



INSTITUTE REPORT

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Regimental Commander Fights for the Vulnerable

By Marianne Hause

Blake Smith '23, an economics and business major and this year's regimental commander, has a moving story behind his success. He did not achieve the highest-ranking position a cadet can earn without inspiration, and that inspiration comes from his sister Ashley, who is severely mentally and physically disabled.

Smith, who is just one year older than Ashley, watched his entire life as his parents continuously struggled to care for his sister. As a child, he wrestled with the difficult family dynamics, and was often frustrated and acted out because his parents were focusing on his sister. During his sophomore year of high school, he transferred to Benedictine College Preparatory in Richmond, Virginia. "When I first arrived, my football coach pulled me aside and warned me that I was in for a challenge at Benedictine, and it would take a lot of work to succeed as a student and athlete," reminisced Smith.

Smith matured in the new school, and excelled both academically and athletically. He learned resilience and hard work, and with Ashley to inspire him, he developed a desire to fight for others who cannot fight for themselves. "It was her disabilities that gave me, and continues to give me, an understanding of my God-given abilities and inspire me. The biggest influence in my life is my relationship with God. I owe all my success to Him. I work as hard as I can and leave the rest to Him," he said.

When looking for a college, Smith wanted a school that matched his moral belief of service over self, always thinking of his sister. "I found what I was looking for at VMI, whose philosophical model is to train cadets to selflessly serve as citizen-soldiers. There are great people here at VMI," said Smith.

Smith explained how his leadership and service training developed at VMI. "It starts with the Rat Line. We were all on an equal level, and we all looked the same. The rat physical training mentality is crawl-walk-run-sprint. Most rats fail the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) in the beginning. VMI has a 'no rat left behind' approach. Rats are taught the proper physical fitness technique to pass the APFT, and maintain a healthy routine for life. Being on the Rat Line is a hard process, but we wanted to go through it, and we established a brother rat experience. Then for the next three and a half years, the process molds us into cadets, and our character is developed. A bond is formed between brother rats. We will be brothers and sisters for life," he said.

He decided to run for regimental commander because, as a 3rd Class cadet, he noticed many of his brother rats had lost their excitement and zeal for VMI because of the COVID-19 restrictions and investigations upsetting routine Institute life. "I love and value VMI and wanted to help my brother rats get

back their vision and enthusiasm, and I wanted to give back to the school that has given me so much. My main goal as regimental commander is to enable all cadets to have the opportunity to be successful at VMI in all aspects of cadet life." Smith went on to say he has been fortunate to have dealt with multiple groups and organizations within the Corps of Cadets, and he is motivated by his daily interaction with them. "We have had much success this year. So many people have been doing a good job. The whole Corps is upholding the Institute standards and providing a safe and professional Rat Line," he said.

Smith is disheartened when he hears unfounded critiques that VMI is not living up to its reputation of high standards. "Just ask the cadets. They love it here, and they'll tell you what's going on. I feel truly blessed to be here. At VMI, you stop thinking about yourself, you think of your brother rats, your class, your team. VMI cadets adhere to honor and leadership skills. We are destined to do monumental things," Smith said.

In November, 21 cadets, led by Smith, visited their shared alma mater, Benedictine College Preparatory, to host and judge the school's annual individual drill competition. Reese DeVries '24, who teaches drill as Company E master sergeant, was one of four cadets who judged the rifle drill, of which there were three rounds. "The final round was between the top five contenders. We looked for overall proficiency in stationary rifle movements, and basic knowledge of what movements can be carried out from certain positions. The standards became stricter with each round, and in the final round, ranking the challengers came down to minute details," explained DeVries. The event displayed the historic relationship between VMI and BCP, which sends more students to VMI than any other high school in the country.

After graduating, Smith will commission into the United States Marine Corps as a 2nd lieutenant, but also recommends VMI for those who choose not to enter the military. "Cadets who do not commission will go into civilian life and will live by the same morals, honor, dignity, respect, and character for success. At a recent job fair on post, there were many civilian companies desperately competing to attract cadets to come work for them. There is no better person to fill a role than a VMI cadet. The diploma we receive at graduation has great value. I look forward to seeing the success of my brother rats 20 years from now," he stated. ✪



Blake Smith '23



Regimental Commander Blake Smith '23 leads the Corps of Cadets in a parade.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

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On the cover: The finishing touches for pool activities are on display in the new Aquatic Center during the ribbon cutting event on Jan. 27.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

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2022 Sports Hall of Fame Inductees Celebrated

By Marianne Hause and VMI Athletics Staff

VMI inducted its 2022 Sports Hall of Fame class at a banquet on Jan. 21, 2023 in Marshall Hall.

With the coronavirus pandemic interrupting the standard three-year cycle of inductions, the 2022 Hall of Fame class consisted of 10: seven members plus a veteran honoree and two special citation honorees as voted on by the committee. The seven cadet-athlete honorees were: Alexander Alston III '92 (men's soccer), Donnie Cowart '09 (men's cross country/track & field), Audrey Falconi '10 (women's soccer), Chavis Holmes '09 (basketball), Travis Holmes '09 (basketball), Tim Maypray '10 (football), and Reggie Williams '08 (basketball). Additionally, Kelly Lombard '79 (basketball) was inducted in the veteran category, while Mike Bozeman, the former VMI director of track & field and cross country, and athletics statistician George Tolley were inducted under the special citation category. The 10 were also recognized earlier in the day during halftime at the home basketball game against the Citadel Bulldogs in Cameron Hall.

Alexander Alston III '92

An anchor for the Keydet defense, Alston became the second player in soccer program history to earn All-Southern Conference honors three times, earning All-SoCon Tournament recognition in 1989. Earning four SoCon Player of the Week awards during his career, Alston made 66 starts and helped lift VMI to a 9-7-1 record in 1990, the first winning record in program history.

Donnie Cowart '09

An All-American in 2010, Cowart finished 12th at the NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships in the 3,000-meter steeplechase. Holding the VMI record for indoor mile (4:04.35), Cowart was also part of VMI's top relay teams in history, running on the 4x1500m (2005–16:41.64) and 4x1600 (2006–17:44.63) teams, qualifying for the 2008 Intercollegiate Association of Amateur Athletes of America Conference (IC4A) Championships, finishing 8th that year in the Big South Indoor Championships. In addition to his track accolades, Cowart earned All-Big South honors in cross country in both 2005 and 2007. After leaving Lexington, Cowart raced

semi-professionally, meeting the Olympic B standard and was just 0.3 seconds off the Olympic A standard in the 3,000 steeplechase.

Audrey Falconi '10

Perhaps the most decorated women's soccer player in VMI history, Falconi was the first female recipient of VMI's Three-Legged Stool Award, was elected to the 2000–10 Big South Conference All-Decade Team, earned Big South First Team honors twice (2008 and 2009) and Second Team honors in 2007. Holding down the back line at sweeper, Falconi played every minute of the 2009 season, being named Big South Scholar-Athlete of the Year honors as well as the Big South Graduate Fellowship. Falconi helped VMI complete the biggest turnaround in Big South history in 2008, as the Keydets went 5-3-1 in the regular season. Ranking fifth all-time in games started at VMI (73), Falconi was named the 2006 Big South Freshman of the Year after totaling 15 points, five goals, and five assists in her rat season.

Chavis Holmes '09

Combining with his brother and fellow inductee Travis, the pair is the most prolific twin-brother basketball scoring duo in NCAA history, passing VMI's own Ramon and Damon Williams. Chavis is one of just six Keydets to score 2,000-plus points, finishing with 2,065 as he averaged 17.4 points per game for his career. A sharpshooter, Chavis ranks third all-time at VMI in made three-pointers (306) and fifth in three-point field goal percentage (38.5), with 54 games of 20 or more points scored. Chavis was also a threat on the defensive end, totaling 304 steals (second all-time in Big South history) while collecting a 105 in 2008–09 after recording 90 in 2006–07. Helping his teams reach the 2007 and 2009 Big South Championship games, Chavis shined bright as a senior, including playing a key role as VMI topped Kentucky 111-103 followed by a career-high 31-point effort against Virginia.

Travis Holmes '09

VMI's all-time leader in steals (309) and steals per game (2.7), Travis scored 1,733 points during his collegiate career on the hardwood—ranking ninth all-time at VMI. A lockdown defender, Travis was voted the 2006–07 Big South Defensive Player of the Year after a school-record 111 steals. Travis was a prime facilitator of the offense, dishing out 360 assists (9th) in his career as he helped VMI to two Big South Championship game appearances (2007 and 2009). Earning Big South All-Freshman honors in 2005–06, Travis was named to the Big South All-Tournament Team in 2006–07 and the All-Big South Second Team in 2008–09. Pairing up with his brother Chavis as the NCAA's all-time twin scoring duo, Travis totaled a career-high 37 points against UNC Asheville as a senior, scoring 30 in a Big South Tournament opening round win later that season. After collecting another program-record 117 steals as a senior, Travis is currently the lone player in Big South history to score 1,000 points, 500 rebounds (590), 300 Assists and 300 steals.



Jim Miller, director of intercollegiate athletics, congratulates a few of the 2022 Sports Hall of Fame recipients.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Continued on next page

Tim Maypray '10 (Posthumously)

A factor from the start, Maypray was named the Big South Freshman of the Year in 2006 after averaging 6.8 yards per carry and totaling 244 yards receiving with two touchdowns for the Keydet football program. Maypray was a threat all over the field, being used as a receiver, running back, kick returner and even quarterback en route to 228 career points scored (third all-time at VMI). Maypray would earn First Team Big South honors as a kick returner and Second Team honors as a wide receiver in his sophomore campaign, earning Second Team honors at quarterback in his junior season when he became the first quarterback in the Big South to rush for over 1,000 yards. In his senior season, Maypray earned the 2010 VMI Intercollegiate Athletics Award presented to the most outstanding cadet-athlete after combining for eight touchdowns and 1,861 yards for the Keydets. A member of the Big South All-Decade Team (2000–10), Maypray set the league record for all-purpose yards (6,129) and ranks second all-time at VMI in touchdowns with 38.

Reggie Williams '08

One of just three basketball players to have his jersey retired, Williams led the nation in scoring twice, including his senior year when he averaged 27.8 points, 9.7 rebounds and 3.9 assists per game in 2007–08 to finish his Keydet career as the program's all-time leading scorer (2,556). Williams, who averaged an NCAA-best 28.1 points as a junior, is one of just nine players in history to lead the country in scoring multiple times, etching his name into the history books alongside names like "Pistol" Pete Maravich and Oscar Robertson. A four-year starter, Williams was named to the All-Freshman team as a rat, earning All-Big South honors in 2007 and 2008 while closing his career as the Big South's all-time leading scorer. After his time on post, Williams embarked on a seven-year NBA career (Golden State, Charlotte, San Antonio, Oklahoma City, and New Orleans). As a rookie in Golden State in 2009–10, Williams scored 20-plus points nine times and averaged 15.2 points, 4.6 rebounds and 2.8 assists per game.

Kelly Lombard '79 (Veteran Category)

A valuable piece to two SoCon Championship basketball teams (1976 and 1977), Lombard was a three-year starter for the Keydets,



Bianca Maypray, widow of Tim Maypray '10, along with his mother, Rose Jones, accept his induction recognition from Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 and Jim Miller, director of intercollegiate athletics.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

dishing out 383 assists (sixth all-time) while often guarding the opposition's top perimeter player. During his tenure, Lombard played with seven teammates who scored 1,000 points and was the program's leader in career assists at the time of graduation. In his rat year, Lombard backed up Hall of Famer Curt Reppart '76 at point guard, playing a crucial role for the 1976 team that upset the University of Richmond in the Southern Conference Tournament, earning an NCAA bid and ultimately reaching the Elite Eight. After earning the starting spot in 1976–77, Lombard helped a VMI team that would reach the Sweet Sixteen while recording a program-record 26 wins. Lettering for four years on the VMI baseball team, the ever-hustling Lombard earned First Team All-SoCon honors as a sophomore and would lead the 1977 team in batting with a .344 average.

Mike Bozeman (Special Citation Category)

Bozeman served for 23 years as VMI Director of Track & Field and Cross Country and enhanced the rich tradition of the program during his tenure from 1985 through 2008. Under Bozeman's tutelage, the Keydets captured 12 conference crowns and he earned

Conference Coach or Co-Coach-of-the-Year honors 13 times. Bozeman also helped build a viable women's athletic program at the Institute and started the women's cross country team in 1997, adding women's indoor and outdoor programs over the next two years. Bozeman was also instrumental in getting VMI membership into the prestigious IC4A. A 1967 graduate of the Citadel, Bozeman rose to the rank of brigadier general in the U.S. Army Reserves and during his military



The 2022 Sports Hall of Fame class is recognized during halftime at the home basketball game against the Citadel Bulldogs in Cameron Hall on Jan. 21.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

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POST BRIEFS

Cadets Attend Physics Congress

During the fall semester, Karsten Wahl '23, James Hebert '24, Mitchell Meyer '24, and Timothy Daigneau '25, all physics majors, along with Col. Daniela Topasna and Col. Gregory Topasna, professors in the physics department, participated in the 2022 Sigma Pi Sigma Physics Congress—100 Years of Momentum in Washington, D.C. The cadets, also members of the Society of Physics Students, presented at the poster session their work on thin films, astronomy, nanotechnology, and superconductors. They

attended career workshops, social events, and talks given by physics Nobel Prize recipients and scientists from various physics fields. Lab tours at the National Institute of Standards and Technology, NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, and the University of Maryland Department of Physics were highlights of the experience. The event, which occurs every three years, is supported by the American Institute of Physics and hosted by Sigma Pi Sigma, the physics honor society.

Retired Professor Featured on Spy Podcast

Col. Rose Mary Sheldon, who retired in 2019 after teaching at VMI for more than 25 years, has recorded an Apple podcast entitled "Espionage in the Ancient World" for the program Spycraft 101 with Justin Black. Her episode began airing at the end of January and will be archived on most

popular podcast platforms. The podcast features authors, historians, and former members of the military sharing how espionage and secret operations have shaped history.

Cadets Visit Power Plant

A group of 2nd Class cadets majoring in mechanical engineering recently visited Dominion Energy's Bear Garden Generating Station in New Canton, Virginia, to enhance their studies in thermodynamics, energy generation and use. The station uses both gas turbine and steam turbine power cycles, giving the cadets the opportunity to see power generating equipment first-hand and gain insight on how power plants operate.

Paul Damerell, adjunct professor and Wachtmeister Chair in Science and Engineering, and Dr. Shrabanti Roy, assistant professor of mechanical engineering, accompanied the group. "An advantage of visiting a combined cycle plant like Bear Garden is that you can walk right up to the equipment and ask questions to the plant manager about how it operates," said Damerell.

Institute Brass Travels to Europe

VMI's brass ensemble, the Institute Brass, traveled to the Czech Republic and Germany over winter furlough. The small group of cadets, led by Col. John Brodie, had a whirlwind tour consisting of performances in and around Prague, Czech Republic and in Ansbach, Germany.

VMI alumnus Lt. Joshua Chapman '19, who is stationed at Katterbach Kaserne, a U. S. Army base in Ansbach, Germany, arranged for the group to perform at the base as a fundraiser for the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade.

In the Czech Republic, they performed at the University Defense, the only military institution of higher education of the Czech Armed Forces, in Brno. After that concert, the cadets were able to meet and share experiences with their Czech counterparts.

As guests of U.S. Embassy Military attaché Col. James "Hack" Harbarger, they sat in on a rehearsal of the Czech Army Central Band at their headquarters located at the Ministry of Defense in Prague. ✪

Hall of Fame *continued from page 5*



Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 congratulates George Tolley, athletics statistician.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

career earned various awards and decorations including the Silver Star, Bronze Star, Legion of Merit, Air Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Combat Infantryman's Badge and the Ranger Tab. Bozeman's diverse skills and expertise were called upon by the Institute in many ways. He was Commandant to the Corps of Cadets from June 1994 to July 1996 and was VMI's interim athletic director in 1998.

George Tolley (Special Citation Category)

A fixture at VMI athletics home events, Tolley served as chief statistician for VMI football and basketball for 46 years, starting in the hand-written era all the way until 2018 when the games were tracked electronically. Tolley was present for nearly 800 home athletic events and was noted for his pinpoint thoroughness and accuracy. He also served as head statistician for Southern Conference basketball tournaments from the mid-70's until 1989. ✪

Rat Unity Event Helps Local Schools

By Maj. Michelle Ellwood

Early on the last Saturday morning of January, the Rat Mass loaded up more than 730 school supplies and carried them across town. The class had been collecting school supply items since December, including over winter fur-lough, to prepare for their annual Rat Unity event, which would help a few schools in the community.

After a chilly ruck on the Woods Creek Trail to Harrington Waddell Elementary School, the rats were greeted by Rebecca Walters, superintendent of Lexington City Schools; Kim Troise, principal at Waddell; Brittney Campbell, Waddell school nurse; Tim Diette, chairman of the school board; and David Sigler, member of Lexington City Council. Troise took a few moments to address the Rat Mass in the school's gym, expressing how appreciative they are for their efforts of collecting the items and walking them over that morning. "Thank you for all you've done to help our students who sometimes struggle with school supplies. This is such a great way to help those families," she said.



The members of the Rat Mass leave barracks early in the morning, each carrying school supplies that would be delivered to local elementary schools.—VMI Photo by Andrew Partridge '24.



Members of the Rat Mass drop off school supplies in the lobby of Waddell Elementary School on the morning of Jan. 28.—VMI Photo by Andrew Partridge '24.

A few members of the Rat Mass then transported the other half of the collected items to Central Elementary School where Robin Parker, principal, met the group. She beamed as they carried the items into her office, acknowledging that many of the items would be saved until the new academic year, but that some would be used very soon. "Throughout the year, especially in the spring, kids run out of things, so we'll use these items to replenish what is needed. We are glad to have extras for when the kids don't have what they need," she said.

Heaton Lawrence '26 assisted with logistics leading up to the event. "In the end, we all organized it, got the word out to our brother rats, and executed it very effectively. It gave me a different type of joy and pride leading an event that donated over 700 items of school supplies to help kids in need," Lawrence said.

Carlie Shaffer '23 oversaw much of the project and was very proud of what the class had accomplished. "Seeing the boxes overflowing with school supplies gave us such an immense sense of pride at what they've done for the community as they came together as a Rat Mass. The way the community supports us at VMI, I think it's special when we can give back to support the community," said Shaffer. ✨



Nickole Chavez '26 carries school supplies into Central Elementary School.—VMI Photo by Andrew Partridge '24.



School supplies collected and delivered by the Rat Mass fill bins in the lobby of Harrington Waddell Elementary School.—VMI Photo by Andrew Partridge '24.

Aquatic Center Ready for Swimmers

By Marianne Hause

The ribbon cutting and dedication of the Corps Physical Training Facility Phase III, the Aquatic Center took place Jan. 27. Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent, celebrated the event with local dignitaries and special guests including Frank Friedman, mayor of Lexington; Lt. Gen. John W. Knapp '54, former VMI superintendent; Thomas H. Zarges '70, Alumni Agencies Board of Directors chairman; Thomas "Tom" Watjen '76, Board of Visitors president; the VMI Board of Visitors; alumni; cadets; and many of those who had a hand in the project.

Lt. Col. Daren Payne '90, deputy director for engineering and construction, welcomed everyone, and invited Wins to the lectern who noted that it was almost 100 years ago to the day that VMI opened its first indoor swimming pool in Memorial Hall. "As opportunities expanded and demand increased, VMI leadership saw fit to build a new pool in 1969, the same one we have used through today," said Wins.

Wins went on to describe the many positive circumstances that occurred during the 21st century that created a demand for a new aquatic facility, such as the growth and size of Corps of Cadets, the inclusion of women, growth in athletic offerings, additional course offerings for water training, and expanded training for ROTC programs. "With the opening of this venue, we continue to meet the demands of the top rated education VMI provides for all of its cadets both academically and athletically," he said.



The view from Main Street now shows the completed Aquatic Center.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



The Aquatic Center pool can be split into three sections, allowing for various activities to be happening at once.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 addresses cadets and guests during the ribbon cutting ceremony on Jan. 27.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Wins expressed gratitude to all those who took part of the construction of the facility, given the constraints of the site, and the overall pace. He thanked the commonwealth of Virginia for the majority of the funding, as well as their continual acknowledgment of the value of a VMI education, and the impact VMI has on the local economy. He extended his sincere thanks to the long standing philanthropic support of many members of the alumni.

Wins, Zarges, and Watjen held the scissors together and cut the ribbon, officially opening the facility, after which the crowd was invited to tour.

Construction on the \$44 million facility began December 2020, and it contains an indoor 50-meter swimming pool which holds 800,000 gallons of water. It has two 1-meter springboards, two 3-meter springboards, and a 5-meter dive platform, plus seating for 570 spectators. The pool is large enough to be divided into three sections, making diving, water polo, and competitive swimming possible simultane-

ously. NCAA teams will be able to use it for practice and competition, and ROTC and the Department of Human Performance and Wellness will use it for training, as VMI requires all students to take one semester of swimming. Cadet clubs, like the scuba club, will also find it valuable. High water entry exercises,

Continued on next page



Thomas H. Zarges '70, Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, and Tom Watjen '76 cut the ribbon in the lobby of the Aquatic Center on Jan. 27.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



The new Aquatic Center sits on Main Street in Lexington.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

which had been done in the Maury River, can now be conducted indoors. The pool is a “smart pool” in that the chemical balance and temperature are all regulated by a computer. Various sensors are located throughout the system in the inner workings of the pool, and as water flows past the sensors, messages are transmitted to the computer. If the pH or temperature needs correcting, it is done by the computer.

Katie Lloyd '23, captain of the water polo team is thrilled to see the opening of the new facility before she graduates. “I can’t wait to get into the water with all my teammates. To be able to play in such a beautiful pool will do so much to enhance our competitive spirit and team morale. It will be a wonderful attraction in recruiting new polo team

members from around the country. But more than that, this pool is for the entire Corps of Cadets. It will benefit everyone since every cadet is trained in water,” she said.

Approximately three-quarters of the total cost of the facility was included in the biennial budget, and that funding remained in the budget as it passed through both houses of the General Assembly. The remainder of the overall cost of the project came from private donations. The completion of the Aquatic Center brings an end to the phased approach for athletic facility renovations and additions that began in 2014, which included renovations to Cormack and Cocke Halls and the building of the Corps Physical Training Facility, which opened in the fall of

2016. Each building provides significant and enhanced indoor fitness training elements for cadets, as well as home to the Institute’s NCAA track and wrestling teams. The buildings also offer a venue for ROTC and individual cadet physical training in inclement weather. Altogether, the three phases of the Corps Physical Training Facility cost \$164 million.

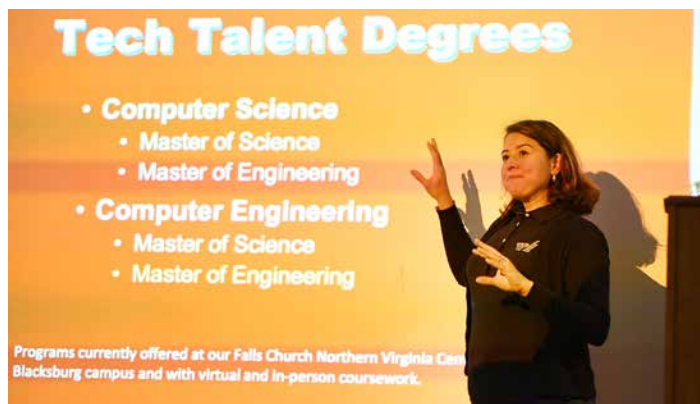
The Knights of Pythias building, also known as the American Legion building, a structure with historic ties to Lexington’s African-American community, has been renovated and is connected to the Aquatic Center via a glass walkway. The main level is used as coaches’ offices and a conference room, the upper level is used for classrooms. ❁

Accelerated Graduate Program Introduced

By Marianne Hause

VMI and Virginia Tech have partnered to launch a new accelerated master’s degree program for a Master of Science (MS) and Master of Engineering (Meng) in computer science and applications/computer engineering for VMI cadets. The program is open to all majors, as long as essential courses have been completed. Cadets may begin the courses as of the 2023 spring semester.

According to Lt. Col. Youna Jung, associate professor in the Department of Computer



Dannette Gomez Beane, assistant vice provost for enrollment management for strategic initiatives at Virginia Tech, discusses the accelerated master’s degree program in Nichols Engineering Building on Dec. 8.—VMI Photo by Andrew Partridge '24.

and Information Sciences at VMI, “The benefit of the accelerated program is to reduce time to completion of a graduate degree. Cadets can take up to 12 graduate credits deemed eligible for a VT graduate degree. The 12 credits will allow cadets to complete their master’s program in one year,” she said.

Brig. Gen. Bob Moreschi, deputy superintendent and dean of faculty at VMI, said of the new program, “VMI is excited to

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Bakich Receives Outstanding Faculty Award

By Maj. Michelle Ellwood

Col. Spencer Bakich, professor of international studies and the director of VMI's National Security Program, has been named a recipient of the 2023 Outstanding Faculty Awards announced by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) on Dec. 20. The Office of the Dean of the Faculty nominates professors each year, highlighting accomplishments, recognition, teaching style, research, service to the Institute and community, as well as providing letters of support from colleagues and cadets.

Bakich came to VMI in 2016 after teaching at the University of Richmond, University of Virginia, and Sweet Briar College. He is known for extensive efforts in facilitating independent cadet research and has advised or directly supervised more than 70 cadet thesis projects since 2016. Cadets providing letters of support in his nomination emphasized his dedication to their individual interests and development, and making sure cadets felt comfortable participating in discussions with diverse perspectives.

He was the adviser to the Class of 2021, a cadetship heavily impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. He serves on numerous Institute-wide committees, including the Cadet Educational and Professional Opportunities Committee and the Institute Honors Committee. He is the author of "Success and Failure in Limited War: Information and Strategy in the Korean, Vietnam, Persian Gulf, and Iraq Wars," and



Col. Spencer Bakich

his second book, "George H. W. Bush and the Persian Gulf War: Diplomacy, War, and Grand Strategy in the New World Order," is under contract.

"He is an outstanding instructor, dedicated to his students, with a passion for his discipline that is contagious," said Brig. Gen. Bob Moreschi, deputy superintendent and dean of the faculty, in his letter of support for Bakich. "The combination of his passion for making academic scholarship come alive to undergraduate students and his

team-oriented spirit made him a key driving force on VMI's successful grant proposal and ongoing participation in the U.S. Department of Defense's Cyber Leadership Development Program. Any sincere observer of Bakich can only wonder how one person can accomplish so much important work on an ongoing basis while limited to the same time constraints each of us face," Moreschi continued.

"I could not ask for more supportive and inspiring colleagues. Receiving this award is a tremendous honor," said Bakich. "Across post, VMI offers cadets amazing opportunities, most notably the myriad opportunities to conduct independent research under the supervision of dedicated and talented professors. Since joining VMI, I have been able to work with scores of national security minor and Institute Honors cadets on exciting and challenging projects. I look forward to continuing this work in the years to come."

Bakich is one of 12 recipients for 2023, in good company with faculty members from other schools across the commonwealth. This year, there were 74 nominations. These awards have been given out since 1987, with recipients being narrowed down and selected by a committee of leaders from the public and private sectors. Each recipient will be recognized and receive a \$7,500 gift from the Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation at a ceremony held in March in Richmond, Virginia. ❄️

A Christmas Miracle: Cadet Assists in Avalanche Rescue

By Marianne Hause

When Erik Gottmann '25 boarded a flight to Austria for a ski trip with his family over winter furlough, he had no way of knowing he and his brothers would be an essential part of a Christmas miracle.

The family, who reside in Malta, New York, arrived for their first day of skiing in the village of Zürs in the Austrian Alps on Christmas Day. Erik, along with his two brothers, Troy, a 17-year-old high school senior and Hans, a 15-year-old high school



Erik Gottmann '25

sophomore, have been skiing since they were toddlers, and are considered to be experts. "We have been to that same ski slope twice before and know it fairly well. My brothers, a family friend, and I spent most of the day skiing the trails, which are quite long and challenging, since the mountain is massive. My father was skiing in a less ambitious area, and my mom was in the lodge," explained Erik.

Continued on next page

The four stopped to rest, enjoy the view, and take some pictures when Hans first saw the avalanche and pointed it out to the others. "I thought he was joking at first, then I saw it too, and quickly got my phone out of my pocket and began to video. Even from the distance where we were standing, we could see the snow covering up people. As soon as the avalanche stopped, we decided to ski over to help the people trapped.

"The first person we found was a German man who was buried in the snow up to his neck. We dropped down on our hands and knees, and used our hands to dig him out of the snow. He was speaking German, and I know a little of the language, so I was able to understand that he injured his shoulder, but I didn't understand much more than that. Once we uncovered him, we scrambled up the hill to try to find others.

"The ski patrol soon arrived and asked to see our videos to determine how many people had been covered by the snow. They ascertained there were ten. Additional ski slope employees including lift operators, instructors, and maintenance crew, joined the rescue effort. Small shovels were distributed, so we no longer had to dig with our hands. They told us to look for skis and ski poles sticking up out of the snow, and to dig wherever we found them, since people were most likely nearby.

"Shortly after that, rescue helicopters arrived. There were so many coming and going, I lost count, but there were at least ten. They were lowering paramedics and rescue equipment. They prepared to airlift the first victim we uncovered and instructed my brothers



Skiers, including Erik Gottmann '25, scramble to rescue the avalanche victims in Zürs, Austria.—Photo courtesy of Erik Gottmann '25.



Steven, Kristan, Hans, Erik, and Troy Gottmann pose on the ski slope in Zürs, Austria.—Photo courtesy of Erik Gottmann '25.

and myself to wrap the man with a metallic survival blanket to keep him warm. As we were doing that, he told us that he couldn't feel his legs. At that point, the paramedics took over his care, and we went back to digging for others," said Erik.

The four young men continued to dig for an additional 45 minutes. By then, enough police and other professionals arrived to complete the search effort. Long poles were used to probe the snow, but fortunately no bodies were found. The entire rescue lasted less than three hours. "Clearly these people have been trained for avalanches and know exactly what to do," said Erik.

He and his brothers were able to talk with several of the survivors after they were rescued. Miraculously, the majority had only minor injuries. The most seriously injured was the German man, who was flown to the hospital.

"Ironically on that very morning, the ski resort had used dynamite to try to loosen the snow in that particular section, since the temperature had risen slightly. But the snow didn't slide at all, so they thought it was safe," noted Erik.

Confirmation that all the victims had been successfully rescued came in the form of church bells in the town of Stuben, where the Gottmanns were staying, just south of ski resort in Zürs.

"The ritual of ringing the church bells three times signals to everyone in the village that all were safely found. But to hear them on Christmas evening was extra special. They chimed for our Christmas miracle," Erik mused.

Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent, was amazed, but not surprised when he heard of the report. "VMI is no ordinary college experience. Each and every day at VMI, our cadets choose selfless service, courage, and honor in stark contrast to other school experiences. So it comes as no surprise that Cadet Gottmann chose to put the needs of others over his own. His actions in Austria perfectly exemplify the values of a Virginia Military Institute cadet," stated Wins.

Erik majors in civil engineering. He plays mid-field on the Keydet lacrosse team and plans to commission into the Army upon graduation. ❦

Rocco Takes Helm as New Football Coach

By Marianne Hause and VMI Athletics Staff

Danny Rocco has recently been hired as the 33rd head football coach for the Keydets, bringing extensive and decorated coaching experience. This change comes shortly after Scott Wachenheim stepped down from the position after eight seasons. He announced his resignation on Sunday, Nov. 20, a day after the loss to the Citadel in a tight game.

Originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Rocco attended Penn State University in State College, Pennsylvania, where he played football as a linebacker for two years before transferring to Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where he started for two seasons as outside linebacker and was named captain of the 1983 Demon Deacons team. He graduated from Wake Forest in 1984 with a bachelor's degree in speech communication and rhetoric. He also earned a master's degree at Wake Forest in education and counseling in 1987.

His first coaching assignment was as a graduate assistant, then defensive line coach at Wake Forest. He left Wake Forest for the University of Colorado at Boulder where he coached linebackers for a season. He then spent three seasons at the University of Tulsa in Tulsa, Oklahoma, then to Boston College in Newton, Massachusetts for three years as defensive line coach. He worked for the Texas Longhorns and University of Maryland football programs, was special teams coach for the New York Jets, then coached linebackers at the University of Virginia before getting his first head coach position in 2006 at Liberty University, where he led the Flames to a 6-5 record and was honored by the Big South Conference as their Coach of the Year. In 2007 he led the Flames to an 8-3 record and Liberty's first Big South Conference championship, as well as his second consecutive Coach of the Year honors.

In 2012, he went to the University of Richmond, where he coached the Spiders

for five seasons, then to the University of Delaware in Newark, Delaware, where he coached the Fightin' Blue Hens for five seasons. Before coming to VMI, he was an analyst for Penn State.

Rocco is a six-time National Coach of the Year finalist, and has won seven conference championships. He has made five FCS playoff appearances, four Big South Conference Championships, three Colonial Athletic Association Championships, 10 top-25 finishes, and 12 seasons with seven or more wins while coaching 42 All-Americans.



Coach Danny Rocco and his wife, Julie, were introduced during halftime at the home basketball game against Navy in Cameron Hall on Dec. 3.—VMI Photo by Andrew Partridge '24.

“Coach Rocco has had a great deal of success at every level leading his teams both on and off the field,” stated Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent. “He is clearly someone who believes in developing his players into leaders of character, in perfect alignment with VMI’s mission. I look forward to the future success that our cadet-athletes will enjoy from his leadership.”

Rocco believes coming to VMI is a great opportunity for himself and his family. “It’s an honor to be at VMI,” he said. “I’m very appreciative of General Wins and his support. This Institution has a great and proud history. They play in a really good conference. I’m familiar with the SoCon, having been an FCS head coach for 16 seasons. First and foremost, I want to get to meet

the cadet-athletes. I want to be able to get to know them and make a positive impact in their lives as we work together to win football games and adhere to our core values.”

Rashad Raymond '24, a running back for the Keydets is excited to begin working with Rocco. “Coach Rocco cares about developing us as players, and as young men. The team is excited to see what we can accomplish this year moving forward,” said Raymond.

Quarterback Collin Ironside '24 agrees. “Coach Rocco has proven to win wherever he has been, and I am excited to get the opportunity to work

with him to turn things around after last season. We have not had a ton of interaction with him yet, but I like what he is about, and I believe he is going to do a fantastic job leading our program,” he said.

Rocco quickly added three new staff members to the Keydet football program: Bryan Stinespring, as the associate head football coach and

offensive assistant; Rich Yahner, who will take over the play calling duties as defensive coordinator and linebackers’ coach; and Pat Brown who will work in the secondary.

Stinespring is a native of Clifton Forge, Virginia and a graduate of James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and has over 30 years of coaching experience, including two years as part of Rocco’s staff at Delaware, and over 26 years in a variety of roles at Virginia Tech. After his tenure at Virginia Tech, he returned to his alma mater JMU, helping the Dukes reach back-to-back FCS National Title games in 2016 and 2017. Most recently, he served as activities director for Alleghany County

See Rocco, page 15



December Festivities

Holiday decorations on post were abundant in December, with celebrations culminating on Spirit Night—Dec. 13. Cadets enjoyed a special dinner served by Parkhurst Dining in Crozet Hall, carol singing by the Glee Club in barracks, and a candlelight service with the chaplain’s office in Memorial Hall. Faculty and staff were also treated to a holiday meal in Crozet Hall on Dec. 19.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin, Kelly Nye, and Andrew Partridge '24.



Graduate Program *continued from page 9*

partner with Virginia Tech to offer this opportunity for cadets to complete a graduate degree in as little as one year after graduation. Employers across the commonwealth highly value VMI graduates, and in this increasingly competitive marketplace for technical talent, this partnership affords cadets the opportunity to accelerate their career development.”

Cyril Clarke, executive vice president and provost at Virginia Tech agrees. “This program creates pathways for students looking to advance their careers in the sought-after fields of computer

science and computer engineering. We are proud to collaborate with VMI to further opportunities for our graduates and serve the technology capacity and expertise needs of our commonwealth,” he said.

Access to the program is limited to students currently enrolled at VMI. They must attain an overall minimum GPA of 3.3 for the Meng and 3.5 for the MS at the time of application. Once accepted into the program, they must maintain an overall GPA of 3.0 for the remainder of their undergraduate coursework. ❁

VMI Holds December Commissioning and Graduation

By Marianne Hause

The day was sunny and brisk on Dec. 21 as 22 cadets crossed the stage in Memorial Hall to receive their diplomas during the commencement ceremony.

Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent, welcomed all in attendance to the “much colder-than-May” and more intimate December graduation. He noted that VMI graduation dates have varied throughout history, originally coinciding with the July 4th Independence Day celebration, and during the 1940s, were held as early as

February. But he assured the graduates, “It doesn’t matter the season or your tenure at VMI. What matters is each of you finished the arduous, demanding journey you started.” Wins told the cadets that this was the last time he would be addressing them as cadets, saying “from this point forward, you are fellow alumni,” and encouraged them to leave the Institute with the lessons they have learned on post: honor, teamwork, discipline, and friendship. “Stay in touch and return as often as you can as you are forever welcome here on post.”

Wins introduced the commencement speaker, Gussie Lord '01, who was part of the first co-educational class to matriculate in 1997, and who graduated from VMI with a degree in English, with distinction, and is now a member of the VMI Board of Visitors.

Lord opened her remarks by reminiscing about the first time she and her parents saw VMI when arriving for the Summer Transition Program. They drove from their home in Michigan, which was a 16-hour drive spanned over two days. “When we came into Lexington, we came down Route 11, under the walking bridge that says Virginia Military Institute. We turned right onto Letcher Avenue, and as we were coming up the hill, on the left,



Graduating cadets march into Memorial Hall on Dec. 21.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

we saw these green lawns and red brick buildings with white columns. People were laying in the grass reading, and my mom said, ‘Oh, Gussie, this is beautiful!’ And I was getting kind of excited and I’m like, ‘yeah, this is nice,’ but it sort of dawns on me, wait



Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 congratulates Emily Wells '23.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

a minute, this doesn’t really look like any of the pictures I saw. And then we came up the hill and across the parade deck, there’s barracks. Looking like a castle, or a prison. And my dad said, ‘No,’ as he points over the steering wheel, ‘that’s where you’re going to school,’” she mused.

After the audience laughter subsided, she continued by sharing her excitement

and nervousness, as well as her parents’ apprehension with leaving her on post, and understanding that most parents feel the same way. She thanked the ones in attendance for placing their faith in VMI and for entrusting their children to a school that imposes physical and mental challenges. Addressing the cadets she said, “The truth is, VMI is very effective. Your experiences here will not easily be forgotten. The relationships you formed, the experiences you’ve shared, will endure. They will always be a part of your story. VMI, through the

adversative method of education, strives to produce men and women who are fit to lead. So, when you are called upon to lead, and when things get difficult, I urge you to reach back to the lessons and skills you learned in this place.”

She continued by stating that those commissioning into military service will step into leadership as a new officer, but those entering civilian life may step into a role with no authority at all. “You can be a leader regardless. You don’t have to have authority over others in order to lead. You can lead by example, and through service—by seeing what needs to be done and taking the initiative to do it. You can lead by showing up on time, giving your best effort, and taking pride in your work. You can lead by having integrity, by owning up to your mistakes,

and by treating others with kindness and compassion,” she said.

Lord warned the graduates not to define themselves by either their failures or their successes. “There is a danger in letting our failures become too big in our own minds. They can weigh us down, hold us

Continued on next page



Four graduating cadets take the oath of office as they commission into the U.S. Army.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

back, suppress our confidence, and create fear. But there also is a danger in defining ourselves by our successes. It is tempting to do that—to point to accomplishments, or money, or awards, or recognition, as proof of a life well-lived. But often, success is born from luck, born from circumstances that were in place long before we had anything to do with them, and success almost always involves many people working together, not just one person,” she said. Instead, she urged them to learn from each experience, to discover what could have been done better, what relationships were formed, and what stories arose that can be told. “As VMI graduates, I believe, in many respects, you have an advantage over your peers. You have identified your capacity to persevere, and to be resilient. You understand what it means to lead, what it means to succeed and to fail while others are watching,” she said.

Lord concluded by advising the graduates to be open to change,

which is often painful and scary, but necessary for growth. “If the path seems uncertain, take comfort in knowing that every generation has faced unprecedented issues, every generation has brought change. There also are things for you to hold onto: your values, your integrity, your faith, your resilience, and your loved ones.

For generations, the principles VMI has endeavored to instill in her cadets—honor, discipline, service above self, have remained. Though we live in interesting times, I believe if you hold fast to those principles they will serve you well, as they have served those who have gone before. Congratulations. Rah Virginia Mil.”



Graduates, family, and friends attend the graduation ceremony in Memorial Hall on Dec. 21.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Lord is founder and managing attorney of the Tribal Partnerships Program at Earthjustice, a nonprofit public interest environmental law organization where she represents Indian tribes and Indigenous communities in their efforts to protect the environment and sacred sites. Prior to Earthjustice, Lord worked at the New Mexico Court of Appeals. She also spent several years in private practice representing tribes in environmental, administrative, and jurisdictional matters, and representing public housing authorities in efforts to expand affordable housing opportunities.

While at VMI, Lord earned monograms in cross country and track and field. She also participated in cheerleading, soccer, the Promaji Club, and served as opinion editor of *The Cadet* and co-editor of the *Sounding Brass*. She graduated from the University of Michigan Law School in 2006.

The evening before commencement, the Joint Commissioning Ceremony was held, also in Memorial Hall, in which four graduating cadets were commissioned to the Army as second lieutenants and one to the Navy as an ensign.

Offering remarks and administering the oath of office was Maj. Gen. Bowlman “Tripp” Bowles ’87, the J9 director at the Defense Logistics Agency Headquarters in Fort Belvoir, Virginia. His previous assignment was as commanding general of the 80th Training Command (The Army School System.) A native of Richmond, Virginia, Bowles received his Bachelor of Arts degree and commission from VMI in 1987. ❄️

Rocco *continued from page 12*

Public Schools and Alleghany Highlands Public Schools.

Yahner graduated from Penn State, and has coached at all levels of college football. He shares a professional history with Rocco, as he also has worked at Penn State, University of Virginia, and University of Delaware. Yahner’s impact on the Delaware defense was immediate upon his arrival, as

he helped the Fightin’ Blue Hens reach the FCS semifinals in the 2020–21 spring season.

Brown is from Atlanta, Georgia, and played tight end for Greensboro College in Greensboro, North Carolina, where he was a U.S.A. South Academic Team honoree, and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in exercise and sport studies in 2012. He comes to VMI after serving as the defensive

coordinator and cornerbacks coach for Widener College in Chester, Pennsylvania. In 2020, he was selected for the Bill Walsh Diversity Coaching for the Chicago Bears.

Rocco and his wife, Julie, are the proud parents of David and Amy. David currently serves as an offensive analyst at Penn State, and Amy is a second year law student at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. ❄️



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Call to Duty Scholarships Being Awarded

By Marianne Hause

VMI has begun taking applications for the new Call to Duty scholarships that will be awarded to 100 new matriculants this fall who are recipients of the three and four-year ROTC national scholarships. ROTC national scholarships are awarded independently by the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Call to Duty scholarships will cover the cost of housing and food (room and board) at the Institute for cadet recipients.

“VMI is recognizing and rewarding young people who answers the call of serving our country,” said Lt. Col. Joe Hagy, director of admissions. “It’s all about putting service before self, which we see so much of here at VMI.”

The scholarship is an annual award, and, to keep the scholarship each semester, cadets must continue to demonstrate eligibility for their ROTC scholarship.

ROTC will work closely with the Office of Financial Aid to determine continued semester eligibility prior to the beginning of each semester. Lt. Col. Shannon Eskam,

director of financial aid, said, “These scholarships will allow incoming cadets to maximize any other scholarships they are receiving, and give families peace of mind as they make the great decision to join the VMI family.”

Students interested in applying for Call to Duty scholarships may begin the application process on the VMI website or by contacting the Office of Financial Aid at financialaid@vmi.edu or 540-464-7208. ✉



ROTC cadets, many now eligible for Call to Duty scholarships, participate in fall field training exercises.—VMI File Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.