The ROCK

FALL 2010

The magazine for alumni and friends of Slippery Rock University

SRU transforms regional economy
Dear Friends,

We did it (almost).

We started the year just short of a balanced budget, and that was no small feat. As I shared with you in an earlier column, last September we began a campuswide effort to address an estimated $8.9 million budget deficit while at the same time, making sure we continued to provide an exceptional learning experience for our students and to position the University to emerge from this economic crisis as a stronger, more strategically-focused institution.

After numerous open forums, divisional and departmental meetings, and sifting through more than 150 suggestions submitted by students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends, (some of them from The ROCK readers) we utilized a combination of cuts and revenue enhancement to trim $8.54 million from the budget.

As you can imagine, this wasn’t without some pain. In the process we were forced to eliminate 25 positions, 17 graduate assistantships and freeze four positions. We’ve significantly cut operating expenses including travel, supplies and printing. In doing so, we protected the academic core of the University to ensure we deliver on our promise to provide a Rock Solid education.

We were helped in our budget efforts by another year of record enrollment. The University is now 8,860 strong, and our academic quality continues to improve significantly. With this budget effort, we protected the academic core of the University to ensure we deliver on our promise to provide a Rock Solid education.

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Slippery Rock University is a member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.
SRU earns national ‘best of’ honors

Alumni, friends, faculty, staff and students at Slippery Rock University certainly have a lot to boast about following the announcement of several national honors. The University was again named “A Best in the Northeast” college by The Princeton Review, “A Great College to Work For,” by The Chronicle of Higher Education, one of the 100 “Best Colleges in the North” by U.S. News & World Report and a “Military Friendly School” by GI Jobs Magazine. And to top things off, WorldWideLearn, a premier online directory of education, named SRU No. 2 on its national Top 20 Rural Colleges and Universities list.

This is the third consecutive year that The Princeton Review, a nationally known education services company, included SRU in its Best in the Northeast list. The ranking includes 218 institutions in the region and is based in large part on student evaluations. “Because this review is based on student input, we take it very seriously and are certainly proud that our students hold us in high regard. The fact they are aware of the efforts put forth by faculty and staff toward student success is truly encouraging. The fact that students see the campus as ‘beautiful’ and that they see us collectively as ‘very personable and take the time to listen to students,’ is gratifying and truly what SRU is all about,” said Robert Smith, University president.

The Princeton Review report also noted that SRU students lauded the University’s athletic facilities, residence halls, business school and notable programs such as music and physical therapy. The Chronicle of Higher Education Great Colleges To Work For review cited SRU’s culture of respect and caring and noted that many employees said they expected to work at SRU for a few years but stayed a lifetime. The U.S. News & World Report list is comprised of schools that provide a full range of undergraduate majors and master’s programs. Regional Universities are ranked against their peer group in one of the four geographic regions – north, south, midwest and west. Over the past 26 years, the U.S. News rankings have become widely accepted as a comprehensive research tool for students and parents considering higher education opportunities. Criteria for making the Military Friendly Schools List included efforts to recruit and retain military and veteran students, results in recruiting military and veteran students and academic accreditations. “All of these designations demonstrate the commitment of our faculty and staff to providing an exceptional learning environment and a comprehensive education that helps students succeed,” Smith said.

Student Health Center earns 3-year AAAHC accreditation

The Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care has reviewed operations at SRU’s McLachlan Student Health Center and granted it a three-year accreditation, the maximum permitted under AAAHC regulations. This is an important milestone in the continuing growth and success of our health care organization, said Kristina Chiparelli, director of the SRU facility. Accreditation shows our commitment to providing the highest levels of quality care to our students, and the same high level of conduct in our business practices. (From left) Kaitlin Houser, a special education major from Washington, has her blood rate checked by Cynthia Eisenhobre, a registered nurse at the McLachlan Student Health Center.

Dean Susan Hannam pursues agreement with Chinese schools

Susan Hannam, dean of the College of Health, Environment and Science, has laid the foundation for recruiting up to 15 Chinese undergraduates to SRU annually and launching a Chinese Educators Academy for teachers. Hannam recently traveled to China to visit four high schools. Two of them, Hanning and Zhejiang, are interested in signing a letter of understanding with SRU that would send some of their graduates to SRU for their college education, she said. The dean also discussed the creation of an SRU Educators Academy in which Chinese teachers would spend two weeks at SRU in the summer studying U.S. teaching methods.

19th century Japanese prints come to life

A significant collection of Japanese wood-block prints that SRU has kept in storage for many years will soon be displayed for all to see and learn from. Kurt Pitluga, assistant professor of art, is in the process of researching, documenting and photographing the 100 prints for a digital archive. “It is such a rich display and will be a great exhibit for educating our students and the public,” he said. Pitluga said most of the full-color prints are 19 by 20 inches. At least 30 are rare originals, including works by world-renowned Japanese printmakers Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) and Ando Hiroshige (1797-1858). “Some of the most famous artists in history, including Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin, embraced Japanese-style prints,” Pitluga said.

SRU partners with community colleges

Slippery Rock University has approved a historic partnership with five community colleges – Community College of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh, Penn Highlands Community College, Butler County Community College, Westmoreland County Community College and the Community College of Beaver County – that will make it easier for community college students to continue their studies at SRU. The pact enables students who earn an associate’s degree in early childhood development at any of the community colleges to transfer all of their credits to SRU toward an elementary education degree, said Lee Williams, SRU professor of elementary education.

Student completes Harmony House renovation

A $250,000 renovation of the Harmony House at the Robert N. Macoskey Center for Sustainability Education and Research has been completed. The center received a new entrance, pop-up roof, twice the classroom space, a green kitchen and a greathermal heat and cooling system. SRU, a leader in sustainability education since its founding, expanded the facility to increase energy efficiency and provide more educational opportunities for students and residents who want to implement sustainability at home, said Thomas Reynolds, center director. The biggest change is the new entrance and pop-up roof that added enough space and daylight for upstairs offices, Reynolds said. A covered porch entrance with a roof that slopes downward as a wind-breaking element was installed on the north side of the house, facing the barn. The porch beams were salvaged from a construction site in Ohio. The main floor was expanded to accommodate a class size of 30 people, he said.

Computer science launches diversity initiative

SRU infuses diversity into all aspects of campus life, even computer use. Paul Mullins, professor of computer science, recently obtained a $1,895 grant to launch a project titled “Creating an Environment Supportive of Diversity in Computing Courses.” The project supports multiculturalism and gender neutrality for courses across the computing curriculum. Students this fall began using texts written by women and minorities, creating a Web page about a woman or person of color, exchanging data with programmers in India and studying the example of the late Admiral Grace Hopper (1906-1992), a pioneer computer scientist. Hopper developed the first compiler for a computer programming language and conceived the idea of machine-independent programming languages. “The basic idea is to create an atmosphere that acknowledges diversity,” Mullins said.

SRU has received a $17,158 grant to implement a portion of the new statewide “Gate Opener Project.” The project is designed to improve teacher education for those already working in Keystone Star 1, 2, 3 or 4, the PA Pre-K Counts program or the federal Head Start Program. Diane Wolak, fiscal assistant in SRU’s Office of Cooperative Activities, secured the renewable grant, and Lee Williams, professor of elementary education and early childhood, will oversee its implementation. “We will use the fall semester to develop the online courses and begin offering our first course next spring semester,” Williams said. While the course will be online, the SRU program will include technology support to help those returning to education course work, she said.

Grant helps early childhood educators

A $300,000 grant from the Robert N. Macoskey Center for Sustainability Education and Research will help create an “Environmental Apprenticeship Program” for community college students. The program will focus on providing outreach and sustainable education to students interested in teaching career options that work with children to foster their understanding of sustainability. In addition to providing the training opportunity, students will receive college credit for their work in the community. SRU’s Office of Cooperative Activities, led by TeS Sluder, will work with the Pennsylvania Department of Education to find participating schools across the state, they will receive technical assistance as well. SRU students will also engage in the program in the fall, working with children at several local schools.

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Five green projects receive stamp of approval

Five Green Fund green projects totaling $29,289 received approval during the spring grant cycle.

The Green Fund is a student-initiated program that awards University funds to projects and programs that support the environment and provide environmental and sustainable education opportunities. The latest round of requests approved for funding are:

• $9,390 for an Electric Meter Project in the Physical Therapy Building, sought by Scott Albert, director of facilities and planning;
• $5,800 for a lighting control system at N. Kerr Thompson Stadium, sought by Albert; and
• $4,170 for an Electric Meter Project in Swayne Music Hall, sought by Albert; and
• $8,155 for purchase of a second recycling baler, sought by William Radloff, director of environmental health and safety; and
• $1,801 for a solar-powered inflation station at the Robert A. Masochek Center for Sustainable Systems Education and Research, sought by James Stritt, a graduate assistant in the masters in sustainable systems program.

Since its inception, the Green Fund has awarded more than $50,000 to campus projects.

Emergency notification system boosts security

Slippery Rock University now offers a level of security that can’t be found at any other public university in the state—the Metis Secure Solutions emergency notification system.

The system features two-way “Call for Help” boxes in all the academic buildings. In an emergency, a user pushes a button to automatically send a call for help to University Police. The user leaves a 10-second message for police, who can instantly isolate the location of the call on a computer and send an officer to an exact location.

The system uses three primary, independent data paths—FM-RBDS sub-carrier, wireless mesh network and wired Ethernet to communicate. When activated, the Metis Secure devices come alive with flashing multi-colored lights, siren, recorded human voice and text display, providing an information rich warning to the campus population.

Bickert writes three books

Teacher Grace Bickert, ’93, has authored three books—“Food to Grow and Learn On,” “Celebration Centers to Learn and Grow On” and “Including the Special Needs Child.” The first book is a collection of recipes, literature and activities for young learners that Bickert said she began as a graduate student at SRU.

The second book is full of ideas to use throughout the school year in learning centers. Her third book resulted from having a student with autism and keeping a log of activities she did with him. Bickert has been a teacher in the Shaler Area School District for 39 years. Her books are published by Incentive Publications and available at www.incentivpublications.com and Amazon.com.

University gifts exhibit to Heinz History Center

Visitors to the Senator John Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh will gain a much better understanding of the many contributions of religious women to health care in the region thanks to Slippery Rock University. The SRU Foundation recently gifted it “Sisters in Healthcare History Project” to the Heinz Center. The collection includes hundreds of artifacts, documents and photographs from 16 orders serving between 1847-1969.

“We gifted it (the display) to the history center because, as a Smithsonian-affiliated museum, it is the proper place to honor the sisters’ dedication for generations to come,” said John Bavaro, SRU associate professor of professional studies.
A new study assessing the University’s economic impact confirms what people at The Rock have intuitively known for years: As one of western Pennsylvania’s largest employers, Slippery Rock University is both an educational and economic asset that brings vitality and financial stability to the region. The independent report shows that SRU and its alumni contribute a whopping $334.4 million each year to the regional economy – the equivalent of 9,020 average-wage jobs.

The report, by Economic Modeling Specialists Inc., an Idaho-based provider of socioeconomic impact and strategic planning tools, shows that for every dollar of state and local tax money invested in the University, SRU returns $18.60 in benefits that accrue to all Pennsylvania residents.

“The University plays a significant role in the state economy and is a sound investment from multiple perspectives,” said Anneke Christopherson, who headed up the team from EMSI. “Students benefit from improved lifestyles and increased earnings. Taxpayers benefit from a larger economy and lower social costs. And, the state as a whole benefits from increased job and investment opportunities, higher business revenues, greater availability of public funds and an eased tax burden.”

“Slippery Rock University is so important not only to Butler County, but the entire region,” said U.S. Rep. Kathy Dahlkemper, Pa.- 3rd District. “The University is vital to this area. The school is respected by businesses for graduating students who are well educated in their respective fields -- and those students, in turn, make a positive impact working at local companies, becoming community leaders and choosing to raise their children here. That means the University is not only immediately helping the region’s economy but also will continue to have an important impact on future generations.”

The comprehensive report included data from the Regional Learning Alliance, an SRU initiative located in Cranberry Woods, thereby expanding the tax base. In the aggregate, higher student income and associated increases in labor and non-labor generate about $5.1 million in added tax revenue each year.

Transforming the region

“Enhancing community and regional engagement; expanding opportunities for workforce development; and fostering local and regional economic and community development are strategic goals of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education,” said Robert Smith, SRU president.

“This independent analysis confirms how vital the University is as an economic engine and a catalyst for transforming the region,” Smith said. “We are proud of Slippery Rock University’s academic reputation and the impact of our graduates on the region, state, nation and world. This report clearly shows our economic clout is tremendously important and directly enhances the quality of life for thousands of people -- our friends and neighbors.”

The report provides both an economic growth analysis and an investment analysis that compare costs of supporting the University from the perspectives of students, taxpayers and society as a whole. The findings reflect the University’s primary service area, which includes northern Allegheny County along with Butler, Beaver, Lawrence and Mercer counties.

“The analysis shows that keeping our graduates in the area pays great dividends,” Smith said. The increased productivity of SRU educated workers in the workforce annually contributes an estimated $220 million in added regional income.

“Our overall mission is to create educated citizens,” Smith said. “As part of that process, our work simultaneously and directly encourages new business development, assists existing business and creates long-term economic growth for the entire region. The University enhances worker skills and provides educated workers for local business and industry.”

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Liza Hovis frames right path

Liza Hovis, a 1997 exercise science graduate, worked as an exercise specialist and physical education teacher before she and husband Matt launched Matthew Hovis Photography. The couple recently relocated to Pennsylvania and opened a studio in Slippery Rock. Liza Hovis manages the day-to-day operations of the business and assists Matt during shoots. They enjoy the independence of working for themselves.

“Slippery Rock University gave me a great foundation for a continuing desire to learn,” Liza Hovis said. “I am using many skills I learned from my education. We chose Slippery Rock for the location of our business because the town and the University continuously show growth and a progressive attitude towards culture and business promotion.”

After graduating from SRU, she became an exercise specialist in physical therapy and then directed a small fitness center. After two years, she accepted a physical education teaching position in Virginia and took classes at the University of Virginia.

“I taught for four years in Virginia, then when I married Matt I taught for two years in Ohio where he was stationed as a photojournalist for the Medina Gazette,” she said. “When we had our first child, it was apparent that we needed a more regular workday for Matt and decided to start increasing his private work as a photographer.”

They marketed to local brides while he maintained his job with the newspaper. After about a year and a half they saw enough growth in his private work to “make the leap” to becoming small business owners. Matt stopped working for the paper, and they started Matthew Hovis Photography.

“I started managing the business and found that I had a knack for it and really enjoyed it,” she said. “I like being part of working for ourselves and helping Matt promote his amazing talent. This year we have realized the next step in owning our business and purchased the building in Slippery Rock. It will have a dual focus...one being Matt’s studio for his continued consumer and commercial photography work and secondly as a gallery showcasing his photography and art. The gallery will have a variety of art for sale.”

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— Liza Hovis

Her main role in the business is to focus on marketing and communicating with clients. She keeps records and organizes their schedule. “One of the challenges of owning a small business is that you are all departments...everything from sales and marketing, customer service, labor, shipping/receiving and quality control,” she said. “It can be overwhelming at times because you have to deal with all of it when more people work in a department of a business and only deal with what comes through their department. The upside is that you are able to be familiar with all aspects of your products and services and what it takes to make it work and how to improve things.”

Liza remains connected to her alma mater and was recently on campus helping Matt shoot and produce the University’s official commencement video.

“We give back to the community in many different ways,” she said. “When we work with public, up to 15 percent back for school needs and activities. We do pro bono work for churches and other non-profit organizations as well as lots of donations for auctions for non-profits.”

Rolling in the dough

You don’t need an MBA from Harvard to understand the Rob Coffaro principle for success. The 1997 Slippery Rock University graduate and owner of Coffaro’s Pizza in Slippery Rock said entrepreneurs should forget oven-baked schemes and stick to the Coffaro principle for success. The 1997 Slippery Rock University graduate and owner of Coffaro’s Pizza in Slippery Rock said entrepreneurs should forget oven-baked schemes and stick to the basics of giving customers what they want.

“There are two types of purchases people make,” Coffaro said. “They either go for the cheap, or they go with quality. To survive, you need to be the cheaper or you need to be the best.”

Coffaro paused, smiled and said: “We’re the best and our prices are good.”

Coffaro launched his Main Street pizza shop with the goal of offering great food at an affordable price. He employs 15 drivers, cooks and order-takers – all of them attend Slippery Rock University – and has done well enough financially to buy a nice home for his family, which includes his wife Kim Vardaro Coffaro, a ’97 SRU graduate, and three children.

After graduating from SRU, Rob Coffaro said he worked odd jobs in Moon Township but then heard about a guy who owned a pizza shop in Slippery Rock that wanted to get out of the business. Coffaro bought the shop and opened Coffaro’s Pizza Jan. 2, 1998.

Coffaro is currently rolling in the dough – working seven days a week – to dish up pizza to students and the community. But he is not too busy to support a youth football and baseball team, support community groups and give to the University’s athletic fund, which provides tuition assistance to student athletes.

“We have all kinds of directions,” said Coffaro, “but make sure to use some of the things that we had without somebody giving.”

The percent of SRU students who settle in the county (16.4%) is greater than the percent of students who come from Butler County (14.5%).

Coffaro launched his Main Street pizza shop with the goal of offering great food at an affordable price.

“We would not have been able to have some of the things that we had without somebody giving,” he said. “So I am willing to do my part.”

When the economic recession began, Coffaro said the downtown helped him at first because many people stopped eating at expensive restaurants.

“I’m representing the day to day relief. When you have a day off remains elusive. “I start around 9 a.m. and there are plenty of days when I am here from 11 a.m. until 2 or 3 in the morning,” he said. “There is the constant worry that something could go wrong. Still, I plan on being here indefinitely.”

Now the economy has kind of caught up to us. People have changed their ways on how they spend money. They’re making their own food and not eating out as much. They’re packing home lunches.

While he likes making his own decisions, owning your own business is not without challenges. “A day off remains elusive. “I start around 9 a.m. and there are plenty of days when I am here from 11 a.m. until 2 or 3 in the morning,” he said. “There is the constant worry that something could go wrong. Still, I plan on being here indefinitely.”

“Pizza is quick and easy, and you can feed a whole family for $20. We would not have been able to have some of the things that we had without somebody giving,” he said. “So I am willing to do my part.”

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Sonya Lenz sees big picture – service

Talk about a community leader. Sonya Lenz, a 1988 Slippery Rock University graduate, owns CSA Tours/Lenz Travel Services and Airport Orbit, Inc., in Slippery Rock, but her biggest contribution to Main Street stems from her extracurricular involvement.

Lenz serves on the Slippery Rock Area Women’s Club and sponsors its fundraisers. She raises money for three local organizations – the V.O.I.C.E. Women’s Shelter, the Feed My Sheep Cupboard and the Community Library. “I am one of the few people that actually lives and works in downtown Slippery Rock,” she said. “It is my pleasure to be a part of things and I really could not imagine living my life otherwise. I believe in giving back to my community and participating in its activities. Villagelife, Heritage Days, SRU homecoming, I’m in so there.

Lenz is also involved with the arts committee of the Slippery Rock Development Association, which has erected three murals in town. “My degree from SRU is a bachelor of fine arts so this committee is perfect for me,” she said.

Airport Orbit, which provides shuttle services in six western Pennsylvania counties and car services throughout the state, always sponsors groups as well as local athletic teams. “For me, the business and community go hand-in-hand,” Lenz said. “I grew up here. I sold Girl Scout cookies door-to-door to just about every house in town, and hand-delivered them with my little red wagon. My first date was at the Roxy Theater. I used to skate-board on that hill between Patterson Hall and the Field House on campus. I learned how to drive in the campus parking lot down by the pond. This is who I am.”

Lenz also owns The Cultural Studies Academy. Her father Henry Lenz, SRU professor emeritus and mother Linda, an SRU graduate, incorporated the academy in the 1960s to facilitate historical and cultural international tours. “We provide opportunities for students of all ages to live and travel in Europe while studying language, art, music, historical culture and participating in outdoor sports activities,” she said.

Lenz said her parents, SRU education and previous jobs helped prepare her for running her businesses. “The art department has a faculty of working artists who are teachers,” she said. “They taught me about art, how to make art and how to sell it.

While there are challenges to running your own business, “if you enjoy what you do, know how to do it, and have loyal people by your side, anything is possible,” Lenz said. “What I enjoy most about being my own boss is that I can have an idea and see it through.”

Transforming Butler County

SRU has a sizeable impact on its home community, Butler County. The report found the annual added income due to the activities of SRU and its students in the county equals $188.4 million – approximately equal to creating 4,300 average-wage jobs in the county.

The University employs nearly 2,148 students and 1,208 faculty, staff and managers, making it the 5th largest employer in Butler County. Its annual payroll, including benefits, is $91.9 million. Nearly half of SRU employees live in Butler County and thereby expand the county’s tax base.

“SRU spends an estimated $54.8 million, or 36 percent, of its total budget, in Butler County, including expenditures of approximately $28.2 million in new sales in Butler County each year.

I am one of the few people that actually lives and works in downtown Slippery Rock. It is my pleasure to be a part of things and really could not imagine living my life otherwise.

Sonya Lenz

Florist blooms at specialty shop

Carol Warner, owner of Slippery Rock Specialty Florist, said operating a business is all about the wow factor and work ethic, especially in a turbulent economy. “I carry items in my shop that are not found anywhere else,” she said. “I guess, I have a type A personality, so I am very hard on myself and strive for the best.”

Warner received her bachelor’s degree in sport management from Slippery Rock University in 2003 and a master’s degree in exercise wellness and performance a year later and has also served on the SRU alumni board. She joined Slippery Rock Specialty Florist initially to help a friend market the business. Her friend soon left because of family needs, so Warner invested in the business and became the sole proprietor in 2009. “I know enough about business from past experience and my education at SRU to take that step forward,” she said. “The sport management program is very intense and a lot is expected of you. It is really a business degree with an emphasis in sport.”

Fully confident about the administrative side of running a business, Warner said she needed to learn the floral design end of the profession. She searched for a teacher and found one of the best – Bill Hixson, known as “Mr. Christmas” because he has decorated the White House for the holidays since the Reagan administration.

“I contribute to the economy, I employ three people and look forward to the day when I will need others.”

Warner said her workday begins at 7:30 a.m. even though the shop doesn’t open until 9 a.m. She checks messages, does paperwork, places flower orders and begins designing arrangements. Flexibility is key. “In this business you can go to work with a plan of what you are going to do for the day and then get a call that there is a funeral you need to begin planning for,” she said. “Sometimes I get unexpected calls for orders to be delivered within hours and must drop everything and prioritize.”

Her day rarely ends by 5 p.m. “When you own your own business, you’re responsible for even the unglamorous tasks. “I take care of my own garbage, so I have to pack it up in my car and dispose of it,” she said.

Slippery Rock Specialty Florist offers a full assortment of flower arrangements and creates weddings and other special events. Through Hixson’s contacts, Warner recently established connections with growers in Hawaii and can obtain tropical flowers in two days.

“I have already completed two tropical weddings, and they were breathtaking,” she said. “The colors were vibrant, and the flowers were unusually rare. Most comments from people asked if they were real. It was certainly the wow factor.”

Warner employs two people and utilizes a third, veteran floral designer whom she met at Slippery Rock. “She calls on for holidays or when she becomes extremely busy,” she said. “I employ three people and look forward to the day when I will need others. Flower wholesalers benefit because I buy their flowers. And I have and will continue to bring events to the Slippery Rock University community. I offered a St. Patrick’s Day event at the University last year and am bringing Mr. Hixson to the Slippery Rock Russell Wright Alumni House Nov. 11. I love Slippery Rock and the University and the people here.”
Carr replies faster than a Jeopardy contestant: “$39.99.”

He tries to break up the workday with personal time. “I will sometimes leave around 2 p.m. and come back around 5:30 or 6 p.m.,” he said. “From 2 to 3 p.m., I take a little nap and do some household chores. So I sort of do a split shift – eight hours followed by five hours.”

“You’ll have to kick me out of this town – make me leave – I am not going anywhere.” – Bill Carr

Luigi’s employs 17 people, including five full-time employees, and Carr said he takes satisfaction in contributing to the community. The restaurant sponsors a youth soccer and T-ball team, and regularly contributes to University events. Carr loves being part of the Slippery Rock community and said he has no plans to sell.

“You’ll have to kick me out of this town – make me leave – I am not going anywhere,” he said with a laugh.

Carr’s first encounter with Luigi’s occurred during his student days. He worked at Luigi’s from 1985 until he graduated in 1990. After graduating, Carr accepted a position with a national restaurant chain. He bought Luigi’s in 1999.

“I have owned since 1999. He is chatting away about the business on a recent afternoon when a waiter pops over and asks, “How much is a whole cheesecake?”

Westinghouse. I am extremely proud of Slippery Rock University. It brings in $310,000 visitors to the county, which brings a lot of money into our area, and also showcases our county.”

Raybuck said he knew SRU was one of the largest employers, but he was surprised by how many graduates remain in the county, contrary to stereotypes of “brain drain.” “As Dr. Smith noted in his summary of the report, the biggest impact the University has is with individual students and their income potential after receiving a higher education,” he said. “You always hear that we train them, and they move away. That’s not the case – 64.6 percent of graduates stay.”

The increased productivity of Butler County workers due to the accumulation of past and present SRU skills in the county workforce annually contribute an estimated $64.7 million in added income.

Transforming the future

As noted in the report, SRU’s largest impact stems from the productivity effects of graduates who live, own businesses and work in the western Pennsylvania service area.

The town of Slippery Rock resembles an SRU alumni business district – graduates own restaurants, a flower shop, chocolate shop, travel agency, dance and photography studios, Luigi’s Family Restaurant and an airport shuttle. The Rock connection creates synergy, like friends belonging to the same club, and generates opportunities for more startups. Success breeds success.

In fact, hundreds of graduates have started or own a business, providing jobs, boosting the local tax base and fostering the economic stability of “Main Street, USA.”

According to economic studies, for every $100 spent at a chain store, only $12 is circulated back into the local economy. The same $100 spent at a local business is multiplied into a $45 recirculation.

Small business owners are the heart beat of communities and support all kinds of activities such as school fundraisers, festivals, public libraries, youth sports, food cupboards and service agencies. The National Federation of Independent Businesses reports that 91 percent of small business owners volunteer to provide donations to local causes.

“We sponsor a baseball team and help out most, if not all, of the organizations that come in asking for support,” said Rob Coffaro, a 1997 SRU graduate who owns pizzerias in Slippery Rock and Grove City and employs more than 20 people, including SRU students.

“Other groups need our gift certificates for various causes – there are hundreds of different things – and I always try to do my part.”

“We chose Slippery Rock for the location of our business because the town and the University continually show growth and a progressive attitude towards culture and business promotion,” said Liza Hovis, a ’97 Rock graduate and former physical education teacher who co-owns Matthew Hovis Photography.

The creation of more small businesses tops U.S. President Barack Obama’s agenda for the nation’s economic recovery. Visiting a sub shop in Edison, N.J. recently, the president said, “Small businesses create two out of every three jobs in this country. Our economic recovery depends on them.”

During a roundtable with business leaders in Seattle, Obama said small businesses are at the core of the American experience. “This has always been a country where anyone with a good idea and the guts to see it through can succeed,” he said. “It’s what gives the worker the courage to leave her job to become her own boss, or somebody with a dream to risk it all on a great idea.”

Sarah DiFrischia, a 2007 dance graduate, started the Crossroads Dance Academy in Slippery Rock and also owns The Spaceship Toy Store in suburban Pittsburgh. Her husband gave her the book “How to Start a Small Business for Idiots,” but DiFrischia said her SRU education prepared her for the challenge of running a business.

“One of the classes that helped me prepare for actually owning the studio was ‘Dance Marketing,’” she said. “The class covered press releases and advertising. SRU prepared me mostly by encouraging me and giving me a huge amount of self-confidence. The confidence was gained through the realization that the training I received was valid and exceptional.”

“By providing students with a rock-solid education, we are preparing them for opportunities in jobs that will provide them a better quality of life. Which in turn, benefits their communities… which benefits the state… which benefits all of us. It’s a great cycle.”

Even with all of the success stories of graduates and favorable numbers showing economic benefits to the borough, county, region and state, Smith said the most important economic numbers are those that benefit students. Receiving an education from a college or university enhances an individual’s economic standing. “In our primary service area, students that graduate with a high school diploma average less than $30,000 in annual income,” he said. “Those that graduate with a bachelor’s degree earn near the $50,000 mark. At the master’s level, they earn on average more than $60,000 and at the doctoral level nearly $90,000. Over the course of a work career that is a significant difference.

By providing students with a rock-solid education, we are preparing them for opportunities in jobs that will provide them a better quality of life. Which in turn, benefits their communities… which benefits the state… which benefits all of us. It’s a great cycle.”
Take it from Willie Wonka and Debbie Shannon, a 1977 Slippery Rock University graduate and owner of Shannon’s Kandy Kitchen in Slippery Rock, — you have to be a little crazy to operate a chocolate factory.

“I’ve seen both versions of the movie, and I like to think we’re a lot like Willie Wonka – minus the eccentricities,” Shannon said with a laugh. “He’s always trying to be creative, experimenting with new combinations and flavors, and he takes a lot of pride in his products – the same with us. Plus he never falls into a rut, which is really the nature of this business. It’s ever changing. No two days are ever the same, but that’s what makes it so interesting.”

‘Little surprises around every corner, but nothing dangerous’

As an elementary education major at SRU in the 1970s, Shannon said she never dreamed she’d end up on the sticky side of the candy counter. With a degree in hand, she simply assumed she would spend her life teaching, something that she had always wanted to do. Then the recession of the 1980s hit and life, imitating Wonka’s chocolate factory, went a little haywire. After eight years in the classroom, Shannon found herself out of a job.

“When the layoff came, I was surprised, but I looked at it as if it was another move, just like the ones I made growing up as a military brat,” she said.

Rather than lament the shortages of jobs in education, Shannon decided to drown her sorrows in floats, blizzards and slushies by purchasing a Dairy Queen with her husband, Larry, in Mercer. “It was like going to business school for 16 years,” Shannon said.

As a franchise owner, Shannon said they gained on-the-job experience operating a business and took advantage of the parent company’s classes and workshops. “The number one benefit was figuring out how to work with people – you can’t learn that out of a book,” she said.

‘A little nonsense now and then is relished by the wisest men’

Comfortable in their routine, life once again threw a curve: After 48 years in the candy business, her mother-in-law retired in 2007 and asked that they take over the Kandy Kitchen.

“We jumped at the chance,” Shannon said. “My mother-in-law did a fine job, but we had the opportunity to take the store to the next level. And it would be a chance to own our own business.”

While the original Kandy Kitchen is in Mercer, it didn’t take long for the Shannons to whet their appetite for expansion by opening the Slippery Rock store. “A couple of people from Slippery Rock approached us about opening the store here,” she said. “When we investigated, we found that the whole town had changed since the time I was here as a student. It was the spirit of growth that motivated us to make the move.”
Though formally trained as a teacher, Shannon said she has been surprised at how much she has put her education degree to good use in the business world.

“So much of what I learned about running a classroom applies to business,” she said. “Indirectly, I’m doing ‘lesson plans’ each week, writing down my objectives for the business and the materials I need to keep me focused. I vividly recall my professors emphasizing that the importance of seeing each child as an individual and not as a collective class, and that’s exactly how I work with my customers. Plus, my professors were very personable—they knew me by name—and they were sticklers for meticulous work. That approach to teaching is exactly the same approach needed to run a successful business.”

“Invention, my dear friends, is 93 percent perspiration, 6 percent electricity, 4 percent evaporation and 2 percent butterscotch ripple.”

Each move in her professional career has developed talents Shannon didn’t realize she had. Besides strengthening her entrepreneurial skills, the Kandy Kitchen has stretched her creative muscle. “Finally, we have a chance to use our creativity,” she said.

“All of our candy is made from scratch, so we spend a lot of time experimenting with candies and their presentation.”

Larry, her husband, is a whiz with fine chocolates, handcrafting soft centers, chews, nuts and chocolate-dipped fruit. Debbie is the gift basket guru, mixing chocolates with other confections for personal gifts for people and companies. “It’s work, especially around Christmas, when we get a call for 300 boxes of chocolates three days before Christmas. But it’s also therapy—we get to have fun coming up with new chocolates and packaging.”

Their efforts don’t go unnoticed. Besides serving hometown customers with fresh candy daily, the Shannons ship candy around the world. Among the more popular items: their famous mint sandwiches, a three-layer confection with a layer of mint sandwiched between chocolate and cut into small squares, and SRU logo candies, dark chocolate mints stamped with the SRU “S” logo.

“One day, a soldier came in for a box of mint sandwiches right after he returned from the war,” Shannon said. “He said that his family had sent him boxes in Iraq but he had been using his knife to chisel them out of the box because they were so melted from the heat. Thinking about our candy bringing him a taste of home— that really left me with a good feeling about what we do.”

Besides producing a pick-me-up product, the Shannons are advocates for locally owned businesses. “You really don’t realize how important it is to support your locally-owned businesses until you own one yourself,” Debbie Shannon. “They are the backbone of the community. If you go to a Little League game, you don’t see Walmart on the shirt—you see a local business.”

“The relationship is reciprocal. In this slow economy, Shannon credits her patrons for keeping them in business. “Everything we produce is a luxury item,” she said. “People don’t have to shop here. But we have strong supporters who have helped us stay afloat. “We were delighted when Shannon’s Kandy Kitchen opened an additional store in Slippery Rock,” said Ramona Smith, wife of SRU president Robert Smith who keeps the logo chocolates in stock at her home. “Having a business like Shannon’s Kandy Kitchen right here in Slippery Rock is essential for the growth and strength of our downtown area.”

Small business drives the American economy, especially in hard times, said David Culp, SRU professor in the School of Business. “The majority of new jobs in western Pennsylvania over the next 25 years are going to be with small businesses,” he said. “It’s just the nature of the economy.”

Main Street provides the jobs, pays taxes and spurs economic growth. “America is more of a service economy today. We don’t manufacture to a large extent,” he said. “Most of the tourism, insurance, recreation and things of that nature are all provided by small businesses. Many of our students—about one in four—say they want to start a business.”

“‘If you want to view paradise, simply look around and view it.’

Despite the topsy-turvy ride to her current position as owner of a candy store, Shannon said it’s the ride that makes the destination so sweet. “All I wanted to do when I was young was to teach school and open a store—and look at me. I’ve gotten to do both,” she said. “I get a lot of college students in here who are uncertain about their future, but I tell them that you have to be willing to walk through the doors—that it’s never a waste of time even if you don’t end up where you think.” Wonka himself couldn’t have said it better.
All voice rises above the chatter inside the Slippery Rock University alumni house: “Yeah, it was meant to be,” Frank Barnes said about going blind. Unlike those born blind or those who lose their vision over many years, Barnes entered a world of total darkness in two weeks.

“The left eye went, and the right eye went 10 days later,” the SRU student said.

A successful retail manager with Walmart and youth coach before macular degeneration robbed him of his sight, Barnes admits he still cries even though two years have passed. But as he ultimately discovered, blindness was not the end of his world. It was a beginning. Thanks to the intervention of caring Slippery Rock University faculty, staff and students, Barnes said he has come to terms with his condition and found a renewed sense of ambition.

The social work major – he enrolled after becoming blind – wants to help other people overcome hardship by becoming a counselor. “Social work is a broad degree where I can do what I want to do,” he said. “I want to counsel and help people; I want to help give back. I’ve lost my sight, but that’s nothing compared to what some other people have lost.”

More than 3.3-million Americans 40 and over are blind or have vision so poor that even with glasses, medicine or surgery, everyday tasks are difficult; according to the National Eye Institute, a federal agency. That number is expected to double in the next 30 years.

Barnes, who was fully sighted until May 2008, when he was 40, said a macular hole in his left eye led to complications such as detached retinas and scar tissue in both eyes. Becoming blind suddenly was “scary,” he said.

“For me, the hardest thing of being blind is the lack of independence,” he said. “If you want to go to Sherer in the middle of the night, you can’t go by yourself. You have to plan. I have to depend on everybody around me. What I have learned to do is create a mental map of everything. You learn to remember where the chair is and create a visual of campus, for example.”

His wife Shelly said the journey has been difficult. “At the beginning, it was very hard. It would be very difficult for anybody, but he had to make a decision to live. You can’t just sit there and wallow on your misery. There are so many things he can do,” she said.

Destiny intervened when Barnes, of Grove City, met Wendy Fagan, SRU instructor of exercise and rehabilitative sciences who lives in Grove City. Fagan heads the University’s annual camp for children with vision impairment and shared SRU’s educational opportunities.

“My wife and I were taking Samuel, our seeing-eye dog, for a walk. She was running, and she stopped to investigate herself and said she was a professor at Slippery Rock,” Barnes recalled. “We were kind of amazed, because it was coincidental. We’d lived on the same block for three years, but I had never seen her before when I was sighted. I became blind and we met. Things were meant to be. We met for a reason.”

Barnes told her he wanted to attend SRU but his anticipated ride had fallen through. Fagan offered to carpool, making his admission to SRU possible. “A ride was one of the obstacles,” Barnes said.

“My wife works so how was I going to get to school? There is no taxi service in Grove City. There was no transportation, so that’s where Wendy came in.”

Barnes said he took 12 credits during spring semester. He earned straight A’s and is taking 15 credits this fall.

Fagan’s personal involvement with Barnes is a living example of the University’s mission to be a caring community connecting to the world. The University believes so strongly in providing access to education regardless of obstacles, it provides a number of services for students with challenges to make the dream possible.

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GRAVE expectations

By Heidi Tyline King

The taboo topic of death and dying is all in a day’s work for Adelle Williams

A hundred years ago, death was commonplace even among young adults because of rampant disease and little if any medical treatment. Today, life expectancy has increased so dramatically that more generations are living now than at any other point of time in history. Encounters with death are less common and rather than families attending to the death of a loved one, Americans turn to professionals to manage the details, like long-term care and funerals.

With death seems all the more unrealistic. “It’s a good thing that we are living longer, but despite the fact of hearing a lot about death in the media, we are far more removed from death than ever in our everyday lives,” Williams said.

Opening up about death

One of the objectives of the class is to challenge students about their personal beliefs about death and dying. “It’s not a fun course,” Williams said. “At 20, you feel you are invincible, and many students have never had a serious discussion about death because they haven’t been touched by it. In fact, it is a shock for some to learn that once you die you won’t be coming back to life. Talking openly about the topic in class and sharing stories and beliefs provides students with a safe environment to explore a topic too often considered taboo.”

Daphne Quick, a public health major and gerontology minor from Philadelphia, said she took the class to better prepare for her career, but found herself mid-semester questioning her own beliefs about death. “For example, I had always thought that funerals were just a way to say goodbye, but after the class, I lost that they are a celebration of a person’s life and accomplishments,” she says. “We will all deal with grieving loved ones and our own losses, whether they are personal or work-related. And though some of the class topics got to be a little emotional, I came around to seeing that death is a universal experience and very much a part of life.”

History of death

Integral to the class is the perception of death throughout history. A hundred years ago, death was commonplace even among young adults because of rampant disease and little if any medical treatment. Today, life expectancy has increased so dramatically that more generations are living now than at any other point of time in history. Encounters with death are less common and rather than families attending to the death of a loved one, Americans turn to professionals to manage the details, like long-term care and funerals.

Adelle Williams, a Slippery Rock University professor of health and safety who has taught the class for five years. “Some realize they will have to deal with the subject in their profession and want a better understanding of the process. Others are simply curious.”

“Death and Dying” is a three-credit, undergraduate course. Williams covers many aspects of death, including grief, funerals, end-of-life decisions, cultural customs, children’s view of death, the psychological aspects of death, doctors and death and euthanasia.

“The ‘good death’

As part of SRU’s course offerings for 20 years, the death and dying class has an educational rather than therapeutic focus. Students learn about death and the dying process in different cultures, explore religious beliefs, research the funeral industry and discuss legal issues such as wills and living wills. They learn about the technical aspects of responding to a death such as obituaries, burial and cremation, and what it means to have a “good death.”

“Many people end up redefining their lives once they truly internalize that there is a finality to life. They become more focused, sensitive and aware,” said Holland.

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If the proof is in the test results, Slippery Rock University Army ROTC students are earning high marks across the board. All 11 ROTC students who participated in the Army’s most important officer commissioning training – the Leader Development and Assessment Course – passed on their first attempt. The 28-day course in Fort Lewis, Wash., incorporates land navigation, leadership and intelligence training.

“We trained in a wide variety of areas. We were tested in our physical fitness, land navigation abilities, first aid training, leadership and intelligence training,” said Capt. Richard Coleman, SRU assistant professor of military science. “In the cadre evaluation report, all of our students earned an excellent or satisfactory rating.”

Cadet Mary-Lynn Kebker, an elementary education major from Oregon, Ohio, said she plans to be commissioned as an ordinance officer or quartermaster into the National Guard after graduating from SRU in the summer or fall of 2011. She hopes to work as an elementary education teacher on the civilian side.

“SRU ROTC put us through a rigorous year in order to prepare us for the camp,” he said. “We spent several hours every Thursday, where our MS 4 cadets [senior] and cadre provided us with training that was very similar to the training we received at LDAC. I personally performed well and am happy with my evaluations.”

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“SRU ROTC prepared me very well for LDAC,” she said. “I was able to handle the stressful situations very well. At SRU, we conducted countless marches, land navigation, operational orders, and obstacle courses to be sure we were fully prepared for the material. Faculty even took extra time out of their days to conduct one-on-one training for extra help and went out of their way to provide us with the materials and supplies that were needed for us to succeed.”

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The new desktop computers include health assessment software. "A major weakness in the old curriculum was a lack of technology in physical education methods classes, field experiences and student teaching," she said. "An effective physical education teacher uses information technology to enhance learning and productivity,“

The department also converted a former anatomy classroom in the Field House into a computer lab/classroom equipped with 35 desktop computers, network wiring, data projector, air conditioning and a new ceiling. The smart building reconfiguration enables the department to consolidate most physical education theory classes and laboratory courses into the Field House, benefiting more than 400 physical education students.

Cadet Mary-Lynn Kebker, an elementary education major from Oregon, Ohio, participates in an Army ROTC “muck march,” carrying a pack weighing more than 60 pounds.

"The camp was mentally challenging, stressful and exhausting. We trained in a wide variety of areas. We were tested in our physical fitness, land navigation abilities, first aid training, leadership and intelligence training courses and on a water confidence course." said Capt. Richard Coleman, SRU assistant professor of military science. “In the cadre evaluation report, all of our students earned an excellent or satisfactory rating.”

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Students will benefit from new laboratories and equipment, a media room with high-end technology to facilitate distance education classes. King said the majority of the new furniture is Greenguard certified. Greenguard certified means the furniture protects the health of occupants through the control of mold, moisture and indoor pollutants. King said the old furniture was taken to Construction Junction, which promotes conservation through the reuse of building materials. “We minimized what went to the landfill,” King said.

From the Dean:

"I truly believe it’s going to more than meet the needs of the five departments,” said Mary Ann King, director of academic affairs in specific areas, making it easier for students to locate them. It is also a signature building that makes a statement about SRU’s continued commitment to greening our campus.

– Susan Hannam

Katherine Cooklin, assistant professor of philosophy, said philosophy has historically been perceived as a man’s field, but she is changing that impression. Cooklin recently became Slippery Rock University’s first female philosophy professor to obtain tenure.

“This milestone is significant for a number of reasons,” said Cooklin, who specializes in French philosophy and theories of social justice. “First, it may help overcome pernicious stereotypes that have kept women out of the field. Increasing diversity within academic departments is important for students, the University and the field of philosophy.”

When one group dominates a discipline, that group’s perspective shapes the discipline. “It can lead to blind spots and biases,” she said. “This is not to say that all women philosophers, or all women for that matter, think the same way, or that there are essential differences between the way men and women think. However, increasing the perspective within a discipline can unmask biases and enrich knowledge.”

Cooklin said she was hooked on philosophy from the time she took her first class as an undergraduate at the University of Southern Maine.

“We read philosophers who questioned things like the nature of reality and the legitimacy of knowledge claims,” Cooklin said about her courses. “The more philosophy courses I took, the more I realized how important this kind of reflection, or lack thereof, is to the way the world is structured and the impact this can have on the way we live our lives.”

She received her master’s degree from Lewis and Clark College and doctorate from the University of Texas. She joined SRU in 2006.

“The backbone of philosophy is argumentation – questioning assumptions and opinions and demanding that they be rationally supported,” Cooklin said.

Cooklin is teaching “Introduction to Philosophy” and “Business Ethics” this fall.

SRU offers a philosophy major and minor. Cooklin said majoring in philosophy has practical benefits. It teaches clinical thinking skills and is a good choice for those planning to attend law school or a graduate program in philosophy. She said philosophy students consistently score higher on law-school admission exams than many of their peers.

Katherine Cooklin, assistant professor of philosophy, reviews a text with Bailey Costantino, a philosophy major from Maryland.

We are very proud of Dr. Cooklin’s achievements at SRU. She not only represents big strides in terms of diversity in our college but throughout the nation where women account for only around 20 percent of professionals in their field.

– Eva Tsuqsiash Daddesso

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The Rock provides foundation for attorney’s success

Nicola Henry-Taylor is quick to tell anyone that asks that her success as a lawyer would not have been possible without Slippery Rock University. The 1993 graduate grew up in Brooklyn and attended SRU on a Board of Governors Scholarship, which provides assistance to minority students. She said The Rock provided her with many life-enriching experiences.

“I grew from an inner-city youth into a young lady ready to face the world at Slippery Rock,” Henry-Taylor said. “While at The Rock, I had the opportunity to study abroad, chair the International Students Committee, serve on a history honorary and represent my sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha on the Greek Council. I had endless opportunities to learn about the cultures of others and to teach my new friends about my background. I will never forget that generosity and contribution to my growth.”

Henry-Taylor received a degree in history and went on to earn a law degree from Duquesne University. She embarked on a law career that saw her working as an associate attorney for Allegheny County. She was the sole attorney responsible for managing the Allegheny County Mental Health Court.

In January, Henry-Taylor started her own Pittsburgh law firm, Nicola Henry-Taylor, LLC. Many of her clients are referred to her from the Allegheny County Bar Association and YWCA of Greater Pittsburgh Reduced Fee Program. She represents adults and juveniles in criminal matters in Allegheny and Butler counties and handles custody, support and adoptions, benefits rights law, protection from abuse and welfare matters.

Henry-Taylor said she wanted to represent clients of modest means. She practices criminal defense and family law.

“When I tell people that I started my own practice, a common response is that I must be crazy to make such a move in this bad economy,” Henry-Taylor said. “What they fail to realize is that I had a business plan that also included a marketing plan. In developing my strategy, I understood that the economy is not going to change the fact that people need criminal defense and assistance with their family law issues. Additionally, it is extremely gratifying to mentor interns and create a job for my assistant.”

There are rewards and challenges to being your own boss, Henry-Taylor said. “I enjoy implementing my own strategy and utilizing my own approach to dealing with colleagues and clients as opposed to having someone dictate them to me,” she said.

Being your own boss is not without its challenges, she said. “People are under the misconception that when you work for yourself you can leave, or not come to work, whenever you please; I would argue that the contrary is true,” she said. “It can also be challenging from a cash-flow perspective to pay expenses and to pay yourself and staff. Plus, you have to always be in a marketing/business development mode while taking care of all of the little office management details.”

A goal of all educators is to make a lasting impression upon their students. And it’s safe to say Ed Walsh certainly did that, both as an English professor and assistant baseball coach/pitching coach at Slippery Rock University. It’s also safe to say the easy-going Irishman didn’t know how great an impression he made until former students and players gathered for a tribute recently at the Russell Wright Alumni Home and Conference Center. Plans for the event developed last fall when one of Walsh’s former pitchers, Roger Flynn, was inducted into the SRU Athletic Hall of Fame.

“When we saw the admiration and respect shown to Ed by the former players who came back for Roger’s induction, my wife and I both reached the same conclusion: We needed to do something to honor Ed,” said Dick Hudson, ’68, a 2006 Hall of Fame inductee who himself had played on teams led by then-Rock head coach Wally Rose and Walsh. Walsh, who joined the Slippery Rock faculty as an English professor in 1961, earned the prestigious title of professor emeritus immediately following his retirement in 1996. He also served as Rose’s pitching coach for most of the latter’s 29-year career, which concluded in 1985. Shortly after last fall’s Hall of Fame induction, assuming a role similar to the one played by Bing Crosby in the all-time favorite holiday movie White Christmas, Hudson began contacting former teammates and colleagues of Walsh to gather for an event to honor “the old man.”

You won’t hear Hudson or any of his teammates refer to Walsh in that manner, though. The event bordered on a “roast,” but that was only because, if he had had the chance, the featured guest would have turned the tables on those who paid tribute to him.

Tributes and good-natured jabs were presented by current SRU and former students Walsh helped land an internship with the Pittsburgh Pirates; Bonnie Gangone Lukaus, a former babysitter for the Walshes, who is now president of the SRU Alumni Association; and Bob McComas, a former baseball player under Ed Walsh and now SRU’s Sports Information Director.

Running throughout the tributes was a common theme aptly stated by Hudson: “I was an English major at The Rock, so Ed and I spent a lot of time together,” Hudson said. “Ed was a mentor and a friend to me, someone who had the unique ability to be both of those things without crossing the line between teacher/coach and friend.”

“It was less what he said and more what he did,” Hudson continued. “He set an example for us to follow. He made me feel like you were around a confidante. He gave you encouragement without you really knowing he was doing it and, in the process, instilled confidence and reassurance.”

Walsh’s background, in turn, earned him the respect of his players. “He understood the game, he loved the game and he had played the game, so you knew he knew what he was talking about,” Hudson said.

Throughout his career as an educator and coach, Walsh was true to his beliefs and principles.

“I have been active in the Rotary Club for most of my life,” Hudson said, “and Ed has always epitomized the motto of Rotary International: ‘Service above self.’ It was never about him, it was always about what was best for his players or his students.”

Walsh, and his wife Fran, who also is an emeritus professor at SRU, dedicated their lives to the University and its students. To honor them, former Rock baseball players and other lifelong friends purchased two chair-back reserved seats in their name at Jack Czichoski Park, the home of The Rock baseball program.

“There are good ships, and there are wood ships, the ships that sail the sea. But the best ships are friendships, and may they always be.” There, in the words of an Irish toast, are the sentiments of those who had the good fortune to be mentored by Ed Walsh, with the able assistance of his wife, two of The Rock’s all-time great faculty members.
James William "Bill" McKay, a longtime Slippery Rock University professor of English and secondary education, died in September. He was 80.

McKay began teaching at SRU in 1947 and retired in 1982. He served as chair of the secondary education program and was named Teacher Laureate by his students. McKay was the nephew of Marre McKay, SRU's educator for whom McKay Education Bag is named. The building opened in 1929.

Shortly before his death, his family gave McKay an SRU afghan.

"He just put up when he saw it and refused to use it as a blanket," Mary Agnes McKay, his wife and the retired chair of elementary education at SRU, said. "He insisted that it be placed in the living room so that he could see it at all times."

Survivors include his wife, two sons, two daughters, and four great-grandchildren.

“Class Notes” lists the year alumni received their undergraduate degree from Slippery Rock University. To submit “Class Notes,” send an email at Alumni@srublacksburg.org or via our secure web form at www.sru.edu. Include your information, first and last name with an ‘S’ at the end of the email address. You will receive a confirmation message.

Please note that the editorial staff makes every effort to publish the information as given by the alumni, but at times it may be necessary to make some revision. We do not publish engagements or pregnancies, but we do publish marriages and births.

The deadline for this issue is March 15. To make any revisions, or fax us at 724.738.4784. We do not publish engagements or pregnancies, but we do publish marriages and births.

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For further information, please call us at 724.675.3000, or visit our website at www.sru.edu.
The day before her 50th birthday, Slippery Rock University alumna Vicki Becker joined an exclusive club. She completed a marathon in all 50 states, joining just 156 American women that have earned access to the “50 States Club.”

Often times you hear stories of athletes taking up a sport at an early age, developing the skills needed to excel at that sport throughout childhood and adolescence, and peaking in early adulthood. This is not one of those stories. Becker was never a standout athlete growing up. She struggled to make the junior varsity teams in volleyball and swimming at Center Township High School. She came to Slippery Rock University in the fall of 1978 never imagining she would turn into an athlete.

“I wasn’t really great at any sports,” said Becker, a 1982 computer science graduate. “I was average at a lot of things and never really thought of myself as an athlete.”

Becker joined the Computer Science Club and cheered as a member of the Rockettes before getting some advice her junior year that would help shape her into the athlete she is today. Bill O’Brien, a 1992 graduate who was working toward a graduate degree in student personnel, gave her a suggestion for maintaining health: run.

“I never thought about running before,” Becker said. “I started running a few laps at a time on the track at Old Thompson and it was hard, but I stuck with it.”

The next year, her senior year at Slippery Rock, she entered her first race, a charity 10k run in Butler. She finished third and was officially hooked on running. It was a big deal,” she recalled. “I remember thinking I finally found a sport I could do well in.”

Becker recalled her years at SRU with fondness. She said she started as a math major, took “Intro to Computer Science” and loved it so she switched. She lived in Hamer Hall, an all-girls residence hall, and worked as a student for the maintenance department, vacuuming the halls and common areas of Hamer. She spent a lot of time with computer science faculty and enjoyed eating at Bob’s Sub.

“I have to credit Slippery Rock University with a lot of my success,” Becker said. “It was a positive experience, and I will always be grateful for the education and the tools I received when I was there. My career path and promotions are right in line with the education and the tools I received when I was there, and that has carried over into my life after SRU.”

A week after graduation, Becker accepted a job with IBM and moved to Austin, Texas to begin a career as a program developer for the software company.

“It was an exciting time for me,” she said. “This was when the steel industry was really struggling, so it was hard to land a job in Pittsburgh. I got offers from IBM and Texas Instruments, and decided to go with IBM.”

Before she could begin to trace her path to the 50 States Club, she first had to adjust to moving into the professional world with a company that would become a major player in the technology revolution.

“I had never even seen an actual computer monitor until I started working at IBM,” she said. “When we were at SRU, everything was writing code on one line editors.”

After the adjustment to the job, Becker began to really focus on training and eating right, preparing for what would become the first of a long line of marathons. Her first marathon came in Austin in 1986, where she covered the 26.2-mile course in a personal best time of 3:25, finishing third among all women in the race.

“I was really serious about it back then,” Becker said. “I was focusing on what I was eating everyday and really preparing myself for the race. That first one is still my fastest.”

Over the next few years, she increased her state total from 10 to 30 entering the 2008 marathon season, before realizing there was a chance to accomplish all 50 states before her 50th birthday. June 7, 2010.

Over a two-year stretch, she ran 20 marathons in 20 different states, including some on back-to-back days, an idea that sounds taxing on even the most dedicated runners.

“I stopped doing it to compete against the clock, and I started doing it to meet new people and enjoy myself,” she said. “There was one race where I jokingly asked a little boy if he wanted to run with me. He started running with me, and I couldn’t leave him, so I dragged on with him walking and jogging until the end. I still stay in touch with him, and send him a birthday card every year.”

Becker’s journey to joining the club was completed the day before she turned 50, when she crossed the line at the Casper Marathon in Wyoming.

“I hadn’t really thought about much before the race, but when the race started all I could think about was making sure I finished,” she said. “It wasn’t the most fun I’ve ever had. The elevation was really tough, and I spent a lot of energy talking to everyone on the course.”

The race organizers set it up so she could wear bib number 50, a fitting tribute, and family and friends celebrated with banners and cake for all runners at the finish line.

“A lot must sound strange,” Becker said, “but it didn’t really fill me with a great sense of relief. This was a temporary goal, but I don’t plan on stopping here.”

Next up for Becker: tackling a marathon on all seven continents. After that, she plans to hit the centenial mall, completing 100 marathons.

“The final goal,” she said, “will be to run a marathon on my 100th birthday.”

While the accomplishment stands alone as worthy of acknowledgment, Becker’s message is that this whole process has been more about the experience. The people, the places and the stories are what she will remember most.

Becker has run in marathons with as few as 12 people, like in Lexington, Ky., and as large as 30,000 people, such as New York and Chicago. She’s met thousands of people from all over the world and shared hours of laughs and stories along the way. Not to mention, she can say that she’s had the opportunity to visit every state in the U.S.

Becker said she prefers to run marathons on country roads in quaint places that she would never visit without a race being there. She likes races with 250 to 400 runners and has run in all kinds of weather, from sub-freezing to 100-degree heat.

Becker and her husband reside in Binghamton. Both work for IBM, a career that has given her the opportunity to travel the country and pursue her goals.

“I hope my story can motivate people above all else,” she said. “I think meeting new people and motivating them is my favorite part of all this.”
Melissa Myler can only imagine where she would be in her career without the lessons learned as an undergraduate in the Slippery Rock University sport management program. And she gets a strong second to that sentiment from her boss, former SRU graduate Chase McClain.

"I did internships in golf pro shops and learned the game of golf, which I did not know anything about at the time, from the inside," said Myler, a 2007 SRU graduate. "Without that experience and the leg binder of work samples I had to keep as part of Senior Seminar, I would not have gotten the opportunity to be an intern with the USGA (United States Golf Association) at the 2007 Men’s U.S. Open at Oakmont (Country Club), which led to me getting the job I now have."

Her current job is Director of Operations for the Mylan Classic, a PGA TOUR Nationwide Tour event at the Southpointe Golf Club in Canonsburg. The inaugural Mylan Classic was in September. The event will remain in Washington County for at least two more years.

Myler works on a staff headed by McClain, a 2006 SRU graduate who, as the Mylan Classic tournament director, is responsible for the event from start to finish.

In McClain’s case, the road to Southpointe included stops for internship positions with the American Junior Golf Association, 84 Lumber Classic PGA Tour event and the National Mining Association Pete Dye Classic. He also had a two-year stint as assistant tournament director for the Nationwide Tour Players Cup. McClain echoed Myler’s endorsement about the impact an SRU education has on his career.

“What I learned at Slippery Rock was absolutely critical in helping me carve out my career path,” he said. “I owe a lot to Slippery Rock and the sport management faculty. Their standards are very high and I respect them for that. Without them, I would not be where I am today.”

As director of operations, Myler recently coordinated 500 volunteers who staffed the inaugural Mylan Cup in September. She also directed ticket sales and outside operations such as golf shop sales, concessions and the set up of the bleacher areas and logistics for concerts in conjunction with the golf tournament.

The job entailed a lot of time and effort, she said, but it was also “a lot of fun. A lot of non-stop excitement. It’s been a blast.”

The workload was heavier than normal because the preparation time was shorter for this event.

"Ordinarily, a site has at least a year to get ready to host a Nationwide Tour event," she said. "We had five months.”

The opportunity to have the event televised live on the Golf Channel for four consecutive days and the enhanced sponsorship opportunities that go with it made the decision to have a short turnaround “a no-brainer.”

Especially since all the ticket sales and proceeds of the event go to charity.

"Preparing for and running a tournament can be grueling, especially in the first year," McClain said. "Ordinarily, a site has at least a year to get ready to host a Nationwide Tour event, but they have five months." The workload was heavier than normal because the preparation time was shorter for this event.

"Preparing for and running a tournament can be grueling, especially in the first year," McClain said. "But at the end of the day the most gratifying part is that everything we do, all the money we raise, goes to charity."

The fruits of the labor put forth by McClain, Myler and their staff set a Nationwide Tour record $194,000 in ticket sales by early August, four weeks prior to the start of the event. By the time the first tee shot was taken, the total was expected to reach $250,000.

"That’s what keeps you motivated when you start to wonder if all the time and effort are worthwhile," McClain said.

"When you go to class, you don’t really appreciate how much the little things – the practicums, the volunteer hours, senior seminar and your big internship at the end – are going to pertain to what you will be doing after you get on the job. But they really do.

– Melissa Myler
Pat Mooney, ’61, president elect of the Slippery Rock University Alumni Association

Home:
DuBois, Pa.

Profession:
Retired teacher and coach.

Hobbies:
I play at golf. We have traveled to 18 different countries. I also love to watch sports. I have been to five Olympic Games. I am a Steelers ticket holder and attend my grandson’s and granddaughter’s soccer games.

Great Accomplishments
I hope I have a positive impact on the thousands of students/athletes I have worked with over the years.

Why I Give:
I retired Jan. 5, 2005. I now have the time, energy and money that hopefully goes with retirement. I am fortunate to be in a position to help. Slippery Rock State Teachers college in the late ’50s was home. I became an adult during those years. I remember good times, good friends, a good education and a diploma. I was helped along the way and feel that SRU had a huge impact on my life – job well done, SRU.

James Winner Jr., a western Pennsylvania entrepreneur who with his wife Donna contributed $1 million to the Slippery Rock University Foundation Inc. for student scholarships, died Sept. 14. He was 81 and leaves a legacy of higher education advocacy and benevolence.

“Mr. Winner’s generosity and philanthropic spirit has made a difference throughout this region and beyond,” said Barbara Ender, vice president of University Advancement. “The scholarship he and Donna established with a $1 million gift at Slippery Rock University in 2008 will allow generations of students in Mercer County to pursue a college degree. His was a life lived with purpose and many lives will be better as a result.”

The Winner Foundation Scholarships are awarded with a preference to students who are dependent children of Winner International, his company. Recipients must have a 3.0 grade-point average and be recommended by a school administrator.

Winner believed so strongly in SRU’s mission of providing affordable education, he simply mailed a check to the University with little advance notice. “With education comes everything else: the economy, business, fulfillment, everything hinges on education,” he said at the time.

Winner grew up on his parents’ farm in Transfer, Pa. He joined the Army at 18 and served in the Korean War. Donna Winner’s mother, Sadie Evelyn Lindsey, graduated from Slippery Rock State Normal School in 1927.

Q: What is the mission of the School of Business at Slippery Rock University?
A: The School of Business is currently going through a rigorous accreditation process. All of our faculty members have put serious thought into how to define and redefine our mission. Ultimately, we came up with a mission statement that encompasses what we are providing as a whole and that is ‘helping students build strong foundations for successful careers.’

Q: What distinguishes SRU’s approach to teaching business and economics?
A: Right off the bat, almost all of our faculty members have terminal degrees. Most universities with business schools use graduate assistants to instruct undergraduates in courses, while SRU focuses on research and instruct graduate courses. This is not the case at SRU. Most of our faculty also have extensive experience in the business world and do an excellent job of making the link between theory and practice. There are quite a few faculty members who engage in experiential learning by bringing ‘live’ projects into the classroom, promoting internships or providing educational travel experiences. The work I am doing at SEA will hopefully result in many more opportunities for classroom projects and in particular, introduce students to the importance of incorporating sustainable business practices and long-term thinking.

Q: What is your role with SEA?
A: I focus on business advising services and identifying projects for experiential learning opportunities. Not only do I work with businesses to identify problems that hamper performance, I also promote sustainable business practices and help firms establish and achieve sustainability goals through a network of faculty and student resources at SRU.

Q: What kind of students major in business?
A: Just as in any major, our students have a wide range of reasons for selecting a business major. No question that some are motivated by the potential for financial gain or feel that a business degree provides good employment opportunities. However, I firmly believe that ‘greed’ is not a primary driving factor for our students’ choice of major. Many of our students realize they can use a business career as a means to elicit a positive impact on the world – and this is highlighted by what we teach in the classroom. You can find many of our business majors and alumni involved in philanthropic activities and many are very active in helping their communities. My personal observation is that the vast majority of our students are intelligent, hard-working individuals, who want to establish a career that provides a nice lifestyle and has a positive impact on the world.

Q: How do you convince students that there are still opportunities for starting a business?
A: I really don’t need to convince them. The students who have entrepreneurial drive would figure out a way to start a business no matter what. There are opportunities for ‘enlightenment’ during lecture sessions where I like to point out that most of them have relatively little to lose and should consider this a great time to begin planning a business. It gets tougher to take risks when you are a little older and have family responsibilities. I would like students of all majors to know that starting a new business is a credible option.

Q: Are more women entering business and finance?
A: There are slightly more women than men majoring in business. Finance, which is my area of expertise, is another story – there tends to be more males in the finance major and the financial services industry in general. There is no doubt that there are a greater number of opportunities for women in the financial services industry. The U.S. population is composed of more females than males so it is a natural progression for more women to enter into this industry. One interesting fact: a published study that examined the investing habits of males vs. females discovered that males traded more frequently than females but earned nearly identical returns. When transaction costs such as the commissions paid to brokers were subtracted, women came out ahead due to their lower trading frequency. It looks like society could benefit from having more women managing investment funds.

Q: Is it true that the U.S. is suffering the worst recession since the Great Depression?
A: Yes, it is true. In fact, we really don’t know if this ‘Great Recession’ has run its full course. This is a complex situation with a number of looming factors that could still disrupt a recovery. If anything, we are likely to see no slow growth over the coming years. But this doesn’t mean that you and I have to participate. Two key emerging industries today are the nanotech and sustainable/alternative energy industries. At SRU we need to position ourselves to make sure that part of this massive reallocation of resources and industry base occurs here in our region. Things are starting to happen. We have received state funding to prepare a site for building a Business Innovation Center just north of campus. Last year, I was fortunate to receive an Entrepreneurship Center grant from the state system to help fund the development of the Sustainable Enterprise Accelerator on campus.

Q: Where do you see yourself in five years?
A: I am doing whatever I can to make SEA, our business programs, and the Innovation Center Building distinct points of pride for all of us at SRU. I have two bright, talented daughters who will face the choice of what university they want to attend in about six years – seven years from now. I am myself the proud father of two SRU students who made SRU their first choice based on the outstanding quality of our programs.
More than 550 Slippery Rock University upperclassmen, faculty and staff helped 1,800 new students transition from home to college this fall. Campus became a well-oiled staging ground. Volunteers unpacked cars and carried students’ belongings into the halls, while Army ROTC directed traffic. Rocky, the University’s mascot, chipped in as well. Another sure sign of fall, like changing leaves, was the Marching Pride band rehearsing for the fall season. The band includes 200 students this year, the most in University history.

Ailey II
Friday, Oct. 29, 2010
Ailey II is an exceptional company that merges the spirit and energy of the country’s best young dance talent with the passion and creative vision of today’s most outstanding emerging choreographers.

Scrooge in Concert
Thursday, Dec. 2, 2010
With a cast of 30 singers, dancers and musicians, lush Victorian costumes and rich, original music, “Scrooge in Concert” revives the most beloved of all Christmas stories.

From Galway to Broadway
Friday, March 18, 2011
Starring Dublin-born tenor, Ciarán Sheehan (star of “Phantom of the Opera,” “Les Miserables” and multiple PBS Irish specials) and Gay Willis (star of “Showboat” and “Phantom of the Opera”) in a magical performance from the Broadway stage to the Emerald Isle. Also featuring the Slippery Rock University Chamber Singers.

All Performances are at 7:30 p.m. in Miller Auditorium
Call 724.738.2018 for tickets
I am The ROCK

Becky Pendergast, ’88,
Washington, D.C.

**DAY JOB:** Art director for The Chronicle of Higher Education, Washington, D.C. During more than six years at The Chronicle, I have led and inspired a team of designers and photo editors. By collaborating and planning with editorial staff, we strive to create the best possible visual storytelling for print, the Web and new media outlets.

**BACKGROUND:** My career has led me to creative and management opportunities from non-profit to corporate to small mom-and-pop companies, designing all types of publications and Web sites. I have also taught design classes at several universities.

**INFLUENCE OF SRU:** While at SRU, I thoroughly explored my communication major and also sciences, management and marketing. Outside of class, I worked at the University Union Information Desk and was a graphic designer for University events. My experiences at SRU gave me the impetus and knowledge to accept and explore each opportunity throughout my career. In my spirit of appreciation, I hope others can enjoy similar opportunities through my giving back to SRU. I am a regular contributor to the annual fund and have been involved in setting up alumni events in Washington, D.C., and New England.

Photo by Bob McGrath