Robert Digges:
Entrepreneur builds opportunities at Virginia Tech

When Robert Digges was a sophomore at Virginia Tech, he had a job mowing lawns at homes a builder was trying to sell. Potential buyers kept asking to look inside the houses while no salesperson was around. Digges (business administration ’59) mentioned the issue to his boss.

“He suggested I get a real estate license and sell them myself the next summer,” recalls Digges, who did just that. He wound up making so much money selling houses part-time while finishing his bachelor’s at Virginia Tech and M.B.A. at the University of Virginia that he was able to build a house, outright, after completing his graduate studies.

To the dismay of his M.B.A. professors, Digges didn’t bother to go on any job interviews while graduation loomed. Having already succeeded in real estate, he went into business for himself in that industry, first developing land and building houses, then building and managing apartment complexes. He also founded a semiconductor company in partnership with his brother Thomas (metallurgical engineering ’60).

Along with his wife, Kathleen, a former obstetrician/gynecologist at Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena, Calif., who passed away in December, Digges has been a major supporter of Virginia Tech, especially the Pamplin College of Business, which in 2000 recognized him with its Distinguished Alumnus Award. The Diggeses have committed more than $3 million in support to the university and are members of the Ut Prosim Society, Virginia Tech’s most prestigious group for donors. “She gave me the encouragement to do things for people in education,” Digges says of Kathleen. “She loved classes, particularly medical classes. That was her hobby, going to medical classes and learning.”

In November, the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors recognized the Digges’ commitment to create three professorships focused on entrepreneurship by announcing that the management department’s Center for Entrepreneurial Studies will eventually be named for the couple.

Diggessays his parents were entrepreneurial people. He raised and sold flowers and vegetables as a child. He also delivered newspapers. An accomplished basketball player as a youth, he credits sports for the competitive drive that helped him succeed in business, but also for teaching him humility.

An accomplished basketball player as a youth, he (Digges) credits sports for the competitive drive that helped him succeed in business, but also for teaching him humility.
Your remarkable support will lead us into the future.

I write to you today in the midst of remarkable times — both here on our campus and across the country, times that have been marked by economic uncertainty and no small degree of anxiety. But, as is often the case, remarkable times engender remarkable actions, and I’m pleased to report that that is precisely what is happening here at Virginia Tech.

First, let’s be clear about the challenges. We are not immune from the downward pressures of the economy, and those pressures have affected our endowment. However, because of our prudent fiscal policies, the negative impact on our endowment has been significantly less than it has been at our benchmarking institutions. We remain committed to the good works made possible by our endowment and optimistic about its rebound.

More importantly, I’m delighted that YOU, our donors, have responded in ways that have proven both your faith in this institution and your belief in the importance of this campaign. Consider this: In December, at a time when our nation’s economy looked especially bleak, you donated more than $23 million dollars to The Campaign for Virginia Tech: Invent the Future. That’s the third highest December total in the life of the campaign, and it’s an amazing demonstration of your love and loyalty for Virginia Tech.

I am confident that we will continue to thrive because your past generosity means that Virginia Tech is well-positioned to ride out these ups and downs. And your support now means that we will be prepared to face whatever economic cycles the future may bring.

We are more committed than ever to the promise of this university and this campaign, and we are profoundly grateful for your support. We recognize the need to make strategic decisions about how to responsibly use the funds available to the university and we will continue to make prudent financial decisions that will put Virginia Tech in the best place to take advantage of any opportunities that may arise.

These are remarkable times, to be sure, and it gives me great comfort and confidence to be surrounded by such remarkable people, the loyal friends and supporters of Virginia Tech.

Educating the student leader

We’ve written before that the Virginia Tech experience is more than laboratories and classrooms. Although there can be no denying the importance of Virginia Tech’s academic mission, it is equally important that we prepare our students for a life beyond Blacksburg. As such, providing students with leadership opportunities is a critical part of their educations and a foundation of our mission and our motto, Ut Prosim (That I May Serve). The Campaign for Virginia Tech: Invent the Future offers you a chance to support these initiatives across campus.

The Division of Student Affairs is particularly focused on offering student leadership opportunities. Student leaders help build our campus community in a variety of ways, from welcoming our newest Hokies during orientation to leading programs that celebrate the variety of cultures on our campus. The Leadership program, managed by the division, engages Virginia Tech students in educational programs designed to develop ethical, globally conscious citizens and leaders. The Multicultural Leadership Program cultivates citizens who are aware of how cultural differences can add value in a productive society. The division also offers scholarships, such as the Virginia Tech Rescue Squad Scholarship, for students who show promising leadership ability. The leadership opportunities offered by the division are top priorities for them in this campaign.

Perhaps the most obvious of the leadership opportunities on campus is the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets. The corps’ mission is to graduate exemplary leaders, and they offer their cadets a variety of ways to achieve the skills that will prepare them for success — whether or not they choose a life of military service. Each year, in addition to the leadership opportunities inherent in the corps, the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets hosts a leadership conference that focuses on specific issues of leadership. This year’s conference, held in February, focused on overcoming leadership challenges. The Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets Rice Center for Leader Development also provides a comprehensive program of academic course work, real-world leadership experiences, ethics education, public lectures, and guest speakers. When you support the corps by supporting their programming and scholarships, you increase their ability to offer these opportunities to Virginia Tech students.

Every college at Virginia Tech offers its students the chance to practice their leadership skills. For example, the Student Engineers’ Council produces a Leadership in Management Conference each year. The Educational Leadership Program in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences prepares leaders for PK-12 schools. The Dean’s Leadership Council in the College of Science works to consider and promote any matter which may advance the college and its students. The Center for Leadership Studies in the Pamplin College of Business supports undergraduate and graduate academic research in leadership and the continued development of executive education and management training programs in leadership. The center also raises funds for scholarships, professorships, and programs in leadership.

Pamplin also offers its students the opportunity to participate in student organizations like BASIS (Bond and Securities Investing by Students) and SEED (Student Endowment for Educational Development). Later in this issue of Impact, you’ll have the opportunity to meet Nandan Shah, the co-CEO of BASIS.

Our value of service to a larger community is ingrained in our students — students who promise to be tomorrow’s leaders. Help us to continue our mission to train these leaders today and improve the future for all of our communities by supporting the leadership opportunities on campus. We invite you to become our partner in developing leaders for the future. For further information, please contact the Office of University Development at 800/533-1144 or visit the website at www.campaign.vt.edu.

IMPACT SPRING 2009 | Page 2
DeBell has been returning to Blacksburg regularly for some 40 years. Initially, he came to stay in touch with friends he made in Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity. Eventually, his leadership within the Virginia Society of Professional Engineers led him to develop a relationship with then-dean-of-engineering Paul Torgersen, who would later become university president. Encouraged by Torgersen to use his expertise to help on boards within the college, DeBell became more involved.

Over the past quarter century, he has served on numerous boards, both within the College of Engineering and university-wide. He chaired the Virginia Tech Foundation Board in 2007. Along with his wife, Connie, he is on the National Campaign Steering Committee and chairs the regional committee for Northern Virginia within The Campaign for Virginia Tech: Invent the Future. DeBell has chaired the advisory boards of both the College of Engineering and the Via Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. The department inducted him into the academy of distinguished alumni in 2001. The college presented him with its distinguished service award in 2006 and inducted him into its academy of distinguished alumni in 2007. In 2002, DeBell was named the Virginia Tech chapter honor member of the Chi Epsilon, the national civil engineering honor society.

In 1998, the firm was acquired by a larger company, headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, called Burgess and Niple Inc. DeBell became a partner at the larger firm and to this day runs its Mid-Atlantic operations. The DeBells have endowed scholarships for athletes and civil engineering students and are members of the university’s most select group for donors, the Ut Prosim Society’s President’s Circle, which recognizes families that have donated at least $1 million to Virginia Tech.

“I think there’s a certain culture of Tech graduates that’s different than [at] many universities,” says DeBell (civil engineering ‘68). “I wouldn’t say ‘blue-collar’ is the right word, but they’re generally not egotistical people. They’re down-to-earth people that communicate well and are not false. … In business, you’re dealing with relationships [and] these are important qualities. I don’t know that Tech really teaches these qualities, but they are really worked into the culture. Whatever [subject] you study, you absorb some of that culture.”

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President Steger speaks to attendees at the regional event in Northern Virginia.

During the two years of the public phase of the campaign, regional campaign events have offered people in Tampa Bay/Orlando, Charlotte, Roanoke, Atlanta, and Hampton Roads the opportunity to get involved and excited about the future of Virginia Tech. Last fall, in addition to Northern Virginia, the campaign traveled to the Raleigh/Durham area of North Carolina.

Elizabeth Flanagan, vice president for development and university relations at Virginia Tech, spoke to both groups about Virginia Tech’s success, both over the life of the campaign and over the past year. She noted that we increased our level of private support in the 2007-08 fiscal year more than 9 percent over the previous year, and that Virginia Tech’s Office of Annual Giving surpassed the $4 million mark for the first time ever. “Your belief in Virginia Tech, along with the faith of alumni and friends worldwide, has helped us reach our potential and that’s why you’re here now,” she told those gathered for the events.

President Charles Steger pointed out that when Virginia Tech announced its $1 billion goal, there were doubters. However, Tech is enjoying success because of the hard work and dedication of alumni and friends. “We all share a dream about what this institution can be,” Steger said. “We see a future of expanded educational opportunity for our students, our contribution to our community, and our assistance to the economy of the state and the nation. We see a future where our researchers are making discoveries and resolving the tremendous challenges that face us.”

Calhoun said, “I never come to a Virginia Tech event where I don’t meet yet another member of the Virginia Tech family who gives me a vision about what they’re trying to accomplish, where I’m not inspired to help them achieve that vision.”

Connie and John (civil engineering ’68) DeBell, co-chairs of the Northern Virginia committee, expressed their appreciation to those who attended the event for their enthusiastic support of Virginia Tech and its billion-dollar campaign. John also reminded them that it isn’t enough to reach $1 billion if important initiatives remain unfunded. He encouraged everyone to support the passion that is found in the students and faculty at Virginia Tech.

Joe Collie (chemical engineering ’50), co-chair of the Raleigh/Durham campaign committee, urged campaign volunteers to become advocates for Virginia Tech and be salespeople for the school. “When it comes to explaining why giving to Virginia Tech is worthwhile,” he said, “you have a very easy answer to these things, rather than just say’do what you can.’ It’s got to be more of a sales job. In my case, I felt that my education gave me a good base to start from and learn from, and I felt that I owed the school the very successful campaign. But I didn’t realize that until later on, until somebody came along and talked to me about giving.”

Thus far, the regional campaigns have been very successful. Combined, the regional campaigns have raised in excess of $125 million toward The Campaign for Virginia Tech. Invest the Future. The campaign road show continues this spring with programs in Greensboro/Winston-Salem, R.C., and the bay area of California.

Regional Campaigns: Northern Virginia and Raleigh/Durham North Carolina

“I’ve been fortunate enough to travel all over the world, and it seems everywhere I go, I meet a Hokie who wants to tell me how much they love this institution. And I know we all here today—to step up and help achieve our goal.” So said Dave Calhoun, co-chair of The Campaign for Virginia Tech: Invest the Future, when the campaign traveled to Northern Virginia last fall.

Joe Collie, Charles Steger, Sid Smith, and John Lawson at the Raleigh/Durham regional event.
As we begin the second year of the public phase of The Campaign for Virginia Tech: Invent the Future, we’re optimistic about our continued success in spite of the challenges we face. The clearest reason for that optimism is our progress today. As of February 28, 2009, we had raised $771,820,649. We remain ahead of schedule toward our $1 billion goal.

Wayne Robinson appreciates that his Pamplin College of Business degree prepared him to succeed as a recruiter for a major steel company. And he’s grateful to the athletics department for the scholarship that paved the way for him to play in the National Basketball Association and Europe.

But when Robinson decided to make a major gift, he chose to support a university-wide initiative. “I felt a need to cast a broader net, if you will, across different areas,” explained Robinson.

To do that, he created a named scholarship that is part of the Presidential Scholars Initiative. That initiative helps talented, low-income students from Virginia who have shown the persistence and commitment to academic excellence that it takes to overcome difficult life situations.

Robinson understands the importance of having an inclusive university. He is helping to ensure that Virginia Tech is one by supporting a campus-wide program. Supporting such programs is an effective, though sometimes overlooked, way to make a difference in higher education.

When people consider making a gift to their alma mater, they are likely to think first of the department in which they majored, or perhaps the college that contained that department. But there are many other areas of a university that play a vital role in the lives of its students.

For example, alumni who wish to support the academic vitality of their alma mater can endow a fellowship at their former college. But they can also achieve their goal by donating to the Virginia Tech Graduate School, which supports all our advanced degree candidates. When Jim and Ellen Wade wanted to express their gratitude for the benefits their Virginia Tech degrees afforded them, they created a graduate studies fellowship.

Alumni can endow a scholarship in our honors program to help attract outstanding students like engineering science and mechanics major John Helveston. While looking to convince top applicants to attend Virginia Tech instead of one of the many other schools that would love to have them, honors officials are able to cite scholarships like the one Wayne and Claire Horton funded. Last year, thanks to the Hortons, Helveston traveled to China, where he had an internship with one of General Electric's wind turbine teams.

No matter what their major was, alumni who want to make a gift to support academics probably spent a good deal of time in Newman Library. So they would no doubt be interested in the important role that donors play in the library’s efforts to meet the needs of today's students and faculty. Officials are able to add hundreds of titles each year and respond to emerging needs because of the support of alumni, such as David and Beth Erb, who have established endowments to support University Libraries.

Alumni who give to Virginia Tech often say their lives were changed by their time here. No doubt much of that change came in the classroom within a particular college. But the classroom is only part of the unique experience we offer. The overall environment of our institution — its academic rigor, its scholarly resources, its welcoming and diverse student body — contributes a great deal to the learning process, and is also important to support.
Joe Collie: Distinguished innovator makes a difference on campus

Like many alumni, Joe Collie first came to Virginia Tech in his late teens. But for Collie, then an 18-year-old native of Danville, Va., it was not the university’s academic offerings that brought him here — it was an assignment by the Army Specialized Training Program during World War II.

That assignment was cut short when Collie was sent to Cornell as a first alternate appointee to the U.S. Military Academy before he was assigned to the 100th Infantry Division as a rifleman. His next stop was southern France in 1944.

Collie fought through France and Germany until the end of the war in Europe. He stayed on as part of the ensuing occupation until early 1946, when he returned home hoping to resume his education. “I had been impressed with Virginia Tech, its academic strength and friendly atmosphere, and the interest shown in making the necessary changes to accommodate an influx of 2,500 veterans to the existing 2,500 students already in the corps of cadets,” Collie says. “And I wanted to take chemical engineering.”

Collie’s father passed away while he was overseas. So as he studied for his bachelor’s in chemical engineering, he helped his mother and young sister by sending them what money he could. The G.I. Bill helped some, but the 21-year-old freshman also worked as a dorm counselor in return for free room, board, and laundry.

Collie recalls that lots of other students had to balance their education with family responsibilities in similar fashion. “There were people that were married and had to get out and scratch to get money. For the most part, everybody had limited funds.”

After graduating in 1950, Collie worked several years for DuPont before moving to Durham, N.C., to set up a chemical distribution division for an existing firm that later went under. When that company’s fate became clear, Collie founded his own company, Southchem Inc., in 1969. Southchem operated in the Carolinas and Virginia. By 1993, when Collie sold it to Brenntag, a subsidiary of the German firm Veba, it had grown to $58 million in sales. Collie continued to serve on Southchem’s board for years before he retired, and is proud that the company, which eventually took the Brenntag name, remains in Durham and has continued to grow.

Collie credits his success to hiring talented people and training and treating them well, as well as his willingness to be innovative and explore opportunities that his competitors did not.

“I just tried to evaluate ways that prospective customers could save money with our products, such as using acceptable, lower-cost but still quality product that might be considered waste by some firms. This eliminated a waste chemical, enhancing profitability for the maker and the user, and we gained valuable customers. My chemical engineering background was the catalyst.”

Collie believes that to be truly successful, chemical engineers should develop an eye for business, not just engineering. To help them do so, he and his wife, Barbara, created the Joseph H. Collie Endowed Chaired Professorship. Though the professorship is within the Department of Chemical Engineering, its holder is expected to run an interdisciplinary program in chemical distribution and marketing. The position is vacant for the moment as officials look for the right person, Collie says.

A chaired professorship is just one of many ways in which Collie has helped the university. He and his wife have given more than $1 million in support of the College of Engineering, the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, athletics, and University Libraries. In 2000, Collie was named the College of Engineering Distinguished Alumnus.

Joe Collie’s co-chair for the Raleigh/Durham, N.C., regional committee is Sidney Smith (chemical engineering ’63). Look for more information on Smith in an upcoming issue of Impact.
Accounting for the Future: Jorge and Lin Del Alamo

For most teens, college is the first time they learn what it’s like to live apart from their parents. For Jorge Del Alamo Jr. (accounting ’69), the lesson came earlier.

In 1961, Del Alamo’s family sent the 14-year-old, his sister, and their cousin from Fidel Castro’s Cuba to the United States. Each was allowed to bring just $5 and one suitcase. Del Alamo spoke only Spanish. For six months, until their parents could join them, the children lived in a series of orphanages as part of a program run by Catholic Charities.

“That was an eye opening experience, going from a place where people were really looking after you to where, if, say, you didn’t like the food and want to eat that’s just your problem,” Del Alamo recalls. “But, looking back, it makes you a better person.”

Del Alamo’s father was an attorney in Cuba. In the United States he first worked pumping gas and then found a position teaching Spanish in Danville, Va. After high school, Del Alamo enrolled in a Virginia Tech satellite program in his hometown. He planned to study business, but had no idea of a major until he took his first accounting course, which was taught by Kenneth Heathery (business administration ’54, education, basic studies ’57).

“It was like somebody turned on the light,” recalls Del Alamo, who transferred to Blacksburg as a junior. “I knew I wanted to be an accountant. … It’s a very logical field of study. Things are supposed to balance. That squares with my personality, which is pretty orderly.”

Del Alamo credits Virginia Tech with preparing him to succeed and says that, of his former teachers, William Grasty was especially motivational. Today, Del Alamo is a major supporter of the Department of Accounting and Information Systems. He has given to the KPMG professorship held by Larry Killough and has endowed an accounting scholarship.

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Del Alamo lost his father when he was 18. His mother died when he was 23. After his mother’s death, Del Alamo’s parents sent him to the University of Northern Iowa, where he did tax work for international firms and was a partner for 23 years. He now runs his own firm in Corpus Christi, Texas.

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Del Alamo says enduring the premature separation from his family made him appreciate how important it is to spend time with loved ones. At least once a year he returns to Virginia to visit his parents and other family members. Those visits typically include a stop at his alma mater, often to take in a football game.

“In some ways it feels like coming home,” says Del Alamo, whose brother and brother-in-law are also Virginia Tech graduates. “You feel like you belong in this place.”

“I’ve been a supporter of the Girl Scouts because I understand its influence in my life, and Virginia Tech has had the same power in his,” she says.

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Lin Del Alamo says she understands her husband’s gratitude for the role Virginia Tech played in his life.

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Ways to Give: Retirement account beneficiary designations

The Del Alamos have included Virginia Tech in their estate plans by designating the Virginia Tech Foundation Inc. as a retirement account beneficiary. That support has earned them a place in Virginia Tech’s Legacy Society, which recognizes donors who have supported the university through their estate plans or other planned gifts.

When choosing which assets to use to fund a future gift to the university and which assets to pass to heirs, donating highly taxed retirement account assets offers significant advantages.

Your charitable gift will pass tax-free to the university, where the entire amount can support the area of your choice at Virginia Tech. And, you can pass more tax-favored assets to your heirs.

Making a retirement account beneficiary designation is easy:

Designate the Virginia Tech Foundation Inc. as a beneficiary of your retirement account. Simply sign a form provided by the firm administering your plan.

Tell the university how you want your gift to benefit the area of your choice. Direct other, more tax-favored assets to your heirs.

As with any estate planning decision, you are encouraged to consult your legal and/or financial advisor to ensure your gift fits your overall goals. Your beneficiary designation does not affect how your account can be used during your lifetime, and you can change your gift if you wish.

Learn more about using retirement account assets, or any charitable gift, to help invent the future. Call the Office of Gift Planning at 800/533-1144 or 540/231-2813. Or e-mail giftplanning@vt.edu.
In a first floor laboratory within Virginia Tech’s new Life Sciences Building, Nicholas Willoughby is wrestling with a significant problem in biofuel production. “Inhibiting toxins slow up the process and there’s not a lot known about them, so we want to do some research on them, classify them … and see if there are any ways to get rid of them or find microbes that can work around them,” explains the senior biochemistry major from Amissville, Va.

For their important work, Willoughby and his colleagues are taking advantage of one of the new building’s important assets: a mass spectrometry incubator. Mass spectrometers are expensive, highly specialized machines that allow researchers to weigh and break apart molecules. More than 40 principal investigators and their graduate and undergraduate students work with the incubator, bringing samples containing DNA, lipids, proteins, plastics, and natural products for analysis.

While Willoughby uses mass spectrometry to analyze the transformation of corn stalks and leaves into ethanol, the technology can be applied to many other processes. For example, pharmaceutical companies often use mass spectrometry to predict how new medicines will behave in patients. Forensic science relies heavily on mass spectrometry, as does the FDA and any competitive sport that requires the testing of athletes for banned substances.

Two of the incubator’s four mass spectrometers were provided by PPD Inc., a leading global contract research organization, in a gift valued at more than $500,000. Such gifts, whether of equipment or the money to buy it, play a significant role in the university’s effort to improve its research facilities — a major priority within the $1 billion Campaign for Virginia Tech: Invent the Future that is now underway.

In some cases, donors make lead gifts toward the actual construction of buildings — as happened when Richard Bishop’s generosity made possible a new structure that opened last year for the building construction program. But in other cases, such as PPD’s gift, donors help to fill buildings with equipment that makes new discoveries and cutting-edge teaching possible.

Latham Hall, dedicated in April 2006, was named for Bill and Betty Latham, who provided equipment, research stipends, graduate student fellowships, and other forms of support for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

One goal in creating the mass spectrometry incubator was to improve access to the technology for researchers throughout the university. It’s used by faculty from several colleges, including science, natural resources, agriculture and life sciences, engineering, and veterinary medicine, says biochemistry Associate Professor Rich Helm, who runs the incubator.

Another advantage of the incubator, he points out, is that it allows students to get experience with equipment that is an essential component of any life science- or chemical-based company.

Willoughby, the biochemistry major working on biofuels, is just one of many such students that benefit from the equipment. “I’ve learned a lot and feel a lot more confident with what I’ve learned in the classroom (because of) being able to back it up in the lab;” he says, “I feel it’s a good, intermediate step for me to take in getting a job in the real world.”

Helm also maintains an outreach program involving high school students, exposing them to the field of mass spectrometry. “Seeing the smiles on their faces when they get to actually run the mass spectrometers is a joy,” he says.
**NEWS Around the campus**

Your gift can make an impact at Virginia Tech again and again. A named professorship allows world-renowned researchers and professors to make a difference in their professions while at the same time be ambassadors for the university. A scholarship affects the recipients every day of their college careers and beyond. Private philanthropy touches the lives of students and faculty every day. These are some of the ways your gifts are working on campus. For more information on these stories and more, please visit our website at www.campaign.vt.edu or the Virginia Tech news site at www.news.vt.edu.

**Professor highlights failing U.S. water infrastructure in national press briefing**

Marc Edwards served as the keynote speaker for the fall 2008 Graduate School commencement ceremony.

Marc Edwards, the Charles P. Lunsford Professor with the Virginia Tech Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and renowned expert on water infrastructure, says America is failing in its quest to provide safe drinking water in high quality and high quantity. Edwards, along with other scientists from the American Chemical Society (ACS), held a press briefing Jan. 27, 2009, in Washington, D.C., to speak out on water quality and safety. The event was designed to highlight the ACS’s newly released book, “Final Report on Global Challenges/Chemistry Solutions.”

Winner of the National Science Foundation Presidential Faculty Fellowship, Edwards was dubbed the “Plumbing Professor” by Time magazine for his internationally recognized expertise on drinking water. He concentrates in environmental and water resources engineering.

**Safur Rahman appointed to one-year term on advisory committee to review National Science Foundation investments**

Safur Rahman, the Joseph Loring Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering in the College of Engineering and director of the Virginia Tech Advanced Research Institute, has been appointed by the National Science Foundation (NSF) to serve a one-year term on its Advisory Committee for GPA/PRA performance assessments to determine whether NSF-sponsored programs are meeting the foundation’s strategic outcomes goals of discovery, learning, and research infrastructure.

The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), passed in 1993, holds federal agencies accountable for using resources wisely and achieving program results. GPRA requires agencies to develop plans for what they intend to accomplish, measure how well they are doing, make appropriate decisions based on the information they have gathered, and communicate information about their performance to the U.S. Congress and to the public.

**School of Architecture + Design faculty, students only U.S. university team invited to Cologne furniture fair**

A team of faculty and students in Virginia Tech’s School of Architecture + Design in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies represented the United States at the Cologne furniture fair in Germany. Virginia Tech was the only U.S. university invited to participate.

The team was led by Joseph Wheeler, associate professor of architecture, and Robert Dunay, the T.A. Carter Professor of Architecture and director of the Center for Design Research. Dunay and Wheeler, both members of the American Institute of Architects and residents of Blacksburg, worked with graduate and undergraduate students from architecture and industrial design to develop the exhibit titled, Industrialized Furniture. The work represents a distinctive aspect of design research, presenting an intellectual dimension emphasizing innovative use of computer and fabrication technology.

**Memory of Hannah George helps “Gracie” serve others**

Hannah George was, by all accounts, a bright, happy, compassionate, 15-year-old girl who loved horses. When she was killed with her father, prominent Roanoke cardiothoracic surgeon Dr. Jeffrey George, on Dec. 3 in a tragic car accident, there was heartache for many.

It was Hannah’s passion that led friends of the Georges, Bob and Susan Heath and their children, to make a donation for equine compassionate care to the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine at Virginia Tech in Hannah’s memory.

The Heaths’ donation will allow the college to help offset the cost of care for critically ill animals.

**UPS grant marks 13th year of support for engineering program, for a total $611,000**

The UPS (United Parcel Service) Foundation has awarded a $40,000 grant to the Grado Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering in the College of Engineering at Virginia Tech.

The funds will be used to support doctoral students in industrial and systems engineering’s human factors engineering/ergonomics graduate program with a research focus on truck driver safety and training, vehicular safety and design, aircraft pilot safety and cockpit design, and ergonomics of commercial and personal vehicles. This is the 13th consecutive year that the UPS Foundation has supported the department with grant funding.

**We need your help!**

We are always looking for ways to improve Impact and the best way to do that is to ask you. Please take just a few seconds to go online and let us know what you think. Thank you! Visit us at www.campaign.vt.edu/impact.
Imagine letting your college student make investment decisions about your retirement account. Sounds crazy, right? But that is exactly what Bond and Securities Investing by Students (BASIS) does. BASIS is a multimillion dollar fixed-income investment fund, managed entirely by students, that focuses on the U.S. debt market, which is comprised of nearly $24 trillion dollars. The money they’re investing? It’s provided by the Virginia Tech Foundation and it comes from donors to Virginia Tech. We sat down with Nandan Shah, co-CEO of BASIS, to ask him what it’s like to be a part of such a special group.

How is VT’s BASIS program and/or SEED different from other institutions’ programs?
We’re one of seven fixed income portfolios. There are a lot of schools that have an equity portfolio*, but Virginia Tech is unique because these two programs are noncourse related. Students are basically doing part-time work because they’re passionate about it, not because they have to take it for a class. From April to April last year, BASIS performed in the top 6 percent of portfolio managers.

What do you look for in student applicants to join the BASIS team?
We try to set ourselves up as industry where we have a three-round interview process. To be honest, my BASIS interview was a lot harder than the ones I’ve had in industry. We look to see how they perform academically, but also what type of leadership qualities they have. So it’s not just simply do they get A’s in their classes, but can they apply? We would like to see people who can come into the program who are not only intelligent but are willing to work as a team.

How is BASIS structured?
We have co-CEOs and one CFO. We have four sectors in our group — agencies, treasuries, financials, industries, and utilities. We have sector heads who manage those sectors. And then we have analysts and assistant analysts. Ben [Marshall] and I have been CEOs since April [2008]. Before that, I was an analyst in the industries and utilities sector.

What was your first significant trading decision? And what was it like having real money on the line?
My first trade was earlier this semester where I had an almost $400,000 transaction. My first trade and I was in the room by myself, though I obviously had [faculty advisors] Dr. Morgan and Dr. Kumar available to ask questions. I was sweating bullets the whole time, but it was a fantastic experience.

What’s the best call your team has made?
I would have to say that all of last year, the financials sector did an outstanding job. The sector head, Drewy Bartigia, who is now at Wachovia, thought, “Let’s look at companies that have low sub-prime exposure, that have good solid fundamentals, and let’s invest in those.” And if we look at last year’s returns, the financial sector outperformed substantially. As a group, we all have a say in what the individual sector strategies are, but that sector just blew the competition away.

What have you and your fellow students gotten from this experience?
Coming from an engineering perspective, one thing I’ve gained is to not only take certain skills I’ve acquired over the years and apply them to making an investment, but also communicating my point of view: Teamwork is another huge aspect of it. Nothing can be done in BASIS that is individualistic. Everything has a team aspect to it, whether it’s from tool creation to investment proposals, it’s all teamwork. That’s different from engineering projects, where you can divvy it up sometimes and kind of get by. But in this one, you really have to know what the other person is doing. You also learn how to deal with pressure and keep your emotions under lock, which I think is crucial on Wall Street — to hold your emotions and look at it in an objective way, whether it’s a good investment or not.

This is a challenging time in the markets, to say the least. What is it like being responsible for so much money in this volatile environment?
First of all, we think about what is our money going towards. We realize that it’s going toward kids’ scholarships and other things that help the university grow. So we know that what we do really does affect the university, not on a small scale, but on a large scale. If we have a bad year, it isn’t just us that is being affected, it’s the whole university. The thing is that our sponsors, [Virginia Tech Foundation Chief Operating Officer] Ray Smoot and [Director of Investments and Debt Management] John Cusimano, have been so supportive of us that we know that our main objective is to really learn about the markets and really know the markets and the returns will come. We hold true to our mission statement, which is to provide an educational experience on behalf of the foundation.

Virginia Tech does, too. It’s called SEED, Student Endowment for Educational Development. For more information on SEED, visit their website at www.seed.pamplin.vt.edu.

Shah is majoring in engineering and economics and expects to graduate in May 2009. Right now, he hopes to do something on Wall Street — either in sales or risk management. He is also considering teaching in the nonprofit sector or in high school.
Given the current state of the economy, largely due to irresponsible lending and borrowing, the value of that philosophy is especially clear. Asked how the current situation will affect entrepreneurship, Digges says it’s a major challenge, but also an opportunity for the entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

“He was probably the best boss I ever had,” said Charles Forbes (engineering ’43) whom Lavery hired as Virginia Tech’s first vice president for development. Forbes said that when he thought of Lavery the first things that came to mind were the many accomplishments during the former president’s tenure, including the creation of the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine, the acquisition of what is now WVTF, and, of course, The Campaign for Excellence.

“Bill and I traveled all over the country raising money,” Forbes said. “I was one of his great admirers. I thought the world of him. It’s a great loss for me and for the [Virginia Tech] community.”

Digges continued from page 1

When William Lavery and other university officials were planning The Campaign for Excellence a consultant said they were unlikely to raise more than $25 million.

They didn’t listen, and announced a $50 million goal in 1983. Their campaign eventually generated $118 million — a tremendous boost for an institution whose foundation previously had less than $8 million.

Lavery, Virginia Tech’s 12th president, died Feb. 16. Harnessing philanthropy to help stabilize the university’s finances was just one of his many accomplishments. Lavery not only encouraged philanthropy, he practiced it. Along with his wife, Peggy, Lavery was a generous supporter of a wide range of programs at the university.

“Somebody’s loss is somebody else’s gain,” he says. “Even in an environment like today, there are a whole lot of opportunities. … There are always opportunities to make a buck in this world.”

Digges said that while studying at Virginia Tech he was especially impressed by those professors who embodied the entrepreneurial spirit by remaining active in their industries, including William “Shorty” Gay and L. Mahlon “Clay” Harrell, who taught accounting while maintaining their CPA practices, and John Barringer, an attorney who taught a course on law and was also Blacksburg’s mayor.

Digges says he and his wife choose to support professorships because “all it takes is one professor to change somebody’s life and give them the inspiration that could make a difference in the world.”

Even though entrepreneurship was at the heart of Digges’ personal success, that is only part of the reason he chose to support faculty members focused on that topic.

“[Virginia Tech] is making groundbreaking research discoveries every day.

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