://alumni.vt.edu/videos-spring).



### TINY FOSSIL LEADS TO A BIGGER DISCOVERY

Through a recent fossil discovery found while excavating a site in Petrified National Park in Arizona, Helen Burch, a vertebrate paleontologist, helped discover a new, potentially venomous, reptile species, *Microzemiotes sonselaensis*.



### ENGINEERING A BETTER WAY TO EAT

Virginia Tech researchers, along with collaborators at Cornell University, have created a new robot-assisted utensil to assist individuals with limited mobility. The kiri-spoon can both grasp like a fork and scoop like a spoon.



### HOKIES CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK

International performances, interactive workshops, cultural showcases, and many other events brought the university community together in celebration of International Education Week.



### HITTING THE HIGH NOTES IN ANNUAL HONOR BAND FESTIVAL

Visiting high school band students and directors participate in rehearsals, clinics, and performances with Virginia Tech music faculty and guest clinicians.



VIRGINIA TECH.

# BOUNDLESS IMPACT



## ELEVATE EVERY ENCOUNTER

MOSSBERGS RALLY TABLE TENNIS COMMUNITY WITH SUPPORT

By Emma Leonard

A passion that started on a 9-by-5 tabletop between a father and son is now changing the game for table tennis players across the Virginia Tech campus.

Jim Mossberg '73 discovered a love for table tennis early in life while playing with his dad in their garage. He championed the sport as a founder of the Virginia Tech Table Tennis Club. Recently, Mossberg funded the Table Tennis Zone in the renovated War Memorial Hall.

Mossberg's contribution extends beyond the \$1.7 million he and his wife, Elizabeth, pledged to the facility. The couple also committed \$60,000 toward scholarships to help attract accomplished table tennis players, with the intention of growing the scholarship funding to \$240,000 over the next four years.

And, primed by his years of expertise, Mossberg ensured every detail of the new facility was molded to the benefit of the players.

From court dimensions to strategically selected lighting, the facility is carefully crafted for the optimal table tennis experience. Table Tennis Club President Anthony Mazza appreciates the impact Mossberg's gift has on the club.

Members of the Virginia Tech Table Tennis Club (clockwise from top) Ethan Do, Kian Sepahpour, and Chi King Choo participate in a tournament. *Virginia Tech Athletics* photos (below, right) Elizabeth and Jim Mossberg. *Photo by Pepe Gomez for Virginia Tech.*

“

MOST PEOPLE YOU TALK TO, SOME OF THEIR BEST MEMORIES ARE FROM THEIR YEARS IN COLLEGE, AND WHAT THEY MENTION IS **NOT SITTING IN THE CLASSROOM.**”

Elizabeth Mossberg, donor

“Before the new facility, we'd rent a small room every Saturday for a few hours,” Mazza said. “There was only enough space to cram in four tables. With the new facility, we've been able to promote a more serious, competitive side with a focus on actual training.”

Mossberg completed his Virginia Tech bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering, then began a career with the National Security Agency. For decades, that career carried him across the globe. Table tennis allowed him to connect with people abroad.

“You meet people from all over the world,” Mossberg said. “It's a great way to meet different people from different cultures.”

Although Elizabeth Mossberg doesn't play table tennis, she appreciates how it has enriched her husband's life. Like him, she is happy the new facility offers both competitive and recreational options for students.

“Most people you talk to, some of their best memories are from their years in college, and what they mention is not sitting in the classroom,” Elizabeth Mossberg said. “It's some of their social and recreational pursuits. That we can contribute to something like that, I think, is great.” ■



RISE, RALLY,  
RULE

Scan the code or visit [alumni.vt.edu/table-tennis](https://alumni.vt.edu/table-tennis) to read more and to watch a video about Mossberg Table Tennis Zone.





# CROSSING THE FINISH LINE TOGETHER!

## HOKIES RALLY FOR ANOTHER RECORD-BREAKING GIVING DAY

By *Dacota Liska*

Virginia Tech's Giving Day once again displayed the strength and dedication of the Hokie community. Over a 24-hour period—from noon Feb. 19 to noon Feb. 20—alumni, students, faculty, staff, and supporters came together to make an impact on the university's colleges, departments, programs, teams, student organizations, and more.

Together, more than 24,100 Hokies rallied their friends and family to raise more than \$21 million.

Gifts made on Giving Day, and throughout the year, open doors to opportunities for students to have life-changing experiences at Virginia Tech.



Students hold Giving Day T-shirts; 2,805 students made a gift on Giving Day.  
Photo by Clark DeHart for Virginia Tech.

## HERE'S WHAT HOKIES ACCOMPLISHED TOGETHER ON GIVING DAY:

**24,106:** Hokies who stepped up with a gift on Giving Day

**\$21,237,006:** Funds raised

**2,180:** Ambassadors who shared their passion

**15,491:** Number of gifts brought in by ambassadors

**\$1,025,437:** Dollars raised through ambassadors

**Australia:** Location of our farthest gift

**41:** Number of countries with participating Hokies

**50:** Number of states with participating Hokies

**68:** Number of people who attended the Young Alumni Giving Day Party in D.C.

**Pamplin College of Business:** Winner of the Most Donors Leaderboard

**College of Engineering:** Winner of the Most Amount Raised Leaderboard

**German Club Alumni:** Winner of the Additional Areas of Support Leaderboard



Alumni at a Young Alumni Giving Day celebration in Washington, D.C. Photo by Samantha Whitney for Virginia Tech.



WINNERS'  
CIRCLE

To watch a video and read more about Virginia Tech's 2025 Giving Day scan the code or visit [alumni.vt.edu/giving-day-25](https://alumni.vt.edu/giving-day-25).



GIVING  
DAY VIRGINIA  
TECH



# 'RIGHT PERSON, RIGHT OFFICER, RIGHT JOB'

ALUMNUS HELPS OVERSEE  
ISRAEL-LEBANON CEASEFIRE

By Jimmy Robertson



Maj. Gen. Jasper Jeffers has spent nearly 30 years in the U.S. Army since graduating from Virginia Tech and has served in places such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. He currently serves as a commander at Special Operations Command Central at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida. Photo by Spc. Michael Udejiofor, 50th Public Affairs Detachment. Photo at bottom by Capt. Bailey Miclette.

When Jasper Jeffers III enrolled at Virginia Tech in the early 1990s, he originally planned to return to his nearby Giles County home after graduation and help run the family's small sawmill business in Ripplemead, a scenic 30-minute drive from Blacksburg.

But those plans started splintering the longer he spent in the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets and in ROTC. After graduating in 1996 with degrees in political science and government from the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, he found himself pining to serve his country before returning to his hometown.

Now, almost 30 years later, he still hasn't made it back to Giles County, at least not on a permanent basis.

"There was never a scenario where I envisioned doing any more than the minimum required to complete my service obligation for my [ROTC] scholarship," Jeffers said. "Obviously, life has a weird way of taking what you think you're going to do and changing it."





“

THE REAL BEAUTY, I THINK,  
OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS  
IS THE GREAT PEOPLE  
THAT WE HAVE.”

Maj. Gen. Jasper Jeffers



Maj. Gen. Jasper Jeffers, commanding general of Special Operations Command Central, awards a coin to Sgt. Mason Chandler for his exceptional work representing U.S. Army Central on Sept. 3, 2024. U.S. Army photo by Capt. Bailey Miclette.

Today, Jeffers is a major general in the U.S. Army, working as a commander in the U.S. Special Operations Command Central at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida. Jeffers received a promotion in July, and this past November, he was assigned arguably the most important task of his career.

On Nov. 27, 2024, U.S. Army officials sent Jeffers to Beirut, Lebanon, for the “implementation and monitoring mechanism” of the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon. The Lebanese Armed Forces, the Israel Defense Forces, the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon, and France also participated in this 60-day ceasefire process.

“This is a really tough problem,” Jeffers said via Zoom from Beirut two weeks before Christmas. “This is a very complex neighborhood. It’s a complex country with an incredible history, but a difficult one. We’re from Special Operations headquarters, so one of the things we talk about a lot is how we are comfortable in uncertainty. I call them ‘unstructured problems’—they don’t have a clear beginning, middle, or end. That’s kind of our specialty.

“We are just taking this process day by day. This is difficult. It’s a tactical, operational, and strategic problem, and you can only go day by day. You have to work very closely with a variety of partners, the five different members of the ceasefire makeup here. . . . It’s just one of those things where you have to be patient and occasionally decisive and step through it day by day.”

Jeffers’ experience makes him ideal for the role, according to Maj. Gen. Kelly Dickerson ’95, who works in the Office of the Chief, Army Reserve. Dickerson was a year ahead of Jeffers in the Corps of Cadets, and during the late summer before his senior year, Dickerson, along with a few other seniors, helped prepare underclass cadets for the upcoming year. Dickerson said

the seniors noticed that Jeffers, though only a junior, could have taught them a few things.

“When I found out he was being sent to Lebanon for that role, I thought, ‘Right person, right officer, right job,’” Dickerson said. “As soon as I found out, I texted him, ‘Hey, brother, you’re the right guy. Let us know what you need, and we’re all proud of you.’ He comes back, and he’s like, ‘I’m ready.’”

Jeffers’ experience includes serving in Iraq as a company commander and air operations officer during the second Gulf War. He also has spent time in Afghanistan, and he led a brigade within the U.S. Army Special Operations Command in Syria to push back the Islamic State group.

Those experiences give him a perspective in how to negotiate conflicting interests in some of the world’s most volatile regions.

“I have been in situations where you’d have to step into an unstructured problem,” Jeffers said. “You’d take a small team, a small special operations team, and step into a little bit of uncertainty and try to help manage it. The real beauty, I think, of special operations is the great people that we have. If you pull them together on a little team, it’s amazing how you can work your way through some tough problems.”

In less than two years, Jeffers will have served 30 years in the Army. Many tend to contemplate retirement following 30 years of service, but those who both know Jeffers and understand the importance of his work hope to see him remain in the service. ■



**CALLED TO  
SERVE**

Read about Jasper Jeffers online by scanning the code or going to [alumni.vt.edu/corps-spring](https://alumni.vt.edu/corps-spring).



# SHARK TALE

## RESEARCHERS STUDY ENDANGERED SHARKS

By Max Esterhuizen

Virginia Tech researchers tagged a young shortfin mako shark in the Mediterranean, the first time that this has been done in the region. Mako sharks are critically endangered not only in the Mediterranean, but also globally.

The research team tagged the shark while on an expedition through the White Shark Chase initiative led by Francesco Ferretti, assistant professor in the College of Natural Resources and Environment, during the summer of 2023.

“During that research trip, we encountered a young shortfin mako shark by happenstance,” said Brendan Shea, a doctoral student. “We placed an electronic tag on it, which provides valuable information about its movements, helping us understand how to better conserve the population.”

The tag the team used is called a pop-off archival tag. It collects and stores data on water temperature, depth, and ambient light levels. This data helps the researchers estimate the shark’s location and understand its movements. The tag detaches after a set period or if the shark dives too deep—more than 1,800 meters—and then transmits the data back to a satellite.

The research was published in *Frontiers in Marine Science* in December 2024.

The young mako shark, which was likely 1 or 2 years old, traveled more than 750 miles in 54 days. This means that protecting nursery areas might not be enough because these young sharks travel so far.

“Sharks play a crucial role in the health of our oceans,” Shea said. “A healthy

ocean supports various human activities, so understanding and conserving shark populations benefits everyone. Understanding the three-dimensional movement of sharks helps us know how they connect different habitats and their role in the ecosystem. This data also informs us about the depths they occupy, which is vital for conservation efforts.”

The collaborative effort included national and international researchers as well as Jeremy Jenrette of Virginia Tech’s Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation.

Funding was provided by The Explorers Club, Discovery Channel, Sharkproject, the Bertarelli Foundation, the Augmentum platform, and individual donors. ■



UNDER  
THE SEA

To learn more about Virginia Tech shark research, and how you can support the studies, scan the code or visit [alumni.vt.edu/ology-spring](https://alumni.vt.edu/ology-spring).

By tagging a young mako shark in the Mediterranean, a Virginia Tech research team gained behavioral insights to help prevent the decline of the sharks in the region. Photo courtesy of Brandon Shea.



# WHAT'S YOUR BIG IDEA?

HOW A STUDENT SET THE STAGE FOR DECADES OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

By Kelsey Bartlett

Ask Christina McClung '03 about her experience at Virginia Tech, and one moment stands out.

It started with a big idea. And a lot of gumption.

In 2000, McClung, a first-year student, was ready to make an impact. As the newly elected speaker of the house for the Student Government Association, she proposed launching The Big Event—Virginia Tech's student-run day of community engagement.

Since then, The Big Event, which is held each spring, has grown into the nation's second-largest event of its kind. Last year, it drew over 5,000 volunteers as students, faculty, and staff completed 465 service projects across the community.

But starting the event came with its fair share of challenges, said McClung, who graduated with a degree in resource management with minors in management and leadership studies. Inspired by Texas A&M University's Big Event and her own upbringing, McClung worked with her Student Government Association peers—which included her future husband—to make the day of service a reality at Virginia Tech.

Securing funding was one of the toughest aspects and came with “a lot of slamming doors.” McClung recalled spending a day of her sophomore year spring break at Lowe's headquarters, where she landed a meeting with executives. There, she presented a proposal asking for \$10,000 worth of paint, rakes, shovels, and other supplies—a “super scary” experience—but one that paid off.



(top of page and at left) Students participate in The Big Event 2024 at Virginia Tech, a student-run day of service. Photos by Lee Friesland. (top right) As a student, Christina McClung (left) met with student representatives from Texas A&M University. Photo courtesy of Christina McClung. (bottom right) Christina McClung. Photo by Todd Wright.



After two years of planning, Virginia Tech hosted its first Big Event in 2002. At that time, 475 volunteers completed 60 projects. According to McClung, watching the event grow over the years as others embrace Virginia Tech's motto, *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve), has been beyond rewarding.

“It's breathtaking to see the multiplier of how many people have been impacted through something that just started as an idea,” McClung said.

The experience also helped shape her into the leader she is today. McClung has worked at Capital One for more than 14 years and became senior vice president of human resources in 2022.

“It helped me in my career because I learned how to rally a diverse group

of people, each with their own unique motivations, around a unifying vision,” she said.

She said her life's mission statement, to “leave things better than I found them,” was also born out of the experience.

McClung now has nephews who attend Virginia Tech. Her advice for students is to get involved with the university's clubs and organizations.

“You never know when you're going to be a true changer in somebody's life,” she said. ■



AT YOUR  
SERVICE

Virginia Tech's 2025 Big Event was held on April 5. Go to [alumni.vt.edu/big-event-2025](https://alumni.vt.edu/big-event-2025) or scan the code to learn more.



# MANAGE YOUR FINANCES

## TIPS FOR EVERY STAGE OF LIFE

By Rianka R. Dorsainvil

### ABOUT RIANKA DORSAINVIL

Rianka Dorsainvil '09 entered Virginia Tech as a math major but soon realized she wanted to pursue a career with more interpersonal interaction. After taking a personal finance class, Dorsainvil was eager to share her new knowledge and ultimately found her professional calling in the field.

Today, Dorsainvil, who earned a degree in agricultural and applied economics, is a certified financial planner in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. Through her work, she recognized a need to equip a broader population with the same tools and knowledge given to wealthy clients.

In 2013, Dorsainvil debuted a blog to empower young professionals. Then, in 2015, she founded Your Greatest Contribution, a virtual firm offering financial advice via video conferencing. Following several strategic business transitions, Your Greatest Contribution was relaunched, existing as YGC Wealth today.

This fall, Dorsainvil, who has been part of the CNBC Advisory Council for eight years, was interviewed by Sharon Epperson, CNBC senior personal finance correspondent, about redefining retirement across the generations working today. Recently, she offered financial guidance tailored to Virginia Tech alumni at different life stages.

Photo courtesy of Christina Franusich.

## INVEST IN YOUR FUTURE

### CURRENT STUDENTS

- Master cash flow management: Create a budget that balances tuition, living expenses, and some fun. Use apps such as YNAB or Monarch Money to track spending.
- Start building credit responsibly: Consider a student credit card but pay the balance in full each month.

### RECENTLY GRADUATED (LESS THAN THREE YEARS)

- Take advantage of campus resources: Attend financial literacy workshops and seek guidance from the financial aid office.
- Begin investing small amounts: Even \$20 a month in a low-cost index fund through apps such as Acorns can teach valuable lessons about the market.
- Tackle student loans strategically: Understand your repayment options and consider refinancing if it makes sense for your situation.
- Maximize employer benefits: Contribute enough to your 401(k) to get the full company match. It's free money!





“

“AS HOKIES, WE’RE KNOWN FOR OUR RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION. APPLY THOSE SAME QUALITIES TO YOUR FINANCIAL LIFE, AND YOU’LL BE WELL-EQUIPPED TO FACE WHATEVER THE FUTURE HOLDS. ”

Rianka Dorsainvil ’09,  
certified financial planner

- Build an emergency fund: Aim for three to six months of expenses in a high-yield savings account.
- Consider term life insurance: If you have dependents or financial responsibilities for others, a basic term policy can offer valuable peace of mind.
- Start thinking about your legacy: Create a will and designate beneficiaries on your retirement accounts.

## 10-PLUS YEARS SINCE GRADUATING

- Reassess your career and earnings potential: Consider upskilling or pivoting to increase your income.
- Diversify your investments: Look beyond your 401(k) and Roth IRAs to HSAs and taxable brokerage accounts.
- Review your insurance needs: As your assets and responsibilities grow, ensure you’re adequately protected.
- Start estate planning: Create or update your will, consider establishing a trust, and draft advance health care directives.
- Balance paying off your mortgage with investing: Don’t neglect retirement savings in favor of becoming mortgage debt-free too quickly.

## NEAR RETIREMENT

- Catch up on retirement savings: Take advantage of catch-up contributions in your 401(k) and IRA after age 50.



(from left) Rianka Dorsainvil with children Romina and Remington and husband, Reggie Dorsainvil. Photo courtesy of Iris Mannings Photography.

- Consider long-term care insurance: Protect your assets and independence as you age.
- Create a retirement income strategy: Determine how you’ll draw down your various accounts in a tax-efficient manner.
- Review your estate plan: Ensure your wishes are clearly documented and consider discussing your plans with family members.
- Plan for health care costs: Understand Medicare options and consider a supplemental policy.
- Remember, financial planning is not one-size-fits-all. Your individual circumstances, goals, and risk tolerance should guide your decisions. Don’t hesitate to seek professional advice, especially as your financial situation becomes more complex.

As Hokies, we’re known for our resilience and innovation. Apply those same qualities to your financial life, and you’ll be well-equipped to face whatever the future holds. Whether you’re just starting out or nearing retirement, it’s never too late—or too early—to invent the future you desire. ■

## EXPLORE MORE

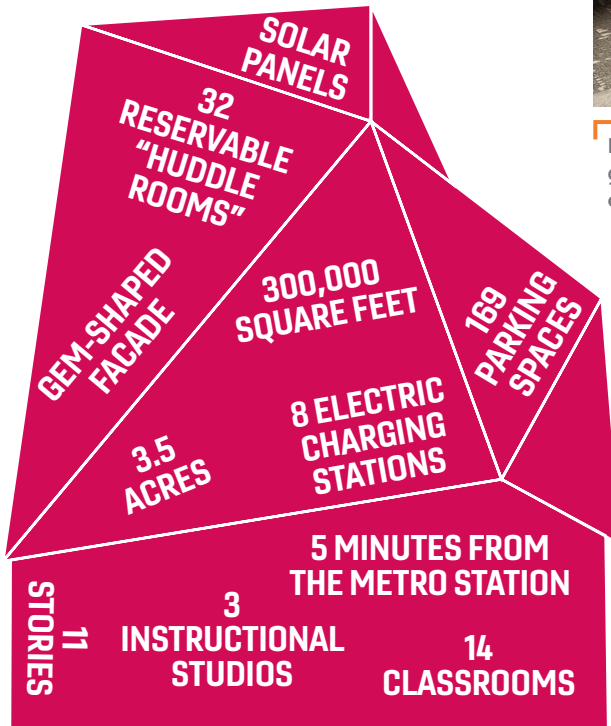


Want to learn more about how to manage your finances? Check out events and resources for alumni on home buying, estate planning, and more. Some of our prior events are even available to stream online. Scan the QR code or visit [alumni.vt.edu/how-to-spring](https://alumni.vt.edu/how-to-spring) to learn more.





Inside the building, there are three areas available for “brain breaks”—a video game playing room, a meditation space, and a “treehouse-like” space on the eighth floor. Photo by Meghan Marsh for Virginia Tech.



# A CAPITAL INVESTMENT

## BUILDING THE TECH TALENT PIPELINE

Virginia Tech's Academic Building One in Alexandria, Virginia, focuses on sustainability, emphasizes health and wellness, and creates spaces that foster a sense of community—all designed with cutting-edge technologies befitting of a university making moves in the fields of computer science and computer engineering. The new building is just across the Potomac River from the National Mall and some of the most recognizable landmarks in the world.

### BOEING AUDITORIUM

- The Boeing Company is the first foundational partner of the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus and invested \$50 million in May 2021.
- The 3,000-square-foot first floor large classroom/auditorium includes a 60-foot wide screen and has capacity for 200 people (classroom style) or 300 people (auditorium style).

### IMMERSIVE VISUALIZATION LAB

- The lab provides a fully immersive experience that brings life to student projects, course material, and more. It can interact in real time with the Advanced Research Computing Visionarium in Blacksburg.

### SPECIALTY LAB SPACES

- The new facility includes lab spaces for quantum and wireless research as well as a 1,340-square-foot cyber physical lab attached to the drone cage for building, fixing, and diagnosing drones.

### THE LOFT

- This two-story, collaborative maker space is where students, faculty, and the community will design, experiment, and create.







Mars exhibition organized by the K-12 program. Photo by Luke Hayes for Virginia Tech. Boeing Auditorium. Photo by Luke Hayes for Virginia Tech.

## K-12 INITIATIVES CENTER

- K-12 programming at the new building strives to:
  - Make computer science and STEM accessible for all.
  - Partner with K-12 teachers to transform classroom instruction.
- Some K-12 activities include:
  - Drone soccer program.
  - STEM fairs.
  - K-12 STEM and Computer Science Teacher Professional Development Program.
  - After-school programming.
- K-12 Initiatives are supported by an educational grant from Amazon.

## HOKIE ONE STOP

- The Hokie One Stop is a centralized, student-focused service center. It offers an initial point of contact for students and visitors and will include at least one staff member from the Graduate School, Cook Counseling Center, Cranwell International Center, Career and Professional Development, Office of Veterans Affairs, and others.

## DRONE CAGE

- The 465-square-foot, two-story indoor drone testing cage can connect live with Blacksburg's drone park. An outdoor drone cage is not possible because D.C. and nearby Ronald Reagan International Airport are restricted air spaces.

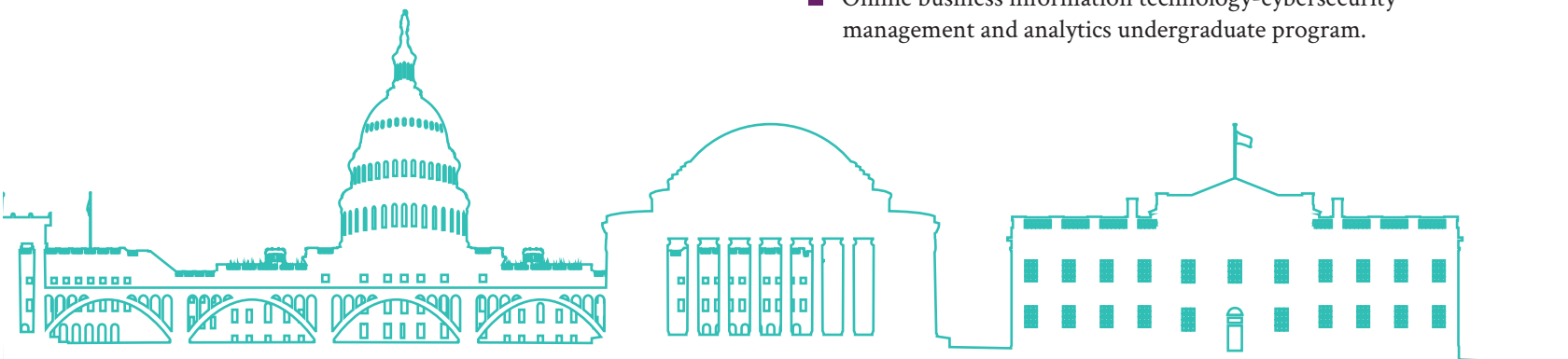
## ROOF DECK TERRACE

- With capacity for up to 300 people, the 4,500-square-foot rooftop terrace offers views of the monuments in the D.C. skyline, Arlington to the left, and Alexandria to the right

## ACADEMIC CONNECTION

The new building is home to Master of Engineering programs in computer engineering and computer science and applications, as well as Pamplin College of Business programs including:

- Online Master of Information Technology.
- Evening and online MBA programs.
- Executive Ph.D. program.
- Master of Science in business administration-hospitality.
- Tourism management program.
- Online business information technology-cybersecurity management and analytics undergraduate program.







Drone demonstration in the drone cage.  
Photo by Luke Hayes for Virginia Tech.



Faculty, students, and staff of the Sanghani Center on the first day of class. The fifth floor is home to the Sanghani Center for Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics and the Boeing Center for Veteran Transition and Military Families.  
Photo by Craig Newcomb for Virginia Tech.



## ROOM TO GROW

Read more about Academic Building One at [alumni.vt.edu/how-tech-ticks-spring](http://alumni.vt.edu/how-tech-ticks-spring).



Sven Shockey. Photo courtesy of SmithGroup.

## ALUMNUS HELPS DESIGN FUTURE

By Jimmy Robertson

Sven Shockey spent four years at the University of Rochester, earned his degree in cognitive science, and became an ... architect.

So how exactly does one go from studying the human mind and how it functions to designing buildings?

"That's a good question," Shockey said, smiling. "At the time, I was also very interested in music and art and architecture, so I was thinking about how to combine the technical research and the analytical approach from something like cognitive science with something creative, but also impactful. I thought architecture was a happy medium between those two interests."

Virginia Tech welcomed Shockey '96 and his diverse interests to Blacksburg, where he earned a master's degree in architecture, which ultimately led to playing a critical role in arguably the largest capital project in the university's history.

Shockey, a vice president and design director at SmithGroup, a national architecture design firm, works out of the D.C. office and has worked with the team responsible for the design of Academic Building One.

Shockey led the design team that was part of the larger interdisciplinary group of SmithGroup architects, planners, and engineers. They spent the better part of two years designing, utilizing 10 principles established by Virginia Tech with consulting partner, Sasaki, during initial visioning for the campus as consistent guidance.

Shockey and his team wove together attributes of sustainability, health and wellness, green and social spaces, flexibility, and integrated technology into what Virginia Tech leaders say is a beautiful and efficient design.

For Shockey, the final product is a career highlight.

"Obviously for me, personally, it is a fortuitous happenstance," Shockey said. "I've been working for 25-plus years, and I've worked on several university projects throughout the country, but then, to have it come back to your alma mater is so gratifying. It completes the loop in a way from all the excitement first being a student immersed in the learning environment and then, on the other hand, to be able to impact the learning environment years later." ■





THE CENTER  
OF NEXT

# THE FUTURE IS HERE



## WELCOME TO A NEW ERA OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AND COMPUTER ENGINEERING.

Virginia Tech's new location in Alexandria is a place where graduate students can gain hands-on experience working with industry and government to tackle real problems, accelerate impact, and supercharge their careers from day one. Because change doesn't happen in a silo, we're intentionally building the foundation for the future from one of the most inclusive and connected tech communities in the country.



SCAN THE QR  
CODE OR VISIT  
[vt.edu/supercharge](https://vt.edu/supercharge)





# CAN AI TOOLS HELP IN AN EMERGENCY?

## RESEARCH IS GUIDING THAT QUESTION

By Jenny Kincaid Boone

Approximately 1,400 miles of pipes, 6,600 storm structures, and hundreds of miles of human-made channels make up the extensive Fairfax County, Virginia, stormwater system that Chase Suddith, a Virginia Tech alumnus and an emergency management specialist, oversees as part of his job.

He's responsible for managing snow, floods, and related weather events for a county of approximately 1.2 million people.

Could artificial intelligence (AI) make Suddith's job easier? Right now, like many people, Suddith uses AI tools to help craft emails and create meeting agendas.

"It's good at creating checklists and main summaries," said Suddith, who earned a master's degree in public administration from Virginia Tech in 2018. "It's good at communicating and distilling information down."

But when it comes to using AI in other work, some emergency managers, like Suddith, are cautious.

A Virginia Tech research team led by Shalini Misra is analyzing how AI tools might support the professionals whose work involves managing crises and emergencies. Suddith is one of 30 emergency managers in the greater Washington, D.C., metro area who is helping to inform the project.

Misra, associate professor in the School of Public and International Affairs, directs the Public-Interest Technology Lab, based at the Virginia Tech Research Center—Arlington. The lab includes faculty from various disciplines who research the governance, design, and deployment of new, emerging technologies with an eye on human impact.

This project analyzing AI tools is particularly timely. As more industries consider using AI for efficiency, public sector managers face questions—what tasks are appropriate to offload to AI and which ones are best left to human experts?

Misra said her team decided to focus on emergency managers because of the important public roles they play.

"We are in an era of cascading crisis and disasters. You might say we are always in a state of crisis these days," she said.

"They [emergency managers] are working in many levels of the government. They could be at the federal level, but [they] also work at the city and county level, and their work involves coordination across levels of government and other agencies. They have to be able to collaborate with schools, hospitals, and with emergency responders."



Emergency managers in the Washington, D.C., area met with a Virginia Tech research team in Arlington for a day-long workshop to discuss artificial intelligence and test tools. Photo courtesy of Shalini Misra.



## THE PROJECT

The team's research is ongoing, and the findings, which feature the results of surveys with emergency managers across the United States, are published in the journal *Government Information Quarterly*.

In August 2024, Misra and her team hosted a workshop for emergency managers at the Virginia Tech Research Center. The team's primary goals were to learn as much as possible about the barriers and challenges the managers faced in incorporating AI tools in their work; to gather feedback about how AI tools could be designed for transparency, accountability, and justice; and to test a tool for hazard mitigation planning.

The team will host additional workshops next year in Arlington.

Some emergency managers said they have used AI for planning tasks but not during an actual emergency, when response time is critical and the public needs quick and accurate communication and decision-making.

"Their decisions affect lives, and they have to be transparent and accountable in the end," Misra said. "So when they need it the most, AI tools need to be designed to be equitable, accurate, transparent, and accountable."

For planning ahead for disasters, such as creating a hazard mitigation plan, AI could be useful, the Virginia Tech team found.



Virginia Tech alumnus Chase Suddith is an emergency management specialist for Fairfax County, Virginia. *Photo courtesy of Chase Suddith.*



Shalini Misra is an associate professor in the School of Public and International Affairs and director of the Public-Interest Technology Lab, based at the Virginia Tech Research Center–Arlington. *Photo courtesy of Shalini Misra.*

## HELP BEFORE THE HAZARD

In the world of emergency management, there are "periods of planning and pre-work and there's the time of the response or preparing for something imminent to happen," said Ben Katz, a member of the research team and associate professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Science.

Another element of the project involves testing a specialized AI tool called Hazard Helper. It would allow emergency managers to create or update hazard mitigation plans ahead of a crisis and eventually incorporate other helpful information into them, such as census data and accessibility details. Some departments outsource such planning, so an AI tool could improve efficiency and reduce costs.

The team's work continues next year, and this project is a microcosm of its ultimate charge.

"Instead of thinking about justice, equity, bias, and human agency as an afterthought after these technologies are out in the world, we think about them at the design stage and before implementing them," said Misra. "We think together with the professionals who are going to use them and the community members whom they will affect." ■



### SMART SOLUTIONS

To listen to a podcast and learn more about Virginia Tech's research in AI and emergency management, scan the QR code or visit [alumni.vt.edu/ai-emergency](https://alumni.vt.edu/ai-emergency).

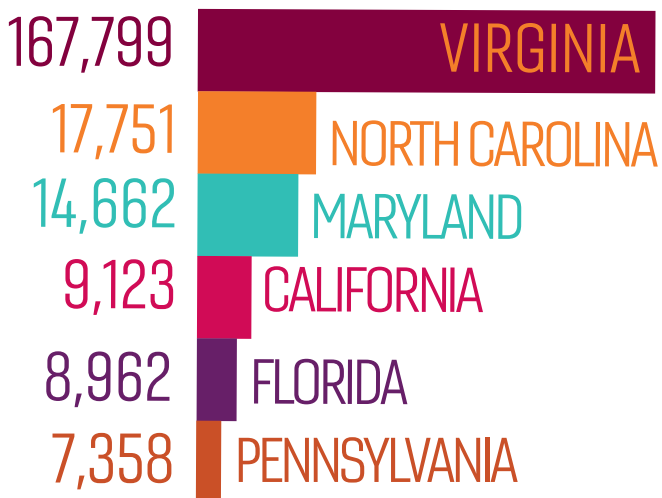




# VIRGINIA TECH ALUMNI *BY THE NUMBERS*

Members of Hokie Nation live and work in all 50 states and in many countries across the globe, including in and around the greater Washington, D.C., metro area. Here's a look at our community.

## STATES WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF HOKIES



**299,415**

TOTAL LIVING ALUMNI



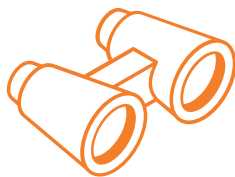
**80,685**

← YOUNG ALUMNI

(GRADUATED IN THE LAST 10 YEARS)

No matter where you go, chances are you'll run into a Hokie. Many stories trickle back to the university about Hokie encounters in airports, on cruises, and even during adventures in remote locations where there aren't many people at all.





## I SPY ... A HOKIE!

Tell us about your most unexpected Hokie encounter. Send a photo or note to [vtmag@vt.edu](mailto:vtmag@vt.edu). Your story may be published in an upcoming edition of Virginia Tech Magazine in print or online.



## GREATER D.C. NUMBERS BY ALUMNI CHAPTER

To help Hokies connect with one another, the Virginia Tech Alumni Association has more than 100 chapters across the country and around the world. Our chapters build strong relationships among alumni, students, parents, and their local communities. Visit [alumni.vt.edu/chapters](http://alumni.vt.edu/chapters) to find a group close to you.

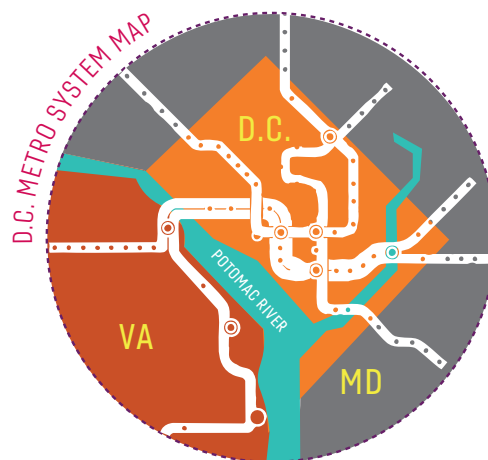


**HOKIE  
NATION**

To learn more about where you can find Hokies scan the code or visit [alumni.vt.edu/hokie-nation](http://alumni.vt.edu/hokie-nation).



## 60,000+ ALUMNI LIVING IN THE D.C. METRO AREA



Loudoun  
County  
**6,563**

D.C. Metro  
Area  
**27,365**

Greater Prince  
William County  
**3,943**

Baltimore  
**4,157**

Fredericksburg  
**3,118**





# HONORING THE QUEEN OF CASSELL

## VIRGINIA TECH RETIRES ELIZABETH KITLEY'S JERSEY

Former Virginia Tech women's basketball standout Elizabeth Kitley was honored by a sold-out crowd during a jersey-retirement event on Jan. 19 in Cassell Coliseum.

"Elizabeth's impact on Virginia Tech and women's basketball transcends statistics," Virginia Tech Athletics Director Whit Babcock said in April 2024, when her No. 33 jersey retirement was announced. "Her passion, work ethic, and character have left an enduring legacy that is inspiring the next generation. Retiring her jersey is a symbolic gesture of gratitude for the mark she has left on our women's basketball program and the hearts of Hokie Nation."

Kitley, who played for five seasons, is the program's all-time leader in games started, minutes played, points scored, and scoring average. She posted the most double-figure scoring games in program history as well as field goals made, field goal percentage, 30-point games, and blocks. She holds the ACC record for rebounds (1,506) and double-doubles (76).

During the 2023-24 season, Kitley led the Hokies to their first ACC regular-season title in program history, leading the league in scoring and rebounding en route to collecting her third consecutive ACC Player of the Year trophy. In addition, she earned first team All-ACC honors for the fourth time, All-Defensive Team accolades for the third time, and was the Kay Yow Scholar Athlete of the Year for the third time.

The 6-foot-6 center was instrumental in helping the Hokies raise an ACC trophy in 2023 and advance to the program's first ever Final Four appearance.

Kitley, who signed with the WNBA's Las Vegas Aces on Feb. 3, is the second women's basketball player to be honored with a jersey retirement. The late Rachel Dennis' No. 44 jersey was retired in 1987.

Off the court, Kitley will be remembered for upholding the values of Virginia Tech and the spirit of *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve). ■



CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

To watch a video and see more photos from the event honoring Elizabeth Kitley, scan the code or go to [alumni.vt.edu/kitley](https://alumni.vt.edu/kitley).

(above) Elizabeth Kitley flashes the VT sign during the event celebrating her jersey retirement. (center) Kitley's No. 33 jersey was retired in a ceremony held at a sold-out Cassell Coliseum in January. (below) Kitley, her parents, and the HokieBird with her framed jersey retirement banner replica. Virginia Tech Athletics photos





(left) ICAT's Immersive Visualization Lab demo in Academic Building One connects people across distances to interact with other locations in Alexandria, Blacksburg, and Roanoke. (right) Lisa McNair showcases the "Carving out Creativity" exhibition in Academic Building One's Immersive Visualization Lab. Photos by Luke Hayes for Virginia Tech.

# 'CARVING OUT CREATIVITY'

ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY EXPERIENCE CROSSES SPACE AND TIME

By Travis Williams

A new Virginia Tech art installation invites people into a multisensory experience simultaneously with others across Virginia.

"This is a very complex project, but it really just boils down to bringing people together," said Lisa McNair, deputy director of Virginia Tech's Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology (ICAT).

"Carving out Creativity" invites visitors to see and touch a stone sculpture as well as a virtual representation of a similar sculpture in a different location. Visitors not only "feel" observers at the other locations but also experience visual and auditory representations of the artists' brain activity during the sculpting process.

Supported jointly by ICAT and the Innovation Campus through a Science, Engineering, Arts, and Design grant, "Carving out Creativity" grew from a desire to illustrate the interconnected nature of Virginia Tech's campuses, according to the institute's executive director, Ben Knapp.

Interactive kiosks with a real stone on

one side and a virtual stone on the other have been installed in four locations across the commonwealth. Users can sense the virtual stone with the aid of a haptic device, and users touching the real stone receive the resulting vibrations. During the experience, users are surrounded by visuals of the artists sculpting along with visualization and sonification of the brain data collected during that process.

"So you'll be experiencing the stone carving in the environment around you and interacting with the finished pieces at a distance with someone else," David Franusich, ICAT multimedia designer, said.

"What really makes this project special is the innovation that brings together computer science, neuroscience, art, and creative processes in a way that connects university locations across the commonwealth," Knapp said. ■



STATE OF THE ART

To watch a video and learn more about this special art installation, scan the code or visit [alumni.vt.edu/what-s-in-it-spring](http://alumni.vt.edu/what-s-in-it-spring).



The Torpedo Factory Art Center in Alexandria is one of four locations at which the installation will be on display. Photo by David Franusich for Virginia Tech.

"Carving out Creativity" is available to the public on the following dates:

- Academic Building One, Alexandria, Feb. 28-May 18
- The Cube at Moss Arts Center, Blacksburg, Feb. 27-28
- Taubman Museum of Art, Roanoke, Feb. 27-May 4
- Torpedo Factory Arts Center, Alexandria, Feb. 1-May 18





Academic Building One features innovative spaces for learning and collaboration as well as office and meeting spaces. Photos by Luke Hayes and Craig Newcomb for Virginia Tech. (opposite page, top) Media representatives participate in a tour of the new building. Photo by Luke Hayes for Virginia Tech.





# THE NEXUS OF NEXT



**Virginia Tech's new building in Alexandria is more than just a technology hub—it's a physical manifestation of the university's growing global network of innovation.**

*By Noah Frank*

Where is Virginia Tech? The answer is more expansive than you might think. Virginia Tech is in Blacksburg, but also in Roanoke, Richmond, and across the commonwealth. It's in Riva San Vitale, Switzerland; India; Africa; and every location in between where Virginia Tech students learn and university research takes place.

This spring, Virginia Tech launched a new era with the long-anticipated opening of its new academic building in Alexandria. An epicenter for technology, education, and research in the heart of the greater Washington, D.C., metro area's innovation economy, Virginia Tech's newest location will expand the possibilities of where and how students, alumni, and the world can connect with the university.

"We're focused on supporting research and scholarship, building on faculty strengths and considering future needs, and attracting, enabling, and championing talent and partners," said Virginia Tech President Tim Sands. "Our new building is a crucial connection point to make that vision a reality and bring our mission of *Ut Prosim* to the world."

Here, Virginia Tech will prepare students for the workforce of the future and bring together leading researchers, industry partners, and national policymakers to help solve the world's most urgent challenges. And the structure in Potomac Yard is a gateway to so much more.

## **GATEWAY TO THE FUTURE**

The new 11-story, 300,000-square-foot structure along the shores of the Potomac River has the potential to connect Virginia Tech both institutionally and physically through the university's growing network of innovation.


More than five decades ago, Virginia Tech established a foothold in Northern Virginia beginning its operations out of a Reston farmhouse. Since then, the university has continued to expand throughout the region and now offers more than 45 graduate degree and certificate programs in the greater D.C. area.

Today, more than 60,000 Hokie alumni also call the region home.

Operating in close proximity to and connecting with government and industry drives transformational change. It opens a multifaceted network of possibilities for what the university is and can become as Virginia Tech extends its presence and reach. In so doing, Virginia Tech is also innovating the very idea of what a land-grant university can and should be in the 21st century.

But even as the global workforce harnesses the benefits of technological connectivity, those developments also showcase the value of face-to-face human interaction—a crucial component for Virginia Tech working with partners in the greater D.C. area.





Recognizing the value of Virginia Tech's expanding presence at the nexus of academia, industry, and government in elevating the university's role as a leading global research institution, Sands and Executive Vice President and Provost Cyril Clarke launched the Northern Virginia Steering Committee in 2023. Its charge: develop a strategy, organizational structure, and holistic approach for Virginia Tech in the D.C. area.

The steering committee engaged stakeholders across the region through town halls and focus groups to determine educational opportunities, evaluate the potential for research and partnerships, and discover ways to convene communities to build a culture of innovation.

Julia Ross, the Paul and Dorothea Torgersen Dean of Engineering and head of the Northern Virginia Steering Committee, also initiated conversations with programs from Blacksburg to

┐ Lounge and study spaces, like this one on the eighth floor, are available throughout the new building. *Photo by Meghan Marsh for Virginia Tech.* ┘

develop networking opportunities and encourage research collaborations, capitalizing on the advantages of the location to forge new connections.

"We're building not just unique research capabilities, but also convening spaces and capabilities that we didn't have before that are going to benefit us universitywide," said Ross.

A new initiative for smart construction that will support research in Northern Virginia and Blacksburg will occupy 40,000 square feet on the ground floor of the new headquarters for HITT Contracting that is slated to open in Falls Church in 2027. The National Security Institute continues to grow and expand its footprint across the commonwealth. And there are further partnerships blooming, like the one with Children's National Hospital, combining novel technologies and therapies for treating pediatric patients with devastating diagnoses like brain tumors.

"Our partners' first engagement with us might be in the region, because that's where they see us or bump into us," said Ross. "But then, in meaningful ways, those engagements will translate to other parts of the university, including Blacksburg and other places around the commonwealth."

## A STRATEGIC VANTAGE POINT

Looking out the windows of Virginia Tech's gleaming new academic building at the U.S. Capitol Building and Potomac River, the location and its purpose become crystal clear.

And all that glass, amid the striking design from Hokie graduate Sven Shockey (see related story, page 20), offers a literal window into what's happening inside.

The scope of that work has been informed, crucially, by those neighbors and partners like Boeing, whose \$50 million commitment is funding scholarships, programs, and other initiatives at Virginia Tech, and Northrop Grumman, which made a \$12.5 million investment to support research and teaching in quantum information sciences and engineering. Innovative partnerships like these will help address the gap in the tech talent pipeline facing American industry and government by arming the next generation of graduates with both a world-class education and the practical, real-world problem-solving tools needed to hit the ground running in the working world.

"We tried to push ourselves to think about how we can differentiate what we do, how we can stand out in the crowd, and how we can do that in a



way that really plays to our strengths and values, in a way that's authentic to Virginia Tech," said Ross.

The result of that thinking is a project-based learning curriculum that challenges students with real-world problems brought to them by outside partners. And the campus's core research areas comprise vital computer science and engineering disciplines in artificial intelligence, quantum information science, intelligent interfaces, and next-generation wireless technology to prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow. To that end, the new innovation and research building is also home to graduate programs in the Pamplin College of Business.

"You've got the largest consumer of technology on the planet, in close proximity to the companies that produce that technology, now in close proximity to our building," said Innovation Campus Vice President and Executive Director Lance Collins. "It's just an incredibly rich environment."

## FORGING LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Elsa Gonzalez-Aguilar, Britney Aiken, and Ramin Roughani may not, at first glance, appear to have too much in common. But despite very different upbringings, each eventually found their way to both Virginia Tech and the Washington, D.C., area. Through their lived experience, they show in their own ways the importance of and commitment to lifelong learning, in and out of the classroom, that exemplifies the potential of Virginia Tech's growing innovation network.

Growing up between El Paso, Texas, and Juarez, Mexico, Gonzalez-Aguilar M.S. '24 knew she wanted to do something in computer science from the moment her middle school teacher opened up a Linux terminal in class and showed what was possible.

In 2019, after graduating from the University of Texas at El Paso, Gonzalez-Aguilar moved to the D.C. area to work for Leidos, an innovation company rapidly addressing the world's most vexing challenges in national security and health. In 2022, she enrolled in the Master of Engineering program at Virginia Tech.

"My family has always put a big emphasis on higher education, and I knew that having a master's would also open more doors for me and help me advance further in my career," she said.

For Aiken, who lives in Ashburn, Virginia, learning that Virginia Tech's new campus would offer a master's program with a concentration in artificial intelligence was a game-changer.

## CHILDREN'S NATIONAL HOSPITAL

Virginia Tech expands research partnership

*By John Pastor*

*Photo courtesy of Children's National Hospital*

Children's National Hospital, which is ranked among the nation's top pediatric hospitals by U.S. News & World Report, and Virginia Tech are expanding their research partnership, building on a successful collaboration established in 2019.

The initial focus of the collaboration is pediatric cancers, including brain tumors. By combining Virginia Tech's leading-edge technology and research infrastructure with Children's National's expertise in pediatric care, the organizations aim to make significant strides in understanding these diseases.

"Together, we're poised to take on some of the biggest challenges in cancer research to contribute to the health of children and adults," said Michael Friedlander, Virginia Tech vice president for health sciences and technology. "The timing of this major step with our Children's National partners couldn't be better as Virginia Tech opens its new academic building in nearby Alexandria, providing additional opportunities for collaborative research emphasizing artificial intelligence and data analytics."

"Partnering with Children's National connects us to a world-class clinical enterprise that has been a pioneer in treating brain tumors with focused ultrasound technology, and this presents a unique opportunity to help children and families struggling with cancer," said Cheng-Chia "Fred" Wu, a member of the Children's National Brain Tumor Research Institute and a principal investigator in cancer research and faculty member at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute in Roanoke and in the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine. "I can't wait to see where this takes us." ■







Aiken shared her perspective at an event held to celebrate the opening of Virginia Tech's new building in Alexandria in February.

Aiken was enjoying a peaceful stroll with her dog, Turbo, one morning, when they were interrupted by a parade of construction trucks. As they followed the convoy to its destination, she realized what they were building.

"I saw that Virginia Tech, *the Virginia Tech*, was building a campus right here in Northern Virginia," Aiken said. "At the time, I was already considering a master's degree. Once I saw that they were offering a concentration in artificial intelligence, I knew then that this was the program for me."

Aiken, who is employed full time as a systems development engineer at Amazon Web Services, applied for admission the very next semester. Although she considered the part-time degree option, she ultimately chose to pursue the program full time.

"I didn't want to wait," Aiken said. "I wanted to be on the leading edge of technology now, not three years from now. With advancements in artificial intelligence happening every few weeks, it seems, I knew that the computational renaissance was not going to wait for me."

┐ A student in a study space in the newly opened academic building. Photo courtesy of Craig Newcomb for Virginia Tech. ┘



Aiken was named one of six Boeing Scholars when she matriculated into the Master of Engineering program in 2023, an opportunity that she says connected her to industry leaders, provided firsthand insight into the aerospace sector, and reinforced the importance of collaboration between academia and industry.

"The rigorous coursework and hands-on learning equipped me with the skills I apply in my current role on Amazon Web Services' artificial intelligence and machine learning team," said Aiken. "My time at Virginia Tech didn't just prepare me for a job—it prepared me to take on challenges and to solve problems that did not exist before."

By being open-minded and embracing unexpected challenges, Roughani '20, M.S. '24 found his own way through Virginia Tech in the D.C. area. Originally from Iran, Roughani moved to Fairfax, Virginia, with his family in 2012. After one year at NOVA Community College, he's been a student at Virginia Tech since 2016. Roughani earned a bachelor's degree in industrial and systems engineering in 2020 and initially pursued a Ph.D. before transitioning into a master's program, which better served his career goals.

Roughani and his classmates participated in project-based learning last year, jumping at the opportunity to work on an inventory monitoring problem from the Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS). Roughani appreciated the hands-on professional development in the challenges the problem offered.

"I've worked on a lot of different projects during my education, but most of them were focused on the empirical and educational side of the project," said Roughani. "Virginia Tech helped me to experience broader concepts to better understand what might be needed in my future career."

## **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW**

Understanding the scope of a project and how each individual problem connects is fundamental to higher-level project management. Working only on isolated problems with prescribed solutions doesn't prepare tech workers for real-world challenges. To be ready to advance, engineers and computer scientists need to be able to see their work more holistically, something project-based learning offers them as part of their education.

More than any programming language or specific piece of technical knowledge, this is what Collins hopes students will take away from their time at Virginia Tech: durable skills and real connections for the working world, no matter where they end up.

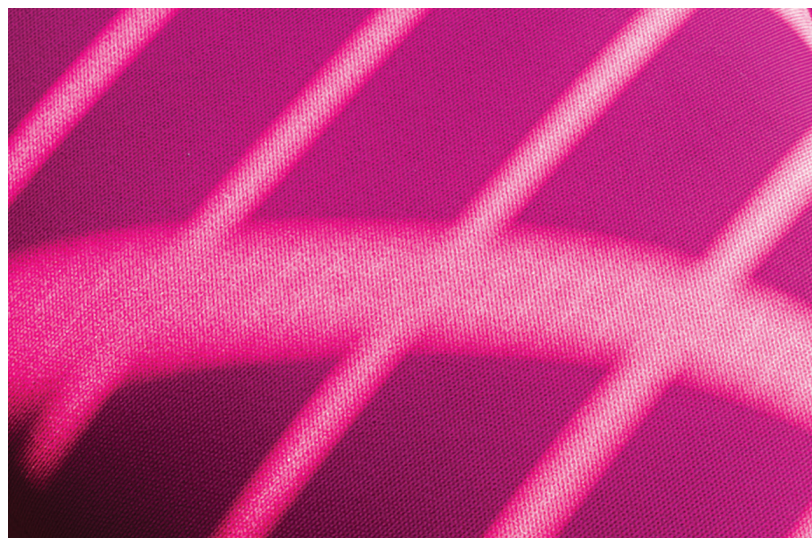




“

MY TIME AT VIRGINIA TECH DIDN'T JUST PREPARE ME FOR A JOB, **IT PREPARED ME TO TAKE ON CHALLENGES AND TO SOLVE PROBLEMS THAT DID NOT EXIST BEFORE.**”

Britney Aiken, Boeing Scholar and Master of Engineering graduate



“There is an incredibly powerful benefit to interconnecting what we do on campus with what’s going on in the corporate sector and what’s going on in the government sector,” said Collins. “And that notion can be brought to life in campuses like this. It’s a real opportunity to create meaningful, ongoing relationships.”

Andre Vieira is a business intelligence manager with MCCS and was the liaison in charge of communicating with and guiding the students as they worked on solutions. While the outcomes the teams would eventually submit were certainly valuable, Vieira was at least as concerned with the process and what he and MCCS could learn about the students under their charge.

“We are not only interested in implementing the students’ results for the problems, but also in creating a connection for quality people and quality resources,” he said.

That pipeline has produced immediate results. The organization is hoping to implement some of the students’ solutions when its budget and technology allows. But in the meantime, following the 2024 spring semester, MCCS was looking for a new hire.

Roughani knew he wanted to work in data science and had been applying for other jobs as he approached graduation. And

even though he’d never heard of MCCS before his project-based learning experience, he knew instantly that it was the opportunity and culture fit he was seeking.

“When you see that you are doing something that makes other people’s lives better, when you are not only focused on the business side of the work, but on the moral side of the work, it feels really good,” said Roughani of his work at MCCS. “You can actually see the impact of the work that you are doing on other peoples’ lives.”

MCCS hired Roughani in August, and thus began his professional life in Northern Virginia. Like Gonzalez-Aguilar and Aiken, he’s the living embodiment of the tech talent pipeline that Virginia Tech is building as it expands its innovation network, one that will fortify its connections to industry and government in and around Washington, D.C., in the 21st century.

Their success stories are emblematic of the kinds of meaningful, lifelong relationships to learning—beyond simple business transactions—that the university can help its students forge in their time on campus and beyond. ■



The most important building material  
for the future of construction?

# COLLABORATION

**By Suzanne Miller | Photo by Brad Soucy**

In the fall, Virginia Tech hosted three roundtable discussions in Alexandria designed to elevate the conversation around the built environment. Dozens of industry stakeholders—from material suppliers to digital technologists to general contractors—attended each event, eager to bring diverse perspectives to the table and to help modernize the construction industry.

Brainstorming sessions like these will guide the mission of the Coalition for Smart Construction, a university, industry, and government collaboration designed to solve some of the world's most pressing construction challenges.

For the past two decades, the construction industry has struggled to increase productivity. Smart construction might offer the incentives to mobilize the industry toward change. Through digital technology and automation, companies can achieve better efficiency, safety, sustainability, and productivity.

The roundtables were a critical first step in strengthening connections within the construction lifecycle and across Virginia Tech networks.

"This was the ultimate partnering session of a cross-section of business leaders of the built environment," said Arlene Parker '88, '93, a principal for the infrastructure consulting firm AECOM. "Virginia Tech has the synergy of a highly technical building construction group collaborating with multidiscipline engineering teams and pure sciences. This inspires innovation."

The Coalition for Smart Construction will lease and occupy a 40,000-square-foot lab and testing facility on the first floor of HITT Contracting's new Falls Church headquarters, which broke ground in January. HITT and Virginia Tech envision the space as a nationally recognized innovation hub to accelerate positive change in the construction sector. ■

The inaugural Smart Construction Roundtables were held in Alexandria this fall to elevate the conversation around the built environment.







## AERIAL INNOVATION

Stepping inside Virginia Tech's innovation and research center in Alexandria, visitors will find a two-story drone cage. It's modest in size, when compared with the 3 million-cubic-foot Virginia Tech Drone Park in Blacksburg, but it's perfect for working on the hardest parts of drone flight, such as hovering in space, or takeoffs and landings, which are when most accidents occur. The space—one of the few spots you can actually fly a drone in the huge no-fly zone that is the D.C. area—also sits right in the backyard of regulators who monitor use and set policy and standards for the popular technology. There may be no better metaphor to highlight the value of Virginia Tech's growing presence in the region. *Photos by Luke Hayes for Virginia Tech.*



### OUR GROWING GLOBAL NETWORK

Scan the code or visit [alumni.vt.edu/nexus-of-next](https://alumni.vt.edu/nexus-of-next) to watch a video or read more about Virginia Tech's presence in the Washington, D.C., metro area.

“

“IT’S LIVELY HERE, I FEEL LIKE THIS IS MY HOME AWAY FROM HOME, **AND I THINK A LOT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CAN RELATE TO IT.**”

Niharika Adhikari, hospitality and tourism management student, Pamplin College of Business





**Q+A**

# WITH PRESIDENT TIM SANDS



**On the occasion of opening Virginia Tech's Academic Building One in Alexandria, Sands reflected on his time at the university and shared his hopes for its future growth and successes.**

## ***How does Virginia Tech's presence in Alexandria help position the university as a leading 21st century land-grant?***

I think the land-grant mission is one that we really resonate with. Everyone at Virginia Tech who's been here a while, who has worked with Virginia Tech, understands the role that we have in terms of access for students who might not have access otherwise, the ability to drive the economy because the work that is done at Virginia Tech is very much tied to the local, regional, and state economy. It's always been part of our DNA, our commitment to *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve) is about serving the communities that we impact and being engaged with them.

What's really exciting about the new building and the way this helps us enhance our network of innovation is that we are located with our partners. We're not all sitting in Blacksburg working remotely. We're in the places they are, deeply engaged, and it's thematic. Whatever that community needs, that's what we bring, and we work with them directly.

## ***How does this new location create opportunities?***

I think the new location creates opportunities for the university beyond just attracting partners and talent. Our alumni in the greater Washington region have a home base that is very welcoming. It has spaces that they can use to gather and be together as Hokies.

Also, I see it as a front door to Virginia Tech in a place where there is an incredible concentration of talent and opportunity. I think what we're going to get out of that front door is immediate access to people and companies and organizations that we want to work with because we're right there. You can just say, "Hey, drop by." Then, we can connect them to all the assets we have in the other parts of the commonwealth and eventually the world.

## ***Would you characterize this milestone as an inflection point for the future?***

We have been growing what I would characterize as our innovation network for decades. This is not the first or the last opportunity we have to really plant ourselves in a community that has so much need for us and also so much opportunity to advance the impact of Virginia Tech. I would call this one of the most significant, if not the most significant moves we've made into a community. I think our Health Science and Technology campus in Roanoke is another one that started 15 years ago. ■



# CUTTING EDGE RESEARCH

Focused on Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, Wireless and Next Gen Technology, Quantum Information Science, and Intelligent Interfaces

## **Next-G Wireless:** Connecting everything, everywhere, all at once

Wireless technology allows us to connect to anyone and anything around us. Wireless technology also has permeated our homes, from smart appliances to personal voice assistants, as well as nearly every device we use, from personal drones to automobiles.

Walid Saad, professor of electrical and computer engineering, and his team at Virginia Tech are exploring, through work with international partners at the Institute of Science Tokyo, what wireless might be capable of next. Specifically, Saad believes that advancements in other technologies, like artificial intelligence (AI), can help drive more advancements in wireless and vice versa. And it all has something to do with digital twins and the digital world.

## **Intelligent Interfaces:** Interacting with users in a more natural, efficient, effective way

Undergraduate students studying with Kurt Luther, associate professor in the Department of Computer Science in the College of Engineering and director of the Crowd Intelligence Lab, offered cybersecurity assessments to local small businesses who were partnered with Arlington Economic Development as they tackled the new challenges of e-commerce spurred by the pandemic.

Sorting through the uncertain origin of information, via the process of collecting, processing, debunking, preserving, and reporting this information, is at the core of digital investigations, an example of the types of intelligent interfaces and human-computer interaction at the center of Luther's work.

## **Quantum Architecture and Software Development:** Exploring the possibilities

To date, nobody has definitively built a quantum computer that can outperform a classical computer. But quantum computing's potential is so much greater, and the ramifications of what it might achieve are so much grander, that global superpowers have invested tens of billions of dollars in its development. Northrup Grumman's \$12.5 million investment in quantum information science and engineering will ensure that Virginia Tech is on the forefront of that revolution.

"I got into this field because I believe that the long-term applications are going to be really revolutionary in ways we can literally only dream about," said Steve Flammia, director of the Center for Quantum Architecture and Software Development at Virginia Tech's new Alexandria campus.

## **AI and Machine Learning:** Students partner with the Washington Post

Naren Ramakrishnan, director of the Sanghani Center for Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics, and his students are partnering with The Washington Post to create AI-driven tools that allow users to quickly search the paper's archives for useful information.

"Establishing trust in the online information space is a huge area of research," said Ramakrishnan. "The whole journalism pipeline has to be reimagined for the generative AI revolution. ■

CC

"ESTABLISHING TRUST IN THE ONLINE INFORMATION SPACE IS A HUGE AREA OF RESEARCH. THE WHOLE JOURNALISM PIPELINE HAS TO BE REIMAGINED FOR THE GENERATIVE AI REVOLUTION."

Naren Ramakrishnan, director of the Sanghani Center for Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics





# THE OPENING OF ACADEMIC BUILDING ONE



**1** Octo founder and CEO Mehul Sanghani '98 speaks at the Sanghani Center for Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics. Sanghani and his wife, Hema '99, made a \$10 million gift primarily supporting the newly renamed center, which is headquartered in Academic Building One.

**2** The HokieBird welcomes visitors to Academic Building One.

**3** Gov. Glenn Youngkin (center) and Virginia Tech President Tim Sands (right) join other officials, including Sens. Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, Innovation Campus Executive Director Lance Collins, and the HokieBird, at the official opening of Academic Building One.

**4** The Corps of Cadets Color Guard at the Academic Building One opening.

**5** Vice President and Executive Director of the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus Lance Collins speaks during the opening of the newest building.







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- 6** The Marching Virginians pose for a picture at the building's opening after a performance.
- 7** Past president of the Virginia Tech Alumni Association of directors Deseria Creighton-Barney '86 and former board member Justin Graves '12 in the photo cube.
- 8** Alumni board member Jennifer Griesbach '07, Vashonta Roach '02, and Valerie Young '03.
- 9** Founder and CEO of Spotted MP Maurisa Potts '95 and her husband, David Potts.
- 10** (from left) President and CEO of Wellcome Leap Regina Dugan '84, M.S. '85; Lance Collins; Paul and Dorothea Torgersen Dean of Engineering Julie Ross; and President Tim Sands at the building opening.

*Photos by Luke Hayes for Virginia Tech.*



# SHAPING THE WORKFORCE

## PAMPLIN GRADUATE PROGRAMS FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

*By Anne Kroemer Hoffman*

Put simply, cybersecurity involves protecting computer systems and online information from threats. But in practice, it's anything but simple.

Securing personal digital data is important for anyone with an online presence. But for businesses and industries across the globe, managing large-scale threats is a critical priority requiring professionals with highly specialized skills—professionals like Scott Hoge '85, M.I.T. '24.

Hoge is director, consulting expert, and senior capture manager at CGI Federal. He leads initiatives focused on cybersecurity, artificial intelligence (AI) integration, and data-driven decision-making across several federal agencies.

Beyond addressing immediate threats, these agencies also need the resources and agility to identify, detect, and confront future, unforeseen crises. Hoge knows that successfully tackling such challenges involves effective decision-making and operational expertise.

He credits much of his success to the Pamplin College of Business and Virginia Tech's Master of Information Technology program.

"Much of my work is at the intersection of cybersecurity and artificial intelligence," Hoge said. "These are areas experiencing tremendous change and growth. Pamplin prepared me for these real-life challenges by equipping me to lead in an ever-evolving technological landscape."

### A HUB FOR INNOVATION

Pamplin's programs in the greater D.C.

metro area serve as a hub for forward-thinking professionals and industry-leading faculty with strategic proximity to global organizations, government agencies, and leading tech firms.

For Hoge, this commitment to preparing future leaders was a driving force behind his decision to pursue a Master of Information Technology.

"Virginia Tech's Master of Information Technology program has been at the intersection of business and technology for over two decades," said Parviz Ghandforoush, the program's executive director. "Expanding to the Innovation Campus in Alexandria, Virginia, we remain committed to preparing workforce-ready graduates with the expertise to harness data, integrate AI responsibly, and drive business transformation."

### 25 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Virginia Tech Master of Information Technology program. Nationally ranked for over a decade, the program has produced a large number of graduates and offers 10 specialized certificates. With its 100 percent online format, the program enables students to advance their skills without interrupting their careers.

"When I decided I wanted to refresh my knowledge after working for many years, I evaluated several programs," Hoge said. "The Virginia Tech program stood out. I knew it was the perfect place for personal growth and preparing for the next chapter in my career—especially since I could do the



Scott Hoge

program without pausing my job. This foundation has been essential to my work, where success isn't just about innovation, it's about impact."

### DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS

Pamplin's comprehensive graduate portfolio emphasizes the power of data in business strategy. Through a rigorous curriculum, students cultivate a data-first mindset, mastering essential business skills and advanced analytics to turn data into actionable insights.

Beyond technical expertise, Pamplin places a strong emphasis on the ethical and responsible application of AI. Whether in business, government, or technology-driven fields, graduates are prepared to develop solutions that not only enhance organizational success, but also navigate the complexities of an AI-driven world with integrity and foresight.

By offering a dynamic portfolio of graduate programs, Pamplin empowers professionals across industries to lead in a digital economy, harnessing technology, innovation, and strategy to shape the future of business and beyond. ■





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**BUSINESS**  
VIRGINIA TECH.

# NEW PATHS. BOLD FUTURES.

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#### Academic Building One, Alexandria, VA

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Master of Science in Business Administration with a concentration in Hospitality & Tourism Management

Executive Ph.D. in Business Research

### Blacksburg

Master of Accounting and Information Systems

Master of Science in Business Administration with a concentration in Business Analytics

Master of Science in Business Administration with a concentration in Global Business Analytics

### Online

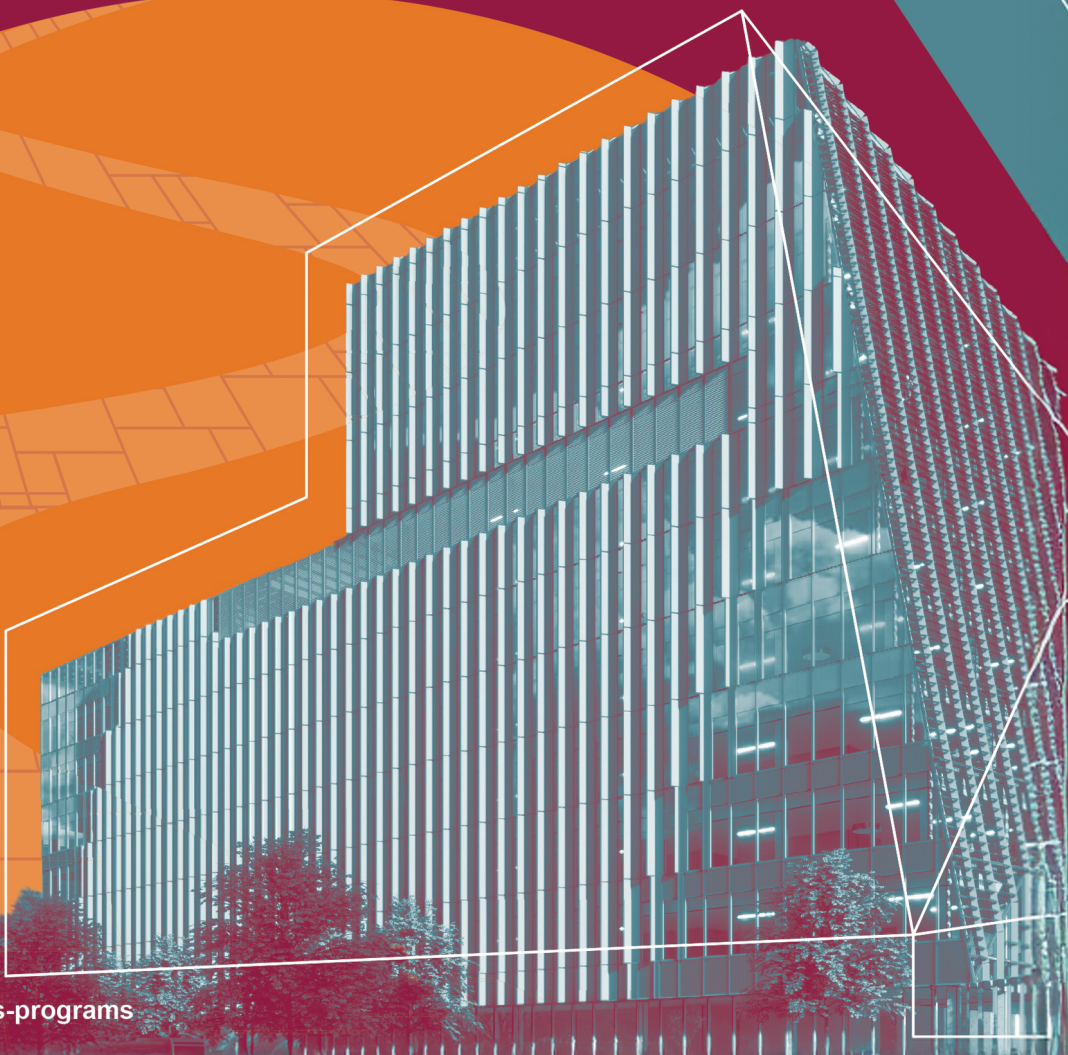
Virginia Tech Master of Information Technology

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# AROUND THE HOKIE NATION







# A RECORD OF SUCCESS

*By Albert Raboteau*

Charlie Phlegar '78, M.S. '87, who led Virginia Tech's Advancement Division to global recognition for excellence in fundraising, alumni engagement, communications, and marketing, will retire this year, effective Aug. 31. Under his leadership, Advancement more than doubled the percentage of undergraduate alumni who make gifts—and the value of new gifts and commitments made each fiscal year.

Advancement's many other accomplishments since Phlegar arrived in July 2015 include securing record gifts on multiple occasions, coordinating the university's 150th anniversary, relaunching the university's brand, aligning and integrating university-level volunteer boards, establishing LINK: Center for Advancing Partnerships, and launching Boundless Impact, a campaign to raise \$1.872 billion and engage 120,000 alumni in meaningful ways. Phlegar and his division are deeply involved in the university's top strategic initiatives, such as the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus, Virginia Tech Advantage, and Virginia Tech Global Distinction.

Phlegar is a Blacksburg native who earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Virginia Tech and began his career as assistant director of his alma mater's alumni association. His father, Archie Phlegar, led Virginia Tech admissions during a time of profound growth and diversification of the university, starting in the late 1960s and continuing through the 1980s.

Phlegar went on to work in roles of increasing responsibility at East Carolina University, the University of South Carolina, Johns Hopkins University, and Cornell University before returning to Virginia Tech as the university's first vice president for advancement, with fundraising, alumni engagement, communications, and marketing all within his division. He was promoted to senior vice president for advancement in 2023.

"We had high expectations for Charlie with his experience and outstanding record of success and because he's a Hokie who understands the university's unique character and great potential," Virginia Tech President Tim Sands said. "Over the past decade, Charlie has provided transformative leadership that left us

Charlie Phlegar, senior vice president for advancement, at the 2019 announcement of Virginia Tech's Innovation Campus. Photo by Erin Williams for Virginia Tech.



“

JOB ONE FOR CHARLIE IS NOT JUST TO SOLICIT YOU FOR TECH'S INTERESTS BUT TO LISTEN TO WHAT YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH AND THEN BRING TOGETHER THE SKILLS AND TALENT AT THE SCHOOL THAT HE BELIEVES CAN DO IT. I'VE LOVED WORKING WITH HIM AND HIS TEAM. EVERYBODY IS IN SYNC ALL THE TIME.”

David Calhoun,  
alumnus, volunteer, and philanthropist



(from left) Barbara Calhoun, Charlie Phlegar, and David Calhoun attend an event at the Moss Arts Center on the occasion of the Calhouns' gift of \$20 million toward honors education at Virginia Tech. Photo by Logan Wallace for Virginia Tech.

our mission in new and impactful ways. I am grateful that he will stay on for a few months to ensure a smooth transition and wish him the very best in his well-deserved retirement.”

Virginia Tech raised \$100.4 million in new gifts and commitments during Phlegar's first fiscal year on the job and nearly \$226.1 million last year. Meanwhile, the university has gone from trailing many of its peers in undergraduate alumni giving percentage to being a national leader in the category.

Phlegar influenced the advancement profession as a whole through leadership within the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, known as CASE. While serving on high-level boards for CASE, Phlegar helped develop standard, global metrics for reporting advancement work, such as fundraising and alumni engagement, which went into effect in 2021.

At Cornell, Phlegar was instrumental in launching a \$6 billion fundraising campaign. He was a member of the Cornell Tech Steering Committee that secured the winning bid to build a new campus on New York City's Roosevelt Island. He also is widely credited with creating the

CASE 50 group that honors the industry's top performing advancement operations and brings together their leaders to discuss best practices. In 2023, Virginia Tech became a CASE 50 member, which Phlegar called “one of the most satisfying achievements of my career.”

CASE's president and CEO, Sue Cunningham, described Phlegar as understated and modest but said, “The amount of change, impact, and transformation he has led is astounding.”

She added, “Charlie is an exemplar of an advancement professional who has worked hand in hand with academic colleagues to provide substantial leadership and innovation for the university. He is an inspiration to the profession.”

Alumnus David Calhoun knew Phlegar as a college roommate and fellow member of the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity and reconnected with him not long after Phlegar returned to lead the Advancement Division. Working with Phlegar and other advancement leaders, as well as senior academic leaders, Calhoun has made several innovative initiatives possible through personal and corporate philanthropy in recent years.



Heywood Fralin (left) and Charlie Phlegar at a December 2018 celebration of the naming of the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC. Photo by Erin Williams for Virginia Tech.





(from left) Charlie Phlegar and Julie Ross, the Paul and Dorothea Torgersen Dean of Engineering, attend the the ceremony for the dedication of Hitt Hall on Sept. 20, 2024. Photo by Lee Friesland for Virginia Tech.

“Job one for Charlie is not just to solicit you for Tech’s interests but to listen to what you want to accomplish and then bring together the skills and talent at the school that he believes can do it,” Calhoun said. “I’ve loved working with him and his team. Everybody is in sync all the time.”

Phlegar’s tenure has seen consistent efforts to improve the way the Advancement Division works. One recent project has been to amplify the Virginia Tech Alumni Association Board’s role in collaborating with university leaders to advance top priorities.

“Charlie is one of the most transformational leaders I’ve had the pleasure of working with,” said Bridget Ryan Berman, vice president of the board. “He’s a Hokie through and through. He understands Virginia Tech’s rich history, and because of his significant experiences with other great institutions, he recognized the potential of the university and has been deeply committed to helping us achieve greatness. With the support of President Sands, Charlie and his team set a vision for Advancement and have built it in a way that will have a lasting effect. Together, they’ve created a culture of philanthropy, which has given us fi-

nancial success and raised the university’s profile, the reputation of its alumni, and the spirit and commitment of the entire Virginia Tech community.”

Phlegar said alumni, corporations, foundations and other supporters are crucial partners whose involvement should be embraced.

“It takes strong and courageous leadership to fully embrace alumni volunteers and industry partners and let them in under the tent,” Phlegar said. “I like the analogy, ‘noses in, fingers out’ as we increasingly engage them. Their ideas can be very impactful and will definitely make us better.”

Phlegar said he looks back on his career with a fair amount of pride and a great deal of gratitude.

“As I get to the end of my career, I want to acknowledge that advancement work takes a lot,” Phlegar said. “Long days. Weekends. Travel. I’m grateful to my family, to my Advancement colleagues and their families, and to our university leaders and their families. Overall, it’s been such fun for me to see individuals who have made gifts witness the tremendous impact they have on the university.” ■



## ADVANCING VIRGINIA TECH

To see more about Charlie Phlegar’s work at Virginia Tech, visit [alumni.vt.edu/record-of-success](https://alumni.vt.edu/record-of-success) or scan the QR code.



The Rev. Pat Daniel and Charlie Phlegar attend the Black Alumni Reunion Awards Ceremony and Dinner in 2018. Photo by Logan Wallace for Virginia Tech.



# ALUMNI CORPORATE NETWORKS

INNOVATIVE IDEA DEEPENS RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN VIRGINIA TECH, ALUMNI, AND WORKPLACES

*By Albert Raboteau*



Capital One's alumni volunteer leadership team. Photo courtesy of Magda Ruesch.





CGI Hokies celebrate their alumni network's one-year anniversary. Photo courtesy of Natalie Wright.

Hokies are known for lots of things, but there's one particular word that underpins every facet of their identity—community. From communities created on campus to connections made long after graduation, Hokies are renowned for creating magic when they come together.

This shared connection has fueled the growth of the Alumni Corporate Network program, which creates unique opportunities for alumni to find each other in the workplace, extending the campus community that alumni remember so fondly. The first official alumni corporate network was established at Freddie Mac, followed by groups at Capital One and Deloitte shortly thereafter. Since then, the Virginia Tech Alumni Corporate Network Program has spread to 14 companies, representing a range of industries and geographical footprints.

Whether they are corporate newcomers or veteran employees, alumni find opportunities for connection and fellowship thanks to these programs. Meanwhile, the university views the networks as a way to broaden and enhance Hokie Spirit, and companies welcome the networks as a way to strengthen retention and recruitment.

“

WITH FELLOW ALUMNI, THERE IS AUTOMATICALLY A LEVEL OF CONNECTION AND RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING.”

**Vishal Ranjan '04**

senior vice president for consulting services at CGI

The Microsoft Hokie network is dedicated to connecting with students, providing them with valuable insights into the tech industry, and encouraging them to pursue their passions. Here, Hokie students visited with alumni at Microsoft's Arlington offices. Photo courtesy of Mike Kelly.





Vishal Ranjan '04, senior vice president for consulting services at CGI, played a key role in establishing the alumni corporate network at his company. His goal was to strengthen recruiting efforts from Virginia Tech while also fostering engagement and retention among Hokies already working at CGI.

“As a result of building our CGI VT alumni network, those CGI partners have been more engaged with their alma mater and current students looking for careers in IT services and consulting,” Ranjan said.

Over the past year fostering Virginia Tech connections at CGI, Ranjan was pleasantly surprised to learn he shared an alma mater with several longtime colleagues he had not known were Hokies.

“Realizing several colleagues I had known for years had also gone to VT was enlightening,” Ranjan said. “It’s really cool, honestly. Many times in the professional world, you spend more time during your week with colleagues probably than you do with your family, but at the same time, you focus on work and don’t really dive into backgrounds or where you went to college. With fellow alumni, there is automatically a level of connection and respect and understanding, having been in Blacksburg. That shared experience connects us.”



(above and below) CGI hosted an event where students learned about careers at the company and engaged with alumni and company partners. Photos courtesy of Celine Hamilton.



Newport News Shipbuilding (NNS) network’s steering committee volunteered on Earth Day 2024. Photo courtesy of NNS network.





## What have these alumni corporate networks been up to?

Capital One's network hosted From Finance to Education: Responsibly Building the Future of AI, a virtual event attended by more than 200 people. During the event, Capital One Chief Scientist and Head of Enterprise AI Prem Natarajan and Pamplin College of Business Dean Saonee Sarker held an engaging conversation around the inherent risks and opportunities of artificial intelligence (AI) while also discussing AI's impact on the higher education and corporate environments.

The alumni network at Boeing arranged an event focused on career journeys and the power of mentorship, which featured former CEO of Boeing Defense, Space, and Security Leanne Caret, among others. More than 180 people participated in the event, which was presented live through group viewings at eight Boeing offices nationwide and virtually to ensure it was available to the company's hundreds of Hokie employees. The Boeing event also kicked off a summer internship program featuring 27 mentoring "pods," through which 58 alumni connected with 191 students.

Graduate alumnus Greg Fitch '05, '09, and undergraduate alumna Katie O'Malley '16 championed the launch of an alumni corporate network at Google. Driven by a desire to bring the magic of Blacksburg to their Hokie colleagues, they pulled together alumni from across the U.S. for a hybrid gathering and celebration.

"The room was overflowing—I was surprised and delighted to see how many Hokies are here at Google," O'Malley said, adding that she was particularly eager to get involved because "a lot of Google's values are aligned with Virginia Tech's values in terms of both technical innovation and giving back through service and philanthropy."

Fitch said alumni networks are an important way the university can stay connected to industry and help ensure students are ready for changing workplace demands.



Learn more about Virginia Tech's growing Alumni Corporate Networks by scanning the code or visiting [alumni.vt.edu/corporate-network](https://alumni.vt.edu/corporate-network).



The EY network hosted opportunities to connect Virginia Tech alumni with Hokie interns during summer 2024. Photo courtesy of Mike Makuszak.

"Future Hokies are likely going to need skills, connections, and something more than is being offered right now," he said. "It's not always exactly clear what that will be. So we need to bring Virginia Tech leaders and industry leaders together to speed up the feedback loop. The sooner this is done, the better the students' futures can be."

With the surge of the Alumni Corporate Network program, the powerful connection once felt only on campus is now energizing workplaces nationwide, allowing Hokies to succeed and thrive as they carry their unbreakable Virginia Tech bond into their professional lives.

"Initiatives like our Alumni Corporate Network deepen Hokies' connections within their organizations to support their professional goals while creating more opportunities to engage with Virginia Tech," said Gwen Harrington, director of strategic engagement and partnerships for Virginia Tech Innovation and Partnerships. "As a Hokie, I could not be more excited by the great work underway." ■

Several Hokies and staff gathered at Google in Mountain View, California, to commemorate the network launch. Photo courtesy of Kathleen Green.





# Adventure Awaits

## MAKE YOUR TRAVEL PLANS TODAY

Ready to explore the world with other Hokies? Virginia Tech's travel programs offer unforgettable journeys for all experience levels.

Discover exciting destinations, immerse yourself in new cultures, and build lifelong memories with the camaraderie of group travel. Tours are open to all alumni, friends, and family. Let's go traveling, Hokies!

May 6-13 **MEDITERRANEAN SPRING**

May 9-16 **ICONIC MEDITERRANEAN**

May 12-17 **SUNNY SAN DIEGO and SoCal**

Aug. 14-25 **CELTIC CLASSICS**

Sept. 12-20 **UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER**

Sept. 13-24 **CHARISMATIC CANADA and  
NEW ENGLAND**

Sept. 25-Oct. 3 **HELLENIC INSPIRATIONS**

Oct. 10-17 **MACKINAC ISLAND, the GRAND  
HOTEL, and NIAGARA FALLS**

Dec. 4-9 **SAN ANTONIO HOLIDAY**

Dec. 30-Jan. 5 **ROSE PARADE NEW YEAR'S**



For more information about this trip and other travels tours, go to [alumni.vt.edu/spring-travel](https://alumni.vt.edu/spring-travel).

Santorini (pictured) is a destination on the Hellenic Inspirations tour, a seven-night cruise Sept. 26-Oct. 3 aboard Oceania Cruises' newest ship, Vista.

### TAKE A TRIP WITHOUT LEAVING HOME

Not ready for a cross-country journey or don't have time for an international getaway? No problem! You can still explore incredible destinations from the comfort of your home. Join our virtual travel series, where local guides bring top locations to life through engaging livestreamed tours.

Visit [alumni.vt.edu/travel/virtual-travel-series](https://alumni.vt.edu/travel/virtual-travel-series) to learn more.

Traveling  
**HOKIES**™



Alumni, we want to hear what you've been doing. Mail career, wedding, child, and death news to Class Notes, Virginia Tech Alumni Association, Holtzman Alumni Center, 901 Prices Fork Road, Blacksburg, VA 24061, or email the information to [classnotes@vt.edu](mailto:classnotes@vt.edu). Photos may also be shared for consideration. For assistance, call 540-231-6285.

## '69

**Raymond D. Smoot**, Blacksburg, Va., was appointed to the Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority board of directors on Nov. 22, 2024.

## '70

**Michael G. King**, Sandia Park, N.M., received the Federal Aviation Administration Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award in recognition of over 50 years of exemplary aviation flight experience, distinguished professionalism, and steadfast commitment to aviation safety. Having retired from the U.S. Air Force and Delta Air Lines, Mike currently serves as chief flight instructor at the Kirtland Air Force Base Flight Center in Albuquerque, N.M.

## '78

**Christopher E. Mandel**, College Grove, Tenn., was named assistant professor of enterprise risk management practice at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

## '80

**James L. Hull**, Fairfax, Va., has published two books in his retirement: the apocalyptic, future-fiction "Mall-mageddon" and the out-of-this-world space adventure "James T. Rogers, Space Cadet."

**Bryce A. Turner**, Baltimore, Md., was honored with the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award from ULI Baltimore in recognition of his contributions to architecture and urban design and planning within the Baltimore-Washington region.

## '81

**Jeffrey R. Williams**, Potomac, Md., was appointed president of Aptamus Carbon Solutions, a pioneer in the global clean energy transition focused on the maritime transportation and storage of carbon dioxide captured from power plants and other industrial sources. Also, he is the legislative director for the global nonprofit Surfrider Foundation, which promotes science-based policies for mitigating the effects of sea-level rise, removes plastics from the oceans, and protects public beach access rights around the nation.

## '82

**Thorold J. Sharitz**, Cumming, Ga., is a Christian author with a new spiritual memoir, "Control Freak, The Least Valuable Player."

**James P. Woolsey**, Washington, D.C., joined the Institute for Defense Analyses as a member of the adjunct research staff in the Cost Analysis and Research Division of the Systems and Analyses Center.

## VETERINARY VOLUNTEER

Lindsey Buracker '07, DVM '13 volunteers twice a year to provide veterinary care in what is essentially a veterinary desert. Navajo Nation spans some 27,000 square miles and contains over 500,000 cats and dogs and only three veterinarians.

"It fills my bucket," said Buracker. Veterinarians "have so much stress, so many hardships, difficult clients, and a lot of time we feel like we are taken for granted and our buckets are depleted. To go to these places where people are so grateful they're practically crying, it fills me back up and reminds me why I'm in this difficult profession. It's for those people, those pets, who truly need me."

As an area chief of staff, Buracker oversees five Banfield Pet Hospital locations spread from Roanoke to Richmond. She manages and directs veterinarian teams—this includes everything from leading a 12-week mentorship program with new graduates to rolling up her sleeves and chipping in to help more experienced veterinarians.

In addition, Buracker is the area community champion, a leader in community outreach who organizes events. For example, a recent event with the Richmond SPCA saw over 100 animals vaccinated and spayed or neutered.

Learn more at [alumni.vt.edu/buracker](http://alumni.vt.edu/buracker).

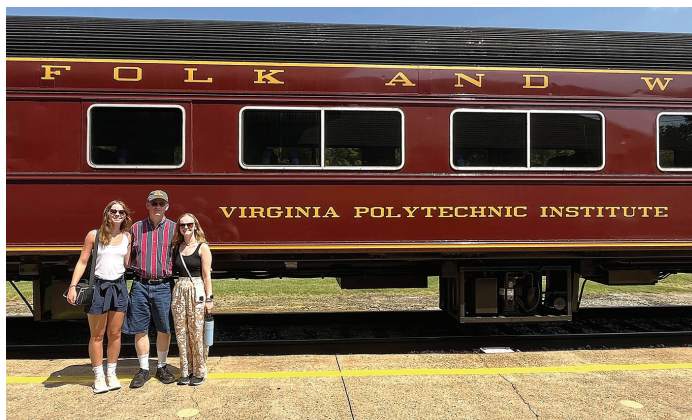


Photo courtesy of the Banfield Foundation.



Tri Delta sorority sisters of Hoda Kotb '86 surprised her live on air during her final week of hosting the "Today" show on NBC. Photo by Craig Newcomb for Virginia Tech.





(from left) Current student Nichole Howell, Paul Howell '89, and Sarah Howell '22 enjoyed a recent trip on a piece of Hokie history. The Virginia Polytechnic Institute rail car was built in 1949 for the Norfolk and Western Railway. The car has been restored is used for nostalgic train rides at the Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum in Chattanooga, Tennessee. *Photo courtesy of Catherine Howell.*

## '85

**Andrew T. Ceperley**, Palm Springs, Calif., published his first book, "Tone Setters in the Academy: How to Build an Inspired Life as a University Administrator," which was written to help higher education administrators reconnect to their passions, implement changes at their organizations, and flourish in their roles.

**Christine M. Gagne-Werner**, Maryville, Ill., who retired from her role as a professor in the physician assistant program at Saint Louis University in 2023, was named professor emeritus in December 2024.

## '91

**Gerard F. Lawson**, Salem, Va., was re-appointed to the Board of Counseling on Nov. 22, 2024 by Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin.

## '94

**Robert J. Mills Jr.**, Callands, Va., was elected vice president of the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation during the 2024 Annual Convention. He has served on the board of directors since 2011. Mills was re-appointed to the Virginia Tobacco Board by Gov. Glenn Youngkin in October 2024.

**Christopher J. Yianilos**, Alexandria, Va., published his second book, "The Law School Breakthrough, 2nd edition," to help current and aspiring law students succeed.

## '96

**Charlie R. Gillian**, Spring Hill, Tenn., is regional vice president for the Waste West region of VLS Environmental Solutions.

## '97

**Amy K. Cheatham**, Virginia Beach, Va., was inducted into the Franklin Community Wall of Excellence in recognition of significant career achievements by an alum of Franklin City Public Schools.

## '02

**Morgan A. Eddy**, Annandale, Va., is vice president of Steele Foundation, which earned the 2024 ABC Metro Washington Excellence in Construction Award for exceptional site work on the Claret project.

## '03

**John H. Rossmeisl Jr.**, Blacksburg, Va., the Dr. and Mrs. Dorsey Taylor Mahin Professor of Neurology and Neurosurgery at Virginia Tech, was recognized as a recipient of the 2025 Outstanding Faculty Awards by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia and Dominion Energy. He directs the Veterinary and Comparative Neuro-oncology Laboratory, which researches brain tumor formation and treatment.

## '05

**Britni W. Edwards Grimes**, Raleigh, N.C., joined Tapestry Development Group as regional development director.

**Brittany B. Macomber**, Brooklyn, N.Y., of Morris Adjmi Architects recently was selected as a winner of Glen-Gery's inaugural Architect Collaboration Program, an initiative that invited architects, designers, and students to submit original designs for custom brick shapes.

## '08

**Jennifer A. Kinnetz**, Olney, Md., joined CodaPet, a network of veterinarians dedicated to providing compassionate end-of-life care for pets in the comfort of their homes.

## '10

**Audrey L. Lucardi-Worden and Alexander G. Worden '11**, Erie, Colo., founders of StudioTJOA in Boulder, Colo., were awarded the Department of Energy's Building Envelope Innovation Challenge for their Thermalswitch Building Envelope Extension.

## '13

**Yasmin Bagha**, McLean, Va., joined Ogletree Deakins in Washington, D.C., as an associate.

## '15

**Ashley E. Adams**, Springfield, Va., joined the Institute for Defense Analyses as a technical editor in the

Science, Systems and Sustainment Division of the Systems and Analyses Center.

## '16

**Erin M. Struble**, Williamsburg, Va., joined CodaPet, a network of veterinarians dedicated to providing compassionate end-of-life care for pets in the comfort of their homes.

**WEDDING Ryan Taylor**, Portsmouth, Va., and **Susanna Joy Kramer**, 11/9/24.

## '17

**Kevin Junior Mekulu Mvondo**, Blacksburg, Va., was recognized in the 2025 Forbes 30 under 30 in Healthcare list.

## '19

**Megan E. Lowman**, Ashburn, Va., joined CodaPet, a network of veterinarians dedicated to providing compassionate end-of-life care for pets in the comfort of their homes.

## '20

**WEDDING Emily P. Horvath**, Concord, N.C., and **John Galbreath '21**, 6/1/24.

## '21

**Angela E. Orange**, Richmond, Va., was selected as a member of Cohort 6 of the Virginia Management Fellows program.



A mobile exhibit honoring Gladys West Ph.D. '00, whose career paved the way for GPS, is on display at Virginia Tech's Academic Building One in Alexandria through June 25. Andre Jones, West's grandson, spoke at the unveiling in March. *Photo by Craig Newcomb for Virginia Tech.*



## SAVE THE DATES

We love celebrating the Hokie community. Attend one of our upcoming events in Blacksburg and beyond.

### APRIL 24

INVASIVE SPECIES: SPOTTED LANTERNFLY AND FIRE ANTS, WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED SO FAR (VIRTUAL)

### MAY 1

YOUNG ALUMNI MEGA MIXER (WASHINGTON, D.C.)

### MAY 14

VIRGINIA TECH NIGHT WITH THE ATLANTA BRAVES (ATLANTA, GA.)

### THROUGHOUT SUMMER

STUDENT SEND-OFFS (HOSTED ACROSS THE COUNTRY BY ALUMNI LOCAL CHAPTERS)

### JUNE 5-8

ALUMNI WEEKEND (BLACKSBURG, VA.)

### JUNE 26

VIRGINIA TECH NIGHT AT THE RICHMOND FLYING SQUIRRELS (RICHMOND, VA.)

### JULY 20

VIRGINIA TECH DAY AT THE WASHINGTON NATIONALS (WASHINGTON, D.C.)

### AUG. 21

WELCOME TO THE CITY (HOSTED ACROSS THE COUNTRY BY LOCAL ALUMNI CHAPTERS)

Check out other upcoming events in Blacksburg and in your area.

Scan the QR code or visit [alumni.vt.edu/events-spring](https://alumni.vt.edu/events-spring).



1 Photo by Abby Joy Photography.



2 Photo by Dreams Come True Photography.

1 “We took wedding day photos on the field with HokieBird, celebrated at the University Club in Lane Stadium, and ended the night as all Hokies do—at TOTS!” —Emily Horvath ’20, Concord, N.C., who married John Galbreath ’21 in War Memorial Chapel on 6/1/24.

2 “I married Susanna Joy Kramer at a lovely old chapel in Poquoson, Va. Our friends said that the ceremony left them all in tears after our vow exchange. We celebrated the night away at Poquoson’s Yacht Club,” —Ryan Taylor ’16, M.S.’18, Portsmouth, Va., who married Susanna Joy Kramer on 11/9/24.

## SEND US YOUR NEWS!

Share your career, wedding, and family milestone news and photos with Virginia Tech Magazine. Email us at [classnotes@vt.edu](mailto:classnotes@vt.edu). Please include your name and class year along with your news, and don’t forget to let us know who took any photos you send.



# WHEN PASSIONS MEET CAREER GOALS

By Jama Green, Mollie Coogan, and Margaret Kovick

## ALEXANDER KAPLAN LAUNCHING SUCCESS

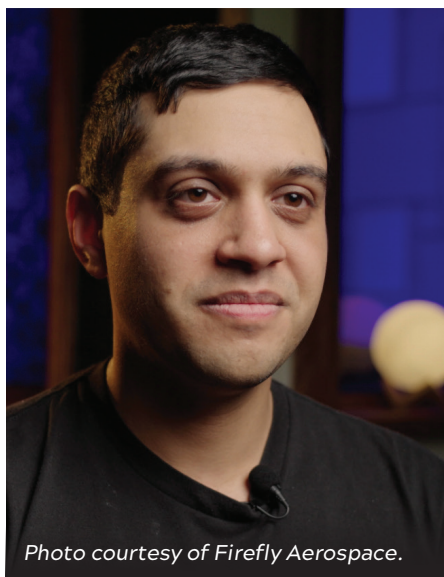


Photo courtesy of Firefly Aerospace.

Alexander Kaplan, a 2017 aerospace engineering graduate, is the spacecraft mechanisms lead for Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost Mission 1, named Ghost Riders in the Sky.

Blue Ghost is among a number of commercial space projects designed to deliver science and technology to the moon through NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services initiative. The uncrewed missions will perform science experiments, test technologies, and help NASA explore the lunar surface, laying the groundwork for humans to have a lasting presence on the moon.

Blue Ghost Mission 1 launched from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Jan. 15, and performed the first fully successful commercial

Moon landing on March 2. Firefly then successfully completed more than 14 days of surface operations (346 hours of daylight) and just over 5 hours of operations into the lunar night with the final data received around 6:15 p.m. CDT on March 16. This achievement marks the longest commercial operations on the Moon to date.

As the lead mechanisms engineer for Blue Ghost Mission 1, Kaplan was responsible for everything that moved independently of the rest of the lander.

"Firefly Aerospace had four different mechanisms on the first mission that support our payloads," he said.

"Firefly's mechanisms on Blue Ghost also support our high gain antenna that allows us to capture 4K video and help improve our power efficiency. When you're going to the moon, you will be dealing with an extreme range of temperatures. We developed a passively controlled radiator cover system to conserve as much heat as possible when the lander is cold. As the lander warms up, it passively opens up these radiator covers to expose them, helping us cool off when we need it and save a lot more power without adding a lot of weight."

As a Virginia Tech student, Kaplan spent a lot of time with different design teams.

"Working on the Astrobotics team was most directly applicable to working on a NASA space robotics mission," he said. "Getting exposure to different disciplines and having extensive design team support was a huge benefit and sets Virginia Tech apart from other schools."

## MORGAN BRIGHT PACKAGING INNOVATION



Photo courtesy of Morgan Bright.

Third-generation Hokie Morgan Bright '23 is making her mark on the world of packaging design as an associate packaging engineer for Newell Brands, which works to develop innovative products for consumers.

"I work with brands like Rubbermaid to develop packaging designs for new products and coordinate with suppliers for packaging production," said Bright, who works at Newell's Huntersville, North Carolina, location.

Bright's journey to Virginia Tech began with her father, Don Bright '98. He studied wood science in the College of Natural Resources and Environment (CNRE) and is now the president of Meherrin River Forest Products. Morgan's mother, Kimberly Bright '98, also attended



Virginia Tech, and her grandfather John David Barrett '71, M.S. '73 served as an associate professor, associate dean, and director of Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Aside from her family background, Morgan Bright, who graduated with a degree in packaging systems and design from CNRE, was drawn to Virginia Tech because of the academic offerings that fueled her passion for sustainability.

"I chose packaging because I wanted to make an impact on plastic pollution in packaging design and reduce waste," Bright said.

Bright's role at Newell Brands requires an understanding of manufacturing. She uses her expertise to help design products that meet the needs of consumers while reducing negative impacts on the environment.

Bright started at Newell Brands as a packaging engineering intern in the summer of 2023. At the end of her internship, she was offered a full-time position, which allowed her to build meaningful relationships with mentors across both experiences.

"Everyone is very interested in teaching me, and I love learning about this field," she said.

At Virginia Tech, Bright interned for Assistant Professor Eduardo Molina in the Corrugated Materials Testing Laboratory. She also completed undergraduate research with funding from the International Safe Transit Association.

"I now use their testing standards in my everyday work, so my research was a great opportunity to build a knowledge base," she said.



**SUCCESS  
STORIES**

Log on to [alumni.vt.edu/young-alums-spring](https://alumni.vt.edu/young-alums-spring) or scan the QR to read more.

## TOMMY DOUBLEDAY SETTING THE PACE



Photo courtesy of Tracie Dereszynski.

Tommy Doubleday '24, a former Virginia Tech Triathlon club officer, placed first in the Long Course Triathlon National Championship in Daytona, Florida, on Dec. 8, 2024.

For Doubleday, who spent years preparing to launch a professional triathlon career, the win was essential to securing the points necessary to apply for his elite license. He finished the race in 3 hours, 22 minutes, and 59 seconds.

"There were a lot of things I could've let kill that race, and I said no," said Doubleday. "I trusted my fitness, my coach, and I knew my friends would be there. Everything fell into place."

Doubleday graduated from the College of Architecture, Arts, and Design with a degree in industrial design. An Illinois native, he didn't start participating in triathlons until he joined Virginia Tech Triathlon. Triathlon, one of 30 sport clubs advised and funded by Virginia Tech Recreational Sports, is made up

of athletes of all skill levels who love to swim, bike, and run.

Joining Triathlon kick-started Doubleday's passion for the sport and introduced him to a team that would become his community. Doubleday's win contributes to the program's legacy of nine national team championships and two individual championships.

In his sophomore year, Doubleday became Triathlon's vice president of apparel and travel. As an industrial design major, he took his role seriously. He designed professional-grade suits to help team members look and feel like a team.

When he isn't competing, Doubleday designs and develops sports apparel for sporting goods company Boombah. Now, with his elite license in hand thanks to his national championship win, he is set to make his professional athletic debut at Ironman 70.3 Oceanside in California in April. ■



# HOKIES IN FOCUS

## 1 a-b CELEBRATING GENEROSITY

Almost 100 Hokies joined the second annual Young Alumni Pylon Society Celebration. Held in Richmond, Virginia, in December 2024, the event recognized recent grads who consistently give back to the university. *Photos courtesy of Dave Miller.*



## 2 a-b BLACK EXCELLENCE

The Hippodrome Theater in historic Jackson Ward, Richmond, Virginia, was home to our first-ever Celebration of Black Hokie Excellence on Nov. 21, 2024. There, guests heard powerful stories from Black student leaders. *Photos courtesy of Orrie Gaines.*







### 3 a-c THESE BOOTS WERE MADE FOR HIKIN'

From Virginia to Arizona to the Great Wall of China—and a whole lot of places in between—alumni and friends explored all kinds of neat places during the 2024 Hokie Hike. *Photos courtesy of Becky Minter, J.J. Morrison, Robin McEnerney, and Scott Armstrong.*

### 4 SEE YA, LITTER!

During a football bye week, Hokies in the Charleston, South Carolina, chapter said “bye” to litter on Sullivan’s Island. *Photo courtesy of Ross Ritchie.*

### 5 SERVING UP FUN

Charlotte Young Alumni Pickleball Happy Hour at Rally in November 2024 was a hit. *Photo courtesy of Sam Whitney.*



### FUN IN FOCUS

Scan the QR code or visit [alumni.vt.edu/spring-focus](https://alumni.vt.edu/spring-focus) to see more alumni photos and events.





# IN MEMORIAM

*Listing includes notices shared with the university from April 25 through July 30, 2024.*

## '44

**Charles G. Miller Jr.**, Irvington, Va., 7/4/2024.

## '49

**Leon E. Boswell**, Newhall, Calif., 6/15/2024.

## '50

**Harley P. Affeldt**, Winston-Salem, N.C., 2/9/2024.

**Robert D. Cameron**, Westernville, N.Y., 8/17/2023.

**George M. Tice Jr.**, Midlothian, Va., 5/18/2024.

## '51

**Richard L. Bunting**, Pocomoke City, Md., 6/4/2024.

**Lawrence E. Cassada Sr.**, Blacksburg, Va., 7/1/2024.

**Cordelia Gates Richard**, Frisco, Texas, 6/21/2024.

**Homer G. Smith Jr.**, Topping, Va., 4/18/2024.

## '52

**Robert A. Harrison Jr.**, Richmond, Va., 5/20/2024.

**Marivance Pickell Thompson**, Anchorage, Alaska, 9/26/2023.

## '53

**Melvin C. Bowling**, Fountain Hills, Ariz., 5/6/2024.

**Malcolm F. Jones Jr.**, Greensboro, N.C., 7/11/2024.

**Gene L. Lewis**, Rocky Mount, N.C., 4/6/2024.

**Augustus W. Watkins Jr.**, Winston-Salem, N.C., 5/2/2024.

## '54

**Robert Gerald Bass**, Lynchburg, Va., 5/30/2024.

**Thomas A. Blackstock**, Newport News, Va., 4/21/2024.

**William J. Groah**, Herndon, Va., 6/29/2024.

**Houston N. Snoddy**, Burnt Chimney, Va., 4/11/2024.

## '55

**Etta Linkous Carter**, Charlottesville, Va., 5/17/2024.

**Thomas A. Graham**, Arvada, Colo., 4/4/2024.

**Nathan L. Higginbotham**, St. Louis, Mo., 2/29/2024.

## '56

**Amos L. Fisher**, Graham, N.C., 4/6/2024.

**Marcellus Douglas North Jr.**, Manassas, Va., 7/6/2024.

**Rudolph W. "Bill" Raabe Jr.**, Carrollton, Texas, 5/21/2024.

**Bobbie L. Thompson**, Aiken, S.C., 5/21/2024.

## '57

**Gerald P. Baber**, Piney Flats, Tenn., 7/2/2024.

**Royce O. Hall**, Oldsmar, Fla., 3/1/2024.

**Earl B. Reed**, Check, Va., 5/28/2024.

**Harold D. Slemph**, Marion, Va., 4/20/2024.

**William O. Tucker Jr.**, Lynchburg, Va., 5/6/2024.

## '58

**Harry Bowen Jr.**, Charlottesville, Va., 5/20/2024.

**James V. Burket**, Seaford, Del., 5/8/2024.

**Andrew G. Gay**, Boca Raton, Fla., 7/1/2024.

**Harry B. Horner**, Jacksonville, Fla., 5/30/2024.

**Roger K. Whetzel**, Myrtle Beach, S.C., 4/25/2024.

**Daniel E. Williams Jr.**, South Orleans, Mass., 6/4/2024.

## '59

**Roger A. Becker**, Webster, N.H., 7/16/2024.

**Harry M. Cook Jr.**, Monterey, Va., 4/13/2024.

**James B. Farley Jr.**, Smyrna, Ga., 4/27/2024.

**Melvin H. Lucy**, Virginia Beach, Va., 6/25/2024.

**Donald C. Morrison**, Duck, N.C., 6/7/2024.

**Harvey L. Sutton**, Chesapeake, Va., 5/25/2024.

**Palmer D. Thomas**, Eatonton, Ga., 7/1/2024.

**Matthew M. Winston Sr.**, Virginia Beach, Va., 5/14/2024.

## '60

**Elvin E. "Gene" Bishop**, Hixson, Tenn., 4/19/2024.

**Dan P. Bunch**, Boulder City, Nev., 4/25/2024.

**Myron L. Blankenship**, Crewe, Va., 4/5/2024.

**Peter R. Kurzhals**, Fountain Valley, Calif., 7/18/2024.

**Charles O. Moore**, Jefferson, Ga., 5/16/2024.

**G. Shirley Myers Jr.**, Macon, Ga., 5/5/2024.

**Charles V. Woerner**, Virginia Beach, Va., 6/10/2024.

## '61

**Harry J. Bagnell Jr.**, Strasburg, Va., 5/5/2024.

**Maurice G. Cook**, Raleigh, N.C., 6/16/2024.

**Polly Cox Harrison**, Leesburg, Va., 5/18/2024.

**Richard C. McCleary**, Myrtle Beach, S.C., 5/17/2024.

**Albert A. Peverall Jr.**, Leland, N.C., 6/30/2024.

## '62

**Larry H. Bailey**, Mooresville, N.C., 5/4/2024.

**Herman J. "H.J." Beckstoffer Jr.**, Henrico, Va., 6/10/2024.

**Randall B. "Bud" Caton**, Camp Hill, Pa., 4/23/2024.

**George G. Dais**, Fayetteville, N.C., 7/7/2024.

**Franklin B. Gattis**, Kitty Hawk, N.C., 4/23/2024.

**Hugh Peck Givens Jr.**, Simpsonville, S.C., 6/16/2024.

**William O. Heintz**, Peotone, Ill., 5/21/2024.

**Milton Edwin Hite**, Annandale, Va., 7/21/2024.

**P. David Lindsay**, Glenwood Springs, Colo., 3/15/2024.

**Robert W. Mobley**, Great Falls, Va., 3/29/2024.

**John W. Nelson Jr.**, Mechanicsville, Va., 5/17/2024.

**Jerry T. Reed**, Midlothian, Va., 4/22/2024.

**Frederick Hillman Shiner**, Fork Union, Va., 3/12/2024.

**Douglas D. Warren**, Radford, Va., 6/25/2024.

**Jimmy E. Wolfe**, Moseley, Va., 6/14/2024.

## '63

**Milton N. Aust**, Draper, Va., 5/28/2024.

**Richard A. Bertsch**, Arlington, Va., 6/12/2023.

**William S. Bloodgood Jr.**, Hampton, Va., 5/17/2024.

**Bernard W. Chudoba**, Mechanicsville, Va., 4/17/2024.

**Richard Wayne Dudley**, Swansboro, N.C., 2/4/2024.

**Harold F. Ford**, Front Royal, Va., 7/21/2024.

**Edward L. Gardner IV**, Moneta, Va., 5/5/2024.

**Larry G. Lawson**, Chesterfield, Va., 5/5/2024.

**Bernard C. Wilkerson Jr.**, North Chesterfield, Va., 5/10/2024.

**John M. Wright**, Amherst, Va., 2/25/2024.

## '64

**Michael L. Franz**, Flat Rock, N.C., 7/16/2024.

**John W. McMillan Jr.**, Newport News, Va., 7/4/2024.

**Henry F. Phipps**, North Tazewell, Va., 6/18/2024.

**John M. Pinkerton**, Middleton, Wis., 5/19/2024.

**Howard D. Thornett Jr.**, Fairfax, Va., 3/30/2024.

## '65

**Gilbert S. Firth Jr.**, Newport News, Va., 7/20/2024.

**David W. Hill Jr.**, Murfreesboro, Tenn., 4/13/2024.

**James W. Johnson**, Mashpee, Mass., 5/19/2024.



**David W. Lambert**, Johnson City, Tenn., 4/25/2024.

**Robert W. Lowry**, King George, Va., 6/17/2024.

**Philip C. Reese**, Plainfield, Ind., 4/18/2024.

**Osie M. "Mack" Sawyer Jr.**, Chesapeake, Va., 6/24/2024.

**Wayne M. Wheatley**, Glen Allen, Va., 7/1/2024.

## '66

**James Clifford Daniels**, Salem, Va., 6/7/2024.

**Benton V. Kelly Jr.**, Buchanan, Va., 7/12/2024.

**John S. Lewis Jr.**, Alpharetta, Ga., 4/2/2024.

**Winfred B. Williams**, Pembroke, Va., 4/21/2024.

## '67

**Dirk E. Lyman**, West Long Branch, N.J., 4/12/2024.

**Jane M. Celly Peake**, Chincoteague Island, Va., 5/18/2024.

**Ronald W. Pendleton Sr.**, Roanoke, Va., 4/26/2024.

**Michael D. Robinson**, Cary, N.C., 5/19/2024.

**Boris O. Taran**, Norfolk, Va., 5/20/2024.

## '68

**James P. Browning**, Farmville, Va., 6/27/2024.

**Hunter A. DeJarnette Jr.**, Chesapeake, Va., 4/24/2024.

**Kenneth Wayne Glass**, Staunton, Va., 5/1/2024.

**Anthony W. Graham**, Dunbar, W. Va., 4/29/2024.

## '69

**William E. Anspach**, Kirkland, Wash., 4/16/2024.

**Clarence Kasy King**, Sioux Falls, S.D., 5/13/2024.

**David E. Pettry**, Millington, Tenn., 6/16/2024.

**John D. Tate**, Boynton, Va., 5/13/2024.

## '70

**Thomas A. Dumper**, Broadford, Va., 6/27/2024.

**Frank C. Fuller Jr.**, Jacksonville, Ala., 4/9/2024.

**Donald B. Higgins**, Richmond, Va., 7/2/2024.

**Henry Dean Johnson Jr.**, Concord, N.C., 7/8/2024.

**John T. Litz**, Virginia Beach, Va., 5/27/2024.

**Kenneth A. Miller**, Richmond, Va., 6/15/2024.

**Richard A. Thrasher**, Roanoke, Va., 6/20/2024.

**Richard J. Yesensky**, Suffolk, Va., 6/6/2024.

## '71

**Linda C. Otey Bray**, Tarboro, N.C., 5/9/2024.

**Michael O. Hogan**, Charlotte, N.C., 5/24/2024.

**Deanna J. Talley-Ronsholdt**, Milwaukee, Wis., 6/18/2024.

**Cornelius Bryan Tonet**, Coventry, R.I., 5/10/2024.

## '72

**Page B. Haacke**, Timonium, Md., 6/27/2024.

**Ronald W. Hall**, Yorktown, Va., 4/26/2024.

**Dale E. Margheim**, Blacksburg, Va., 7/17/2024.

**John R. Thomas**, Ruckersville, Va., 3/11/2023.

## '73

**Donald C. Harwood**, Greenville, S.C., 7/10/2024.

**Edward W. Pence Jr.**, Chesapeake, Va., 6/12/2024.

**Shirley L. Whiteman**, Annandale, Va., 3/31/2024.

**Linda R. Winstead**, Mesa, Ariz., 6/21/2024.

## '74

**Jeri L. Deel Barnett**, Roanoke, Va., 7/6/2024.

**Alice Morrisette Brewer**, Roanoke, Va., 6/18/2024.

**James A. Gatsch Jr.**, Lawrence Township, N.J., 7/21/2024.

**Thomas P. Gourley**, Penhook, Va., 6/15/2024.

**Rita Becker Moya**, Santa Barbara, Calif., 7/3/2024.

**Michael L. O'Connor**, Centre Hall, Pa., 5/1/2024.

**James R. Oliver**, Moseley, Va., 6/19/2024.

**James B. Shelton**, Lynchburg, Va., 4/16/2024.

**Stanley R. Turner III**, Windsor, Va., 4/11/2024.

## '75

**Donna Kocher Brown**, Littleton, Colo., 6/22/2024.

**Donna Diserod**, Pleasant Hill, Calif., 7/6/2024.

**Aileen Blankinship Fletcher**, Salem, Va., 6/6/2024.

**Thomas A. Gard**, Hertford, N.C., 6/26/2024.

**Peter A. McCoy Jr.**, Timberville, Va., 5/25/2024.

**Randall D. Meade**, Christiansburg, Va., 4/5/2024.

**George William Shelburne**, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., 7/18/2024.

**Michael O. Sullivan**, Bridgewater, Va., 4/13/2024.

**James F. Wildey II**, Annapolis, Md., 4/6/2024.

## '76

**Dolores T. Martin**, Spokane, Wash., 5/26/2024.

**Joseph G. Stowers**, Christiansburg, Va., 6/22/2024.

**Lillian Janette Taper**, Blacksburg, Va., 6/10/2024.

**Bertha Duncan Tignor**, McLean, Va., 1/17/2024.

## '77

**Richard G. "Pete" Beattie**, Fredericksburg, Va., 7/13/2024.

**Jeann A. Nowak Birk**, Lake George, Colo., 7/3/2024.

**Lynda Young Blanks**, Virginia Beach, Va., 4/20/2024.

**David P. Morton**, Newtonville, Mass., 5/30/2024.

**Richard K. Fischer**, Roanoke, Va., 3/17/2024.

**W.F. Hughes**, Satellite Beach, Fla., 5/13/2024.

**Cynthia Hudson Landeweer**, Roanoke, Va., 6/1/2024.

**Eleanor Hatten Terry**, Ceredo, W. Va., 6/11/2024.

## '78

**Edward J. Gill Sr.**, Pasadena, Md., 6/2/2024.

**David Benjamin Meeks**, Virginia Beach, Va., 6/5/2024.

## '79

**Lawrence C. Daly**, Scottsbluff, Neb., 6/21/2024.

**Scott E. Evans**, Henrico, Va., 4/17/2024.

**Michael S. Gless**, Littleton, Colo., 4/3/2024.

**Amy Ard Lambert**, Peachtree City, Ga., 7/9/2024.

**Michael P. McQuade**, Richmond, Va., 5/25/2024.

**Janet Motley Murray**, Roanoke, Va., 4/21/2024.

**Paul D. Shields**, Durango, Colo., 6/9/2024.

## '80

**Ronald W. Basham**, Evansville, Ind., 4/30/2024.

**Thomas H. Chilton**, Richmond, Va., 3/28/2024.

**Raymond M. Dancy**, Graham, N.C., 6/17/2024.

**James W. Downs**, Hurricane, Utah, 4/10/2024.

**Michael L. Lindamood**, Richmond, Va., 4/23/2024.

**Joseph E. Timchak**, Kewadin, Mich., 7/14/2024.







' 81

**Clyde W. Ekbon**, Cloquet, Minn.,  
4/22/2024.

**Mildred Davis Matz**, Dublin, Va.,  
4/8/2024.

**Lois J. Dedeaux McClellan**, Peters-  
burg, Va., 5/28/2024.

**Jeffrey L. Sigmon**, Richmond, Va.,  
6/3/2024.

**Rose Mary Stone**, Bassett, Va.,  
6/19/2024.

**Martha L. Vanhook Hall**, Pott-  
stown, Pa., 4/2/2024.

' 82

**Mark S. Begeny**, McLean, Va.,  
5/22/2024.

**Michael J. Capparelli III**, Sykesville,  
Md., 6/8/2023.

**David W. Cash**, Virginia Beach, Va.,  
3/30/2023.

**Richard J. Rittenhouse**, Blacksburg,  
Va., 6/11/2024.

' 83

**Katherine A. Atkins**, Havre De  
Grace, Md., 7/17/2024.

**Donna M. Santee Oden**, El Prado,  
N.M., 5/17/2024.

**John B. Powers**, Mount Carmel,  
Tenn., 4/25/2024.

**Susan Keehne Tirico**, Roanoke, Va.,  
6/30/2024.

**Pamela S. Vincent**, Fredericksburg,  
Va., 6/17/2024.

' 84

**Jeffrey E. Dalton**, Blacksburg, Va.,  
5/3/2024.

**Robert P. DeWilde**, Jacksonville,  
N.C., 4/18/2024.

**Ernest A. Flamik**, Binghamton,  
N.Y., 4/6/2024.

**Dolores Fenix "Chuppie" Sapienza**,  
Rehoboth Beach, Del., 5/13/2024.

' 85

**Frederick L. Nordai**, Chambers-  
burg, Pa., 5/19/2024.

' 86

**Jennifer Murphy Foreman**, Blue  
Bell, Pa., 6/23/2024.

**Dona George Lawson**, Henrico, Va.,  
6/10/2024.

**Peter L. Mora Sr.**, Marmora, N.J.,  
6/30/2024.

' 87

**Clifford S. Samuels**, Miami, Fla.,  
5/19/2024.

' 88

**Michael L. Christiansen**, Holladay,  
Utah, 6/25/2024.

**Mary Beth Kane Preas**, Williams-  
burg, Va., 6/18/2024.

**Mark A. Roberts**, Annapolis, Md.,  
6/11/2024.

' 89

**Arthur W. Mullins**, Pilgrims Knob,  
Va., 6/28/2024.

**David P. Wilson**, Bristol, Tenn.,  
6/20/2024.

**David E. Worley**, Gretna, Va.,  
5/18/2024.

' 90

**Tommy J. Doss**, Danville, Va.,  
5/5/2024.

**Lisa M. Shortridge**, Moneta, Va.,  
5/29/2024.

**Jaye E. Sundin**, Spokane, Wash.,  
5/1/2024.

' 91

**Dana D. Darby**, Greensboro, N.C.,  
7/4/2024.

**Dean R. Snyder**, Fredericksburg,  
Va., 5/11/2024.

**George T. Vickers**, Hurricane,  
W.Va., 5/2/2024.

' 92

**Lowell A. Clemons**, Arlington, Va.,  
5/11/2024.

' 93

**Thomas J. Marano**, Fairview, N.C.,  
4/9/2024.

**Zane W. Mitchell Jr.**, Evansville,  
Ind., 4/27/2024.

**Kimberly S. Shoemaker**, Locust  
Grove, Va., 4/28/2024.

' 94

**Scott E. Miles**, Malvern, Pa.,  
5/1/2024.

**Kent D. Smith**, Nokesville, Va.,  
6/26/2024.

' 95

**Stephen W. Richard III**, Norfolk,  
Va., 6/8/2024.

' 96

**Mark W. Williams**, Danville, Va.,  
4/19/2024.

' 98

**Daniel E. Karnes**, Roanoke, Va.,  
6/7/2024.

**Jason M. Stewart**, Okatie, S.C.,  
6/9/2024.

' 99

**William H. Cox**, Jeffersonville, Ind.,  
7/4/2024.

' 02

**Aaron S. Crawford**, Blacksburg, Va.,  
6/14/2024.

**Rosemary L. Ellis**, Christiansburg,  
Va., 4/12/2024.

**Pankil N. Patel**, Salem, Va.,  
5/18/2024.

' 03

**Glenn O. Konowicz**, Virginia Beach,  
Va., 7/11/2024.

' 04

**Kyle K. Shovlin**, Washington, D.C.,  
6/11/2024.

' 05

**Kim-marie A. Brown**, Leesburg,  
Va., 5/19/2024.

' 08

**Amy L. Ballard**, Brooklyn, N.Y.,  
7/2/2024.

**Kevin L. Reilly**, Roanoke, Va.,  
4/25/2024.

' 12

**Mary R. Hein**, Blacksburg, Va.,  
6/28/2024.

**Alexander Z. Shamy**, Roanoke, Va.,  
6/5/2024.

' 13

**Dylan H. Brooks**, Olympia, Wash.,  
6/21/2024.

**Rachel D. Cramer**, Arlington, Va.,  
4/30/2024.

' 14

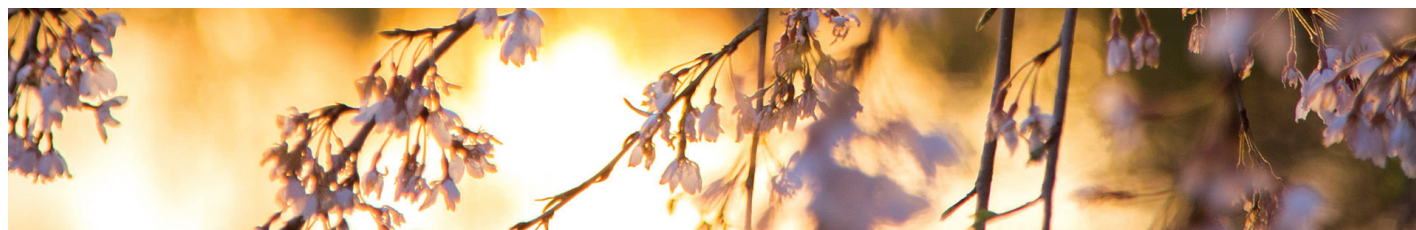
**John A. Short**, Blacksburg, Va.,  
6/17/2024.

' 17

**Matthew V. Lanteigne**, Blacksburg,  
Va., 4/4/2024.

' 21

**Cameron E. Smith**, Southport, N.C.,  
5/19/2024.





## OBITUARIES\*

### NOTABLE ALUMNI



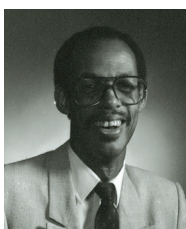
Photo courtesy of  
Chris Gilman.

**James H. "Jimmy" Cochrane '84** died Oct. 24, 2024. Cochrane, who earned a degree in architecture from what is now the College of Architecture, Arts, and Design, was a generous donor to his alma mater. In 1988, Cochrane Hall was named in his honor. He was a member of both the President's Circle within the Ut Prosim Society and the university's Legacy Society.



Photo courtesy of  
the Eller family.

**Arthur Laxton "Ike" Eller**, known nationally as a pioneer in beef cattle performance programs, died Oct. 21, 2024. He graduated from Virginia Tech in 1955 with a degree in animal husbandry and returned to earn his master's degree in animal science in 1965. Eller also earned a Ph.D. in animal breeding and genetics from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He served as a Virginia Cooperative Extension animal scientist and project leader, leading the development of beef cattle performance programs.



Virginia Tech  
photo.

**Glenn Valentine '77**, former admissions and academic enrichment administrator, died Oct. 3, 2024. One of few Black students at Virginia Tech when he graduated in 1977 with a degree in public administration, Valentine helped diversify the university's student body throughout his career. He enrolled at Virginia Tech in 1973 and became a leader in the university's chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha, a historically African American fraternity.

### FACULTY/STAFF

**Wolter "Wolt" J. Fabrycky**, a researcher, professor, and pioneer in systems engineering, died Nov. 6, 2024. In 1965, Fabrycky joined what is now the Grado Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering. During his tenure, he founded and chaired the systems engineering graduate program and served as associate dean of research for the College of Engineering.

**Nikki Giovanni**, poet, activist, and University Distinguished Professor Emerita, died Dec. 9, 2024. Named by Oprah Winfrey as one

of 25 living legends, Giovanni retired in 2022 after 35 years as a professor in the Department of English. Her latest book of poetry, "The Last Book," is set for publication in the fall. (For more on Giovanni's impact at Virginia Tech, see the alumni tribute on page 63.)

**Charles Goodsell**, professor emeritus in the School of Public and International Affairs, died Nov. 24, 2024. He joined Virginia Tech in 1978 as a professor in the Center for Public Administration and Policy, serving as its director from 1986-91. Goodsell retired in 2002.

**Jim Johnson**, former Virginia Cooperative Extension director and associate professor emeritus in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS), died Jan. 5. Johnson began his career as an Extension agent in 1961. He held leadership roles at the district and central levels before being appointed director in 1990. He and his wife, Janet Johnson, dean emerita of the College of Human Resources and Education, were jointly inducted into CALS' Hall of Fame in 2015.

**Bernard Jortner**, professor emeritus of biomedical sciences and pathobiology, died Sept. 28, 2024. An internationally known researcher in neurotoxicology, Jortner served as co-director of the Virginia Tech Laboratory for Neurotoxicity Studies.

**Joseph E. Marcy**, former department head in the Department of Food Science and Technology, died Aug. 26, 2024. Marcy joined Virginia Tech in 1988. He oversaw the largest period of growth in the department to date. In 1996, he was voted Outstanding Faculty Member by the Food Science Club and was inducted into the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Academy of Teaching Excellence.

**Jay Mancini**, professor emeritus and former head of the Department of Human Development and Family Science, died Oct. 10, 2024. Mancini joined Virginia Tech in 1977 as an assistant professor, and he served as department head from 1989-96.

**Ryan McMillan**, a faculty member in the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise, died Nov. 4, 2024. McMillan joined Virginia Tech in 2006 and was instrumental in creating the Metabolic Phenotyping Core, now called the Metabolism Core.

**Gary Lee Wamsley**, professor emeritus in the School of Public and International Affairs, died Oct. 29, 2024. He joined Virginia Tech in 1977, where he founded the Center for Public Administration and Policy and served as its director.

\*Includes relevant information reported to Virginia Tech through Jan. 13.







(inset, top right) White House nurse Genevieve Herrell, whose career spanned six presidencies, is pictured with President Lyndon B. Johnson and White House staff. Photo from the collection of Genevieve Herrell, Virginia Tech Special Collections. (at top, bottom right) Invitations, letters, and signed photographs, along with other memorabilia from Genevieve Herrell's personal collection, were donated to Virginia Tech by her son, Greg Herrell. (at right) The collection includes a personal birthday note from first lady Betty Ford. Photos by Chase Parker for Virginia Tech.

# THE PRESIDENT'S CAREGIVER

## ALUM'S FAMILY COLLECTION OFFERS GLIMPSE OF PRIVATE PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY

By Elise Monsour Puckett

In 2024, Greg Herrell '75 contributed a unique collection, which had first belonged to his mother, Genevieve Raders Herrell, to the University Libraries Special Collections and University Archives. The collection offers private glimpses into U.S. presidential history.

In 1952, Genevieve Herrell, then a civilian nurse for the Army, received an assignment that would change her life: to assist in the care of Margaret Wallace, Harry S. Truman's mother-in-law, who often stayed at the White House. This initial role evolved into a position with the White House Medical Unit, where Herrell would serve until President Gerald Ford left office and she retired on Dec. 31, 1976.

During her tenure, Genevieve Herrell witnessed firsthand the personal side of six presidencies.

"My mother was not a cabinet official or a political adviser," said Greg Herrell, who

earned a degree in history from Virginia Tech. "She provided care to the people we elected to serve our country. Her interaction was personal with no agendas."

The one-of-a-kind collection includes Christmas cards signed by presidents and first ladies; personally inscribed photographs of presidents and their families; letters from first ladies Bess Truman, Mamie Eisenhower, and Betty Ford; travel credentials for Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to Moscow; and an invitation to a formal dinner in Beijing from Premier Zhou Enlai during Ford's 1975 visit to China.

Beyond these tangible items lies wealth of personal experiences that paint more human picture of America's leaders. Ren Harman, University Libraries' oral history projects archivist, captured Greg Herrell's memories of his mother and his family's experiences during an extensive recorded interview that will accompany the collection.

"What struck me most while documenting nurse Herrell's experiences was the balance she maintained between professionalism and compassion," said Harman. "Her stories reveal the everyday humanity of our nation's leaders, reminding us that even in the halls of power, there's room for kindness and personal connection."

In 2013, Genevieve Herrell passed away.

"She is greatly missed but her memory and role in our history will now be preserved," said Greg Herrell. "She had a remarkable life." ■



**WITNESS TO HISTORY**

Scan the QR code or visit [alumni.vt.edu/retro-spring](http://alumni.vt.edu/retro-spring) to read more about the White House nurse.





Photo by Logan Wallace  
for Virginia Tech.

# CHAPTER AND VERSE

*Alumni, students, and friends remember*  
**NIKKI GIOVANNI**

*By Jenny Kincaid Boone*

Nikki Giovanni, a renowned literary legend and retired Virginia Tech professor, passed away on Dec. 9, 2024. Known around the world for her poetry, essays, and other written work, Giovanni received more than 30 honorary degrees, published at least 11 illustrated children's books, and even won an Emmy for Exceptional Merit in Documentary Filmmaking for "Going to Mars: The Nikki Giovanni Project."

Also, Giovanni used her words to mark some of the university's historic and untimely events, writing poems for the April 16 tragedy and for the Class of 2020's commencement ceremony at the height of the COVID pandemic. In 2023, she was the fifth recipient of Virginia Tech's Ut Prosim Scholar Award.

Many alumni, faculty, students, and people around the nation shared personal tributes following her death.

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## TRIBUTES

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**Ayah Ali**, a first-year student, engineering major, and winner of the 2024 Giovanni-Steger Poetry Prize competition

Nikki Giovanni "was truly an inspiration, and it was an honor to meet her last April. Before the Giovanni-Steger Poetry Prize ceremony, she briefly came backstage and spoke to all the finalists to give words of encouragement and inspiration.

"Her work breathes life into the rising generations of writers and activists every day. May we carry on her arts and her advocacy."

**Gena Chandler**, associate chair of the Department of English and associate professor

"Nikki was a wonder. So many people knew her as a phenomenal poet and teacher, but she was an even more exceptional human being—extraordinarily kind, compassionate, and loving."

**Will Furrer '91**, former Hokie and NFL quarterback who majored in English

Furrer said Giovanni's classes were the key to helping him find his voice. Her classroom discussions spanned multiple topics, from music and art to political issues.

"I think she was trying to work the room in a way that was challenging the way we thought in the past or the way that we would think in the future," said Furrer, an executive fellow for strategy for Q2 banking in Austin, Texas.

He described Giovanni's pointed questions as constant voices on his shoulder throughout his career.

"That's the way in which Nikki was able to pass on her creative brilliance to so many others, with these very simple and portable lessons," Furrer said. ■



**CELEBRATING  
GIOVANNI**

This summer Hokies are invited to gather at Alumni Weekend in Blacksburg for a celebration of life on Sunday, June 8. For more details, tributes, and to share your stories and memories, visit [alumni.vt.edu/giovanni](https://alumni.vt.edu/giovanni).



## RADON RISK

Philip Agee, assistant professor of building construction in the Myers-Lawson School of Construction, uses the Heat, Air, and Moisture House to demonstrate building physics. The model also shows how radon can flow from a building's foundation into the air.

The National Cancer Institute lists radon as the second-leading cause of lung cancer behind smoking, and the National Institutes of Health estimate that 15,000 to 22,000 deaths in the United States each year are radon-related.  
*Photo by Lee Friesland for Virginia Tech.*



To watch a video and read more about radon, scan the code or visit [alumni.vt.edu/still-life-spring](http://alumni.vt.edu/still-life-spring).







## END NOTE



### ALWAYS A HOKIE

Learn more about the board's transformation, meet additional board members, and see how you can play a role at [alumni.vt.edu/endnote-spring25](http://alumni.vt.edu/endnote-spring25).

(left) Alumni Association Board President Keith Stemple is passionate about giving back to Virginia Tech. Photo by Travis Carr for Virginia Tech. Keith Stemple (right) and his husband, John Hasselmann, a 1990 graduate, enjoy returning to campus and cheering on the Hokies. Together, they have six family members and a godson who are all Hokies. Photo courtesy of Keith Stemple.

# ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE AND PASSION

## THE KEYS TO OUR ALMA MATER'S FUTURE

*By Keith Stemple, Alumni Association Board president and chief legal personnel and development and practice management officer at WilmerHale*

Hokies everywhere watched with excitement as we marked a major milestone in our university's history—the opening of Academic Building One in Alexandria. You've read about Virginia Tech's ongoing and growing presence in the D.C. region in this issue (page 28).

As an engaged alum, I was inspired to see such a transformative moment for Virginia Tech in the region I and more than 60,000 other Hokies call home.

Like so many, I am excited about Virginia Tech's future in Blacksburg and beyond. As the president of the Virginia Tech Alumni Association, I know the critical role that alumni play in the life of the university. A key part to our future success is our alumni base, which is more than 290,000 Hokies strong.

We bring an important perspective and passion to the work of advancing our university. While Virginia Tech leaders may change, alumni are the constant. When we choose to step up, volunteer with, and give to the university, we make our alma stronger.

For three years I have worked alongside Charlie Phlegar, who will retire later this year, to strengthen our alumni board (page 42). Our board implemented a new structure aimed at supporting presidential priorities and drawing on the deep expertise of engaged alumni who want to serve the university.

Now, we are working toward aligning and integrating alumni boards across the university. This is vital because our alumni community is not only vast and deeply experienced across industries and professions, but because we remain alumni forever.

The shift in board structures sets us up to elevate the top presidential priorities, including Virginia Tech Advantage and Virginia Tech's aspiration to become a top 100 global research university. Both are essential to fulfilling our land grant mission.

We are also focused squarely on the transformative work of the Advancement Division. With committees for engagement, development, and communications and marketing, we are key thought partners in this important work that supports the university's greatest aspirations.

There is great power when Hokies come together, we know that. Our next chapter will be successful when we all step up and play a role. I hope you'll join me on what will be an exciting journey, and one that we'll all be proud of. ■

### ABOUT KEITH STEMPLE

Virginia Tech Alumni Association Board President Keith Stemple is the chief legal personnel and development and practice management officer at Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP (WilmerHale).

Stemple earned a Master of Arts in education focusing on human resource development from George Washington University in 2005 and a Bachelor of Arts with a double major in history and political science from Virginia Tech in 1995.

He served as the D.C. Metro Area Chapter scholarship chair for over 20 years until 2021. He is currently president of the Virginia Tech Alumni Association Board of Directors and a member of the Hokie Club. Stemple also serves as chairman of the Board of Directors for the German Club Alumni Foundation.



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VIRGINIA TECH.

# ALUMNI WEEKEND



**Register now!**

Join us in Blacksburg  
June 5-8 for Alumni Weekend.



Scan the QR code or visit [alumni.vt.edu/weekend](https://alumni.vt.edu/weekend)