Alex Urquhart didn’t have a particular career in mind when it came time to decide where to go to college. But he did have the good sense to heed his father’s advice.

“He advised me that engineering was a great discipline because if I could make it there, I could make it anywhere with the technical background and problem-solving skills I would learn,” said Urquhart, who enrolled in Virginia Tech’s College of Engineering, which his father also had attended. “I wasn’t sure I wanted to sit down and be an engineer, but I was pretty good at math and science, and I thought that was pretty good advice.”

For Urquhart, it actually turned out to be very good advice.

The bachelor’s in industrial engineering and operations research he earned in 1981 launched him on what has become a 30-year career at General Electric, where he now is president and chief executive officer of GE Energy Financial Services.

Recent projects in which Urquhart is involved include a new combined-cycle electricity plant in Turkey, a natural gas pipeline being built in Pennsylvania, and a project to install 130 wind turbines on the plains overlooking Idaho’s Snake River.

“‘I made a lot of great friends and it was a great setting to both mature in and learn in. Blacksburg will always be a very special place to me.’ Alex Urquhart

“‘I made a lot of great friends and it was a great setting to both mature in and learn in,’ Urquhart said. ‘Blacksburg will always be special to me.’

Urquhart has maintained a strong connection to the university and is helping ensure it will remain a special place for future students by donating generously and volunteering with The Campaign for Virginia Tech: Invent the Future. He is on the National Campaign Steering Committee and co-chairs the regional campaign committee for the New York City area.
A Scholarship That Helps Dreams Come True

Your generous contributions are also making a difference. The Presidential Scholarship Initiative, supported by donors, is making it possible for outstanding students in hands-on learning opportunities, enabling them to become active contributors to the discoveries that make lives better for people in communities across the globe. You are helping us to build revolutionary facilities like the Signature Engineering Building, which enable faculty new opportunities to teach and research.

As another year draws to a close, it seems an appropriate time to thank you for your part in making our excellence possible. No matter what role you play in our community – as a student, faculty member, staff, donor or friend – your participation is an essential part of Virginia Tech’s mission to provide students with a world-class education.

Elizabeth A. “Betsy” Flanagan
Vice President for Development and University Relations
WWW.CAMPAIGN.VT.EDU/IMPACT

You can help Virginia Tech create even more opportunities for the students of the future by giving to the Presidential Scholarship Initiative. Contributions can be made in established endowed funds or new funds, and your gift will generate income for scholarships to cover the total cost of education for students who are otherwise unable to attend Virginia Tech at no cost under the university’s Tuition Promise Fund.

A Scholarship That Helps Dreams Come True

Your Support Makes Virginia Tech Extraordinary

Virginia Tech’s goal is to prepare students for the challenges they will face as leaders in their communities and to help them build the skills they need to make a difference. The university’s success depends on the support of students, faculty, staff, donors and friends. Your generosity is essential to our ability to make a difference in the lives of students and in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Virginia Tech students, faculty and staff are working to build a better future, one that values diversity and inclusion, and one that addresses the challenges that face the Commonwealth and the nation.

A Scholarship That Helps Dreams Come True

Your Support Makes Virginia Tech Extraordinary

Virginia Tech is dedicated to providing a world-class education to all students who are willing to work hard to achieve their dreams. The university is committed to ensuring that all students have access to the opportunities they need to succeed.

A Scholarship That Helps Dreams Come True

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Virginia Tech students are leaders in their communities and in the Commonwealth of Virginia. They are working to make a difference in the lives of others and in the world.

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Name a Virginia Tech teaching award and there's a good chance that Alumni Distinguished Professor of Biological Sciences Arthur Buikema Jr. has won it.

Arthur Buikema Jr.

Dedicated teacher endows student awards

While studying toward his bachelor’s in biology at Bluffton College, he considered becoming a high school biology teacher. Buikema ended up seeking advice from that course of study because he discovered that the same education courses offered at its core were needed by a master’s in biology at the University of Kentucky, where he was enrolled to study research, and that he was interested in teaching students.

Despite his earlier concerns about the coursework, a high-school biology teacher, Buikema realized it was a great opportunity to study teaching in the effects of different methods of helping and teaching. He was the second to receive the Brower Award, and his work has also been published in scientific journals.

Buikema and his wife, Alison Galway, endowed a student awards program. Buikema’s show provides a cash prize and recognition for one outstanding graduate teaching assistant and two exceptional seniors in the biological sciences.

While on campus, Buikema was a graduate teaching assistant for John Corin, who came to Virginia Tech in 1990 and created Buikema’s first study for him.

“Sometimes I have done something great on a small scale,” Buikema said.

“Demand for the student’s research assistant is what I really enjoy,” Buikema said.

“By writing this research assistant to operate in the future, I hope to support the university in its goal of understanding and helping young minds develop in science while working with animal and plant samples, and in understanding chemistry in college, in part, when post-doctorate is done.”

David Lohr

Engineering the future by remembering the past

David Lohr’s father often urged him to go to college. Nothing unusual there, but this did have a particularly convincing way to make his point.

“Having a small family business, I suggested to my husband and grew up in the steel business. He was always interested in how things worked and would ask me questions about the metal industry. I’d tell him about things I knew and taught him about the steel business. He was always interested in how things worked and would ask me questions about the metal industry.”

However, in another word, Lohr is dedicated to getting the job done. He currently works for the university’s Office of Gift Planning and is responsible for identifying promising companies in which to make an investment. He worked for the university’s Office of Gift Planning and is responsible for identifying promising companies in which to make an investment. He currently works for the university’s Office of Gift Planning and is responsible for identifying promising companies in which to make an investment. He currently works for the university’s Office of Gift Planning and is responsible for identifying promising companies in which to make an investment. He currently works for the university’s Office of Gift Planning and is responsible for identifying promising companies in which to make an investment. He currently works for the university’s Office of Gift Planning and is responsible for identifying promising companies in which to make an investment.
Ambulance donated by General Federation of Women's Clubs of Virginia benefits Virginia Tech Hose Squad

In honor of Joseph H. Vipperman, a 1962 electrical engineering alumnus of Virginia Tech, and former president of Appalachian Power, his former company has donated $1 million to Virginia Tech’s Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science. The AEP Foundation’s gift will support the sustainable energy and clean coal technology focus areas within the research institute.

A donor’s generosity made it possible for master’s candidate Emily Barry to organize a service learning project in Honduras for students in the University Honors program. Her work on that project is one reason Barry won a Boren Fellowship for international study and was named the second to project of USA Today, the All-USA College Academic Team.

What inspired you in service-oriented work and international development? A class offered through the honors program called “Living Through the Ut Prosim Tradition of Service” truly inspired my passion for international development. The Honduras community partnership I initiated as a final project for this class showed me how to connect my love of international cultures with my passion for sustainable community work.

How has your experience at Virginia Tech helped prepare you to work in that field? I have had the opportunity to create my own unique college experience by grounding theoretical understanding in experiential learning abroad.

The impact of matching gifts

Students: A question and answer session with Emily Barry

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The impact of matching gifts

At GE, Unquhart served on the board of directors, where he co-chaired the overall campaign. He credits Calhoun with “helping to amplify my interest in helping Virginia Tech, because Dave’s enthusiasm for the school is infectious.”

Unquhart’s family, who also supported the GE, endowed a scholarship in the College of Engineering named after his own family in a family in a family in the college. The scholarship is endowed in honor of the Signature Engineering Building, which will have a

Unquhart said that supporting scholarships and educational facilities reflects his belief in the national importance of maintaining an edge in technical subjects like engineering.

“We are inventors here in America and create the jobs that come along with that.”

Unquhart said that supporting a program that played such a large role in his own success was simply a matter of giving back.

“I am proud of the school and what it means to me,” Unquhart said. “I think I was so young and a lack of self-confidence. I think I was always being pushed to be the best and now I want to give back.”
As a scientist specializing in genetics, Koller has spent her career seeking such answers in a bid to improve public health. As a generous donor to Virginia Tech College of Science’s Institute for Advanced Study, she supports researchers who have similarly well-meaning goals. And, through the Deborah Ayers Koller Endowed Scholarship in Biology, she helps tomorrow’s scientists receive the type of education that inspired her.

Koller’s father served in the Navy. Her family—which includes two sisters who attended Virginia Tech—lived in multiple locations, including the Dominican Republic, before settling in Virginia. After attending Western Branch High School in Chesapeake, Koller was accepted to study math at Virginia Tech, but changed her major to biology after learning about the university’s genetics curriculum during her first year.

Koller said it was a natural switch because of her longstanding interest in life science. She remembers trying to crossbreed roses and to get her pet fighting fish to produce different colored offspring while still a young child. Those experiments didn’t quite work out, but they were an early sign of the fascination she would develop for genetics, a field she was largely introduced to at Virginia Tech. “Genetics had the logic of math and mystery of biology,” Koller said. “I thought that was perfect.”

She earned her bachelor’s in biological sciences in 1976 and would later earn a master’s in biological sciences and Ph.D. in microbiology, both from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Koller spent several years working at Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, researching why opportunistic infections caused spinal meningitis in some patients but not others. She later went on to work for Philip Morris USA and is now with its parent company, Altria.

“For the past 30 years I’ve been in research and development, trying to find out what about cigarette smoke causes disease or increased risk, and there is a way to eliminate or reduce that,” Koller said. “You might think it’s hard working for a company that people love to hate, but the work is so challenging and so potentially rewarding.”

Koller credited Virginia Tech with preparing her to succeed, and said she enjoys supporting its programs as both a philanthropist and volunteer. Along with her husband, Kent, she’s also an avid fan of Hokie sports.

Koller is a member of the Women in Leadership and Philanthropy Council, a group of invited women that advise university leadership on ways to engage women as both donors and volunteers. She and her husband, Kent, are considered Platinum Hokies by virtue of their giving to the Athletic Department. They also belong to the UO Prosim Society, a select group of the university’s most generous supporters, and the Legacy Society of those who have included the university in their estate plans.

“I love coming back to Blacksburg,” said Koller, who has also served on the College of Science Alumni Advisory Board, and Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science Dean’s Roundtable, College of Science Roundtable, Department of Biological Sciences Alumni Advisory Board, and Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science Task Force. “It feels like coming home. I feel the university gave me so much that I wanted to give back.”