Dear Friends,

By any measure of success, 2015 was a great year for Slippery Rock University. Despite several real challenges, funding and demographic declines leading the way, we were able to increase enrollment, balance the budget, improve graduation rates and raise more than $3 million in cash contributions, the largest amount in our history.

Our successes were the result of a lot of focused, hard work by everyone at the University: work that was driven by the belief that we could, so we did.

We believed we could buck the systemwide trend of declining enrollment at member institutions by improving our retention rate, initiating new graduate programming starts and expanding our recruitment footprint to maintain stable new freshman and transfer student enrollments...so we did. Our fall 2015 enrollment grew to 8,628, a 1.57 percent increase compared to 2014, and we saw positive increases in our efforts to enroll international students (up 17.2 percent), graduate students (up 15.09 percent) and out-of-state students (up 3.19 percent).

We believed we could decrease institutional expenditures to reinvest in students...so we did. We reduced our educational and general budget by $14 million, renegotiated contracts and leases, implemented workforce realignment, repurposed and remodeled facilities and implemented aggressive energy conservation tactics to free up limited financial resources. We then reinvested those dollars into student success initiatives.

We believed we could continue to improve our four and six-year graduation rates, especially among underrepresented populations...so we did. By implementing a number of high-impact practices including: early intervention, mentoring, learning community clusters, study abroad, community service and leadership development initiatives, we recorded the highest 4-year (50.9 percent) and 6-year (67.5 percent) graduation rates in PASSHE.

We believed we could position the University as one of the top academic and best value Universities in the nation...so we did. In addition to the accolades I've previously shared with you, the University has earned a slew of additional accolades including: a “Best Value” University from MONEY Magazine; one of the Top 30 Best Value Colleges in Pennsylvania from bestvalueschools.com; “Best for the Money” nationally from College Factual; and “Best Bang for the Buck” nationally from the Washington Monthly.

We believed we could reverse the tide of shrinking public and private support of higher education...so we did. Last year, through a variety of targeted fundraising campaigns, the University raised more than $3 million in cash contributions, the largest amount in our history. Arguably, growing private support for the institution will be one of our greatest weapons as we struggle to invest in the people, plant and equipment necessary to provide accessible and affordable educational opportunities to all qualified students.

We believe great things are ahead for Slippery Rock University. We need you to help make our continued successes possible; to believe in the great work we are doing and to help support a new generation of The ROCK family. It promises to be an exciting future. I look forward to traveling the journey together.

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ABOUT THE COVER:
The crocodile fish, aptly named for its resemblance to a crocodile, is a bottom-dwelling ambush hunter. Native to the western Pacific region, they can reach a length of 20 inches. Fortunately, unlike their namesake, the fish presents little danger to scuba enthusiasts like Sam Thangiah, SRU professor of computer science, who often feature them as subjects of underwater photography. (See story page 10)
SRU earns ‘Best Value’ in Pennsylvania ranking

Slippery Rock University has been ranked in the Top 30 Best Value Colleges in Pennsylvania by bestvalueschools.com. The ranking was determined using National Center for Education Statistics’ College Navigator data to identify schools based on graduation rate, net price, acceptance rate and a 20-year net return on investment. “When choosing a college, we recognize that there’s no one, perfect choice for everyone,” bestvalueschools.com reports. “The institutions ranked on our list are colleges that provide a blend of affordability, accessibility and quality that will appeal to most applicants.”

SRU receives 2016 Military Friendly School honor

Slippery Rock University has been named a 2016 Military Friendly School by Victory Media, a veteran-owned company that assists individuals in the transition from active service to civilian life. SRU was recognized for its best practices and support for post-military students.

“I am impressed with the continuous support to veterans as evidenced by the veterans club, the numerous veterans I have met on campus, and the military appreciation football games,” said Army Lt. Col. John Donlin, SRU professor of military science and ROTC commander. “If anyone doesn’t think the University and students support the military, they haven’t been to a graduation to hear the applause when I swear in our new second lieutenants.”

SRU among ‘America’s Best Bang for the Buck Colleges’

Slippery Rock University has been named among ‘America’s Best Bang for the Buck Colleges’ in the northeast by the Washington Monthly in their new book, “The Other College Guide: A Roadmap to the Right School for You.”

SRU, which earned an overall score of 10 out of 15 points, was ranked No. 42 among 402 institutions located in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont.
Saluting our vets

Slippery Rock University marked Veterans Day with a pair of events beginning with a breakfast in honor and remembrance of our military veterans, sponsored by the Veterans Center. A Veterans Day Ceremony followed with Army Capt. Joseph Barrow, an SRU assistant professor of military science, being awarded the Purple Heart for a combat wound he received in Afghanistan in 2013.

SRU makes campus safety a top priority

When it comes to campus safety, Michael Simmons, Slippery Rock University’s police chief, is proud of the University’s record. He should be. SRU has been listed among the “Top 50 Safest Campuses in America.” But Simmons is also quick to point out achieving and maintaining that status takes diligence, planning and the cooperation of everyone at the University.

The University’s first line of defense is its 24/7 Police Department staffed by 13 uniformed police officers commissioned by the Governor of Pennsylvania and who have full police powers including, but not limited to, the authority to arrest and issue citations. Officers are armed.

The University is required to publish an Annual Security and Fire Safety Report that documents its safety policies and report all crime statistics. “We invite everyone to review how we are doing and to help identify any ways we can improve,” Simmons said. The report can be found at: http://www.sru.edu/Documents/life-at-sru/safety/police/clery-ASR-2014.pdf

SRU earns national recognition for improved graduation rates

Slippery Rock University has been ranked as one of the top 15 universities in the country for having shown vast improvements in completion rates for all students over the last decade and particularly its success in increasing graduation rates for underrepresented students (African-American, Latino and Native American) and decreasing the gap in completion rates between underrepresented and white students.

The ranking was part of a new Education Trust report, “Rising Tide: Do College Grad Rate Gains Benefit All Students?” SRU’s three-year average graduation rate for underrepresented populations is 48.9 percent, which is up 17.4 percent over a 10-year span covering 2003-2013. The three-year average for white students at SRU is 62.8 percent, an increase of 11.2 percent during that same time period.

KEEPING VIGIL

As part of Slippery Rock University’s Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation (GISO) Commission Month program, RockOUT sponsored a candlelight vigil to honor and remember LGBT students, staff and faculty. The vigil was one of more than 15 events staged throughout the month by GISO, one of six presidential commissions at SRU. Its purpose is to educate and advocate for understanding and acceptance of all people.

(Photos by Jamie Greene, emerging technology and communication major from Moon Township)
Jocelyn Howard Sinopoli, President

HOME:
Butler, Pennsylvania

PROFESSION:
Insurance Agency owner

HOBBIES:
Lifelong learning, spending time with family.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:
I believe my greatest accomplishment is the realization that it takes a cooperative effort of family, employees and support of the community to succeed.

WHY I GIVE:
In my family, we were raised to give back to our community. Our family has been blessed with three special needs children and through the use of alternative therapies, like the Storm Harbor Equestrian Center, we have discovered the benefits of these opportunities and how that enables them to live fuller lives.

Dance professor’s film reaches global audience

“Ferry,” an experimental short film directed and choreographed by Jennifer Keller, Slippery Rock University dance professor, was screened at the Bucharest International Dance Festival in Bucharest, Romania.

The three-minute film, which Keller shot at North Beach in Cape Charles, Virginia during her sabbatical last semester, has been shown in Italy, Brazil, Ireland, Canada and in New York, Washington and California.

Keller said her color film is unconventional because it lacks dialogue and relies on movement to tell the story of a woman reflecting on her life and losses while standing on a dock.

PT students experience China

(From left) Allyson Demetriadis, a Slippery Rock University doctor of physical therapy student from Mars, Barbara Billek-Sawhney, SRU professor in the School of Physical Therapy, Candice Blevins, a doctor of physical therapy student from Mentor, Ohio, and Caroline Schmitt, a doctor of physical therapy student from Parsippany, New Jersey, traveled to China Dec. 2-19 to work and teach physical therapy as part of the University’s study-abroad opportunities.

McCollin collects ‘Eyes4Africa’

Many college professors take time off during the holidays to recoup from the fall semester and prepare for the next term. Slippery Rock University’s Michelle McCollin used her time differently. The associate professor of special education caught a flight to Nigeria to deliver prescription eyeglasses and re-connect with the country she calls her “natal home.” In three years, McCollin has journeyed to Nigeria three times to donate 2,000 pairs of prescription eyeglasses, conduct eye clinics and provide school supplies to six schools.
Elementary and special education programs ranked among the best nationally

Score four wins for Slippery Rock University’s College of Education. Its elementary education program has been ranked among the Top 20 Elementary Education Schools nationally and among the Top 10 Elementary Education Schools in Pennsylvania, and the college was named as The Top Special Education School in Pennsylvania and among the Top 25 Special Education Schools nationally by Best-Education-Schools.com.

COE receives NCATE continuing accreditation

Slippery Rock University’s College of Education has received a seven-year continuation of its accreditation from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. The accreditation followed a yearlong review of SRU’s teacher-educator academic quality.

“This accreditation means that we are meeting the best standards possible for teacher education in the U.S.,” said James Preston, SRU assistant professor of elementary education.

Business students place 40th in worldwide competition

Four Slippery Rock University students placed 40th worldwide in the final overall score in the GLO-BUS business strategy competition. The students, Brandon Merry, an accounting major from Pittsburgh; Joseph Loeding, an accounting major from Sharpsville; Wesley Kilpatrick, an exploratory student from Lancaster; and Christian Nation, a senior management major from McDonald are all students in the business capstone course taught by Frances Amatucci, SRU associate professor in the School of Business.

Online elementary-education programs earns ‘Top 20’ honor

Slippery Rock University’s online master of education in elementary education program has been named one of the Top 20 Online Master’s of Elementary Education Degree Programs in the country by OnlineSchoolsCenter.com.

OnlineSchoolsCenter.com, a website resource for those who prefer virtual over conventional learning, noted SRU offers specializations in K-8 math/science, K-12 reading specialist and K-12 reading specialist with coaching literacy endorsement.

“Slippery Rock University offers students three unique masters in elementary education specializations, through which they will gain applicable techniques and understanding of their particular career goals,” Rowan Jones, researcher/writer for the site noted. “Whether teachers wish to enhance their abilities in teaching math and science or reading and writing to young children, SRU provides thorough and complex curricula.”
Recreational therapy professors receive grant

Three Slippery Rock University recreational therapy professors, Colleen Cooke, Deborah Hutchins and Betsy Kemeny, have received a faculty professional development grant from Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education to pursue certification in therapeutic humor, animal-assisted and HeartMath therapies, respectively.

The trio hopes their efforts will help SRU recreational therapy graduates help their clients find new ways to deal with the issue of chronic stress - a condition experts say can contribute to both physical and mental health issues such as suppressed immune system, cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, cancer, diabetes, depression and anxiety.

The training will also allow them to meet new guidelines set by the program’s accrediting agency that requires the teaching of a minimum of three specific modalities to provide students with transferable skills.

Therapeutic humor includes any intervention that promotes health and wellness by stimulating a “playful discovery, expression or appreciation of the absurdity of life’s situation.”

Animal-Assisted Therapy is a goal-directed intervention delivered by a professional with specialized expertise to utilize animals to promote human improvements in physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive function.

HeartMath, involves a set of techniques to help people handle stress and negative emotions “in the moment,” while improving performance and quality of life.

“Once the training is completed,” Hutchins said, “we will be developing more comprehensive approaches to enhancing student learning in these areas. The ultimate goal is to prepare students to manage stress, both personally and professionally with clients, in order to enhance overall health and promote well-being.”

Board of governors approves four new master’s programs

Hey alumni. Looking to get ahead or stay ahead in your career? Then check out these four new master’s degree programs recently approved by the State System board of governors.

Beginning fall 2016, SRU will offer master’s degrees in:

- The Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages degree, a linguistically based program, focuses on second language acquisition studies and the teaching of adult English language learners.
- The Master of Science in Health Informatics is a broad, interdisciplinary field that lies at the intersection of computer science, mathematics and public health. The program will offer concentrations in public health, data analytics and healthcare management.
- The Master of Music Therapy will prepare advanced-level music therapists to work in the rapidly-expanding field of music therapy by providing students with the opportunity to expand the breadth and depth of their knowledge and skills in the field, including advanced clinical education.
- The Master of Science in Athletic Training will transition SRU’s current undergraduate athletic program to a graduate offering. The need to transition the program is based on a decision by the Strategic Alliance of the Board of Certification, Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education, National Athletic Trainers’ Association and National Athletic Trainer’s Association Foundation to require a master’s as the professional entry-level degree.

For information about these, or any of SRU’s career-focused graduate programs, contact: Brandi Weber-Mortimer, director of graduate admissions, at 724.738.2051.
Lutz named head football coach

Shawn Lutz has been named the head coach of the storied Slippery Rock football program effective Jan. 16.

Lutz has served as the associate head coach at Slippery Rock for the past four seasons and has been the defensive coordinator for the last eight seasons. All told, he has been a member of The Rock coaching staff for 20 seasons dating back to 1996 when he joined the staff as a graduate assistant.

Martin named Super Region One Defensive Player of the Year

Slippery Rock University’s Marcus Martin, a safety management major from West Mifflin, Pennsylvania and tackle on the SRU football team, has been named the Super Region One Defensive Football Player of the Year. It is Martin's third player of the year honor for the 2015 season after taking home the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference Western Division honor, and the Division II Conference Commissioner’s Association Super Region One honor.

A redshirt junior, Martin averaged an incredible 1.21 sacks per game, the best among all active NCAA football players. No other player in the nation, regardless of NCAA level, averaged more than one sack per game.

Martin has tallied 31.5 total sacks in just two seasons, and is just a half sack from tying the all-time SRU record. The 2015 season saw Martin lead SRU with 15.5 sacks, while 25 of his 88 tackles were for a loss. He also recorded four fumble recoveries, forced three fumbles and broke up two passes.

Martin is the only player in SRU history to record at least 20 tackles for loss in two separate seasons and is the only player in program history to record more than 13 sacks in a single-season.

Martin was also named a finalist for the Cliff Harris Award and was an Academic All-American.

Student’s videography business takes flight

There are two ways of looking at how Jake Paterline got into the aerial photography business.

The first is that he came by it naturally. His grandfather, Edward Kelly, and mother, Nancy, were avid amateur photographers, never without a camera in hand and always snapping pictures at every event and vacation.

The second is to say that he came by it despite always having a camera stuck in his face. In Paterline’s case, he traded in his mom’s enthusiasm for still photography for video, invested in a DJI Phantom 3 drone, and in the process, became an entrepreneur.

Over the past year, Paterline has turned his passion for videography into a small business, working with local realtors to create aerial videos showcasing the exterior and grounds of property listings in order to add another dimension to the marketing of the homes.

As for the future, Paterline is looking to expand his array of equipment to one day include a glidecam and offer clients even more flexibility.

Mike Harich, ’94, President/CEO, and Ron Harich

HOME:
Monaca, Pennsylvania

PROFESSION:
MIKE: President/CEO of the Beaver County (Pennsylvania) YMCA.
RON: Retired from FirstEnergy Corp.

HOBBIES:
MIKE: Landscaping, exercising and crafting.
RON: Traveling with my wife, playing golf and attending Pittsburgh Pirates games.

GREAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS:
MIKE: My children, Nolan and Chloe, as well as being a two-time IRONMAN competition participant.
RON: Raising two wonderful and successful children, in addition to helping nurture four grandchildren.

WHY THEY GIVE:
MIKE: From a very young age, I watched my parents give tirelessly of their time, talent and treasure. Those efforts, combined with the lessons learned from the University and Jeff Messer, helped to shape me into who I am. It is an honor to provide monies for the Harich Family Scholarship, which provides student athletes the funding required for them to learn the same lessons that have blessed my family.
RON: SRU’s baseball program – and the education that our son received – were important elements of my son’s success. The University helped instill values he needed to be successful. I am thankful that I am in a position to help other student athletes.
Exploring a computer science prof’s love affair with scuba diving
The ocean. It’s refreshing, beautiful and humbling. It’s vast, mysterious and terrifying. Since time immemorial, it’s captivated poets and dreamers and divers.

Count Sam Thangiah as one of those people upon whom the ocean has cast its spell.

Thangiah, a Slippery Rock University professor of computer science, teaches artificial intelligence and robotics by day in a world measured by bits and bytes. Off the clock, his passion involves bites of a different nature – scuba diving among the 2.2 million species that live in the ocean. His hobby has taken him on dives around the world, including Sipadan Island in Malaysia, one of Jacques Cousteau’s favorite reefs.

Scuba diving, Thangiah said, is nature’s medicine cabinet – it’s his joy, his adrenaline rush of sensory overload and a “way of life” combined into one.

“Diving is akin to doing yoga underwater,” Thangiah said. “It is just you, the water and the marine life. There are no cell phones, no Internet, no interruptions; just the sound of your breathing and the wonder of the marine life wrapped all around you to take in and explore.”
“Love ‘em or hate ‘em,” the Huffington Post notes, “these toothy fish are one part terrifying and a thousand parts misunderstood. While they are considered an apex predator of the sea, you are at a higher risk of dying from a mosquito bite than a shark.”

Still, these ultimate ocean navigators, Thangiah said, deserve a healthy respect.

Thangiah said his Atlantic dives have taken him to the warm waters off the coasts of Florida, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Mexico and Honduras. Still on his “dive” list are the Maldives Islands in the Indian Ocean, Galapagos Islands in Ecuador, Coco’s Islands in Costa Rica and Raja Ampat in Indonesia. Thangiah, who grew up in Sri Lanka, is an unlikely candidate to take up scuba. He couldn’t even swim until 15 years ago when, by sheer willpower, he taught himself in SRU’s Aebersold Student Recreation Center pool. Swimming led to an interest in snorkeling and scuba diving, taught at SRU by Robert Ogoreuc, assistant professor of physical and health education.

“T here are times I would see something and I can just be mesmerized by it and forget that I am underwater. There are times that I am looking for buried treasure to fund ‘Dr. Sam’s Scuba Retirement Fund.’”

As a beginner snorkeler, Thangiah said, he could never get close enough to see the fish. The only way to get close to them was to go diving, which required a leap of faith.

“When I was visiting Malaysia, my brother-in-law convinced me and my wife to get certified in scuba diving,” he said. “Being naïve about diving, I agreed to it. After signing all the required documents, the dive master took us on a boat to the middle of the sea. He stops the boat and tells us to jump into the water, swim to a buoy about 150 yards away, touch the buoy and then swim back to the boat. To say I was hyperventilating would be an understatement. After much hyperventilation and struggles, I completed the task and then the diving lessons began.”

Scuba diving requires an assortment of equipment. Thangiah said he uses a 3 millimeter wet suit. There are also 5 millimeter and 7 millimeter thick wetsuits. The thicker the suit, the more body warmth it retains. He said the most critical pieces of equipment are the buoyancy compensator, which acts as a ballast, the regulator, air tank, fins and mask. The regulator includes a pressure gauge that lets him know how much air he has remaining in the tank. A depth gauge measures water depth and a weight belt allows him to sink into the water.

Although the average depth of the ocean is around 14,000 feet, the law restricts recreational diving depths to a maximum of between 30 and 40 meters (100 and 130 feet), beyond which a variety of safety issues make it unsafe to dive with recreational equipment and require additional training. A depth of 30 to 40 meters is plenty to see and photograph marine life, Thangiah noted.
“I take along underwater equipment for taking videos and pictures,” Thangiah said. “I enjoy doing underwater photography and videos and editing them. They make the memories last longer and also document what different diving locations have to offer. In addition, my kids enjoy watching the underwater videos and the marine life.”

Thangiah said he loves sharing the same underwater space with fish, including clown fish.

“Your heart initially skips a beat when you are about five feet away from them and you are sharing the same space with them,” he said. “Clown fish, like all other fish, do not like their space to be breached; they will swim right towards you, regardless of their size, to let you know that you should stay out of their space.”

He said he has spotted a large number of unusual sea creatures in coral-rich areas and amid shipwrecks. The colorful species include ghost pipe fish, lion fish, gorilla crab, puffer fish, shark eel, mandarin fish, octopus, cuttle fish and pygmy sea horses, “to mention a few.”

“I am amazed by the colors, shapes, size, mobility and camouflage capabilities of the underwater life,” he said. “There are times I would see something and I can just be mesmerized by it and forget that I am underwater. There are times that I am looking for buried treasure to fund ‘Dr. Sam’s Scuba Retirement Fund.’”

Scuba diving, like many hobbies, requires time, training and resources. To become certified you must be at least 12 years of age, be in good physical shape, pass a required watermanship test, enroll in a registered course, learn the academics, practice and then complete open water training and certification dives.

As with any adventure sport, there is some risk involved. However, experts agree scuba diving is not dangerous as long as a diver seeks thorough training, follows safe diving guidelines, uses proper gear and dives within his experience level.

One of the most critical safe diving guidelines is that no one ever dives alone; you always dive with a partner known as a dive buddy. Thangiah said he and his dive buddy check each other’s equipment to make sure everything is in order; form an agreed upon dive plan and take responsibility for one another. During a dive, the buddy remains within close proximity to minimize potential for accidents and respond to an emergencies.

“The only close calls I have had are when I have been separated from my dive buddy and the rest of the group,” Thangiah said. “Sometimes I am so engrossed in getting a picture or video of sea life that I totally lose track of time and the group.”

Scuba diving has opened my eyes to an entire new world. Every dive is a gift from the sea.”
Throughout the last 28 years, George Mihalik has stood in front of countless rooms full of people and delivered powerful, impactful speeches that would resonate with those attending for years to come. Many of those individuals were Slippery Rock University football players — players privileged to wear the Green and White from 1988-2015.
In December, Mihalik took the podium one last time to deliver one more speech to a room full of people that couldn’t wait to hear what he had to say. But this time it was different. This time the talk was going to be all about him, clearly something out of his comfort zone.

“How do you put 44 years into a statement,” he began. “I’ll try.”

Speaking from the heart, and often having to stop to keep his emotions in check, Mihalik spoke the words the Rock family knew would come some day, but were dreading to hear – after 44 years on the field, as a student-athlete and then coach, he was hanging up his whistle.

In the crowded room, silent except for the occasional tearful-sniffle, Mihalik went on to tell anecdotes of his first days on campus as a student in 1970. He would thank all the players that played for him and the coaches that worked with him. Most importantly, he would thank his wife, Laura, and his daughters, Jenny Lee and Beth, for all of their support throughout his career.

Shortly after the speech began, the reality set in that the all-time leader in coaching wins in Rock football history was stepping away from a program to which he has devoted nearly 70 percent of his life.

To understand how we got to this day in December, you have to go way back to the beginning.

Mihalik grew up in Ebensburg, Pennsylvania as the youngest of three sons. His father, George, was a coal miner, while his mother, Helen, was a stay-at-home mom that devoted herself to raising her three sons, Denny, Bob and George.

“I owe a lot to my parents for instilling the blue-collar work ethic in me,” said Mihalik. “We learned about the importance of family and loyalty from my parents. I think those are values I have carried with me my entire life.”

Mihalik was a standout high-school athlete and when the time came to choose a landing spot to continue his football career and his studies, he selected Slippery Rock and head coach Bob DiSpirito.

“I think that Coach D was a man that shared the same values as I did,” said Mihalik. “He ran his program like a family and that was something I admired and wanted to be part of. There aren’t enough words to describe what Coach D meant to Slippery Rock University and the football program, and to me personally. I owe my whole career to Coach D.”

Mihalik would be the first to tell you the decision to come to Slippery Rock University as a student in the fall of 1970 was one of the best decisions he’s ever made. It ignited his passion for the University and is at the root of most of the great things that have happened in his personal and professional lives.
On the field, Mihalik quarterbacked the program to back-to-back Pennsylvania State championships in 1972 and 1973. The next year he began what would become a 41-year love affair with coaching when he joined DiSpirito’s staff as a graduate assistant, helping the team to the 1974 Pennsylvania State title as well.

A one-year stint at the University of Kentucky in 1976 was the only time in the last 45 years that Mihalik has been away from The Rock. He returned in 1977 as an assistant coach under DiSpirito and served in various assistant roles until 1988, when president Robert Aebersold offered him the head coaching position.

“At that point in time all head coaches were also faculty members, so I was honored to have the opportunity to not only be named the head football coach at Slippery Rock, but also to continue teaching as a professor at my alma mater,” said Mihalik. “How fortunate can one guy be to have those opportunities?”

Over the next 28 years Mihalik would leave his mark on the University in many ways, perhaps none bigger than on the academic side.

Mihalik would be instrumental in helping create the safety management program that is now the third largest program at Slippery Rock University, a program that has some of the best job placement rates and highest starting salaries of all majors offered at the University.

“I am extremely proud of the safety management department here at The Rock,” said Mihalik. “I always knew I wanted to teach and to have the opportunity to teach in this program was life changing for me. I will remember all the championships and men that played for me on Saturdays, but I will also remember all of the tremendous strides that were made in our academic program.”

While thousands of students that have come through the safety management program will remember Mihalik as head coach of the football program and finished his career with an incredible .638 winning percentage. He led the team to eight Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference Western Division titles, two PSAC overall titles after the championship game was instated in 2008 and six NCAA Division II playoff appearances. He twice led the team to at least the quarterfinals and once led the team to the national semifinals.

Mihalik won 197 games as head coach of the football program and finished his career with an incredible .638 winning percentage. He led the team to eight Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference Western Division titles, two PSAC overall titles after the championship game was instated in 2008 and six NCAA Division II playoff appearances. He twice led the team to at least the quarterfinals and once led the team to the national semifinals.

His 197 wins are the most in Slippery Rock history, the fourth most in PSAC history and the 27th most ever recorded by an NCAA Division II coach.

Mihalik received six PSAC West Coach of the Year awards from his peers, including the 2015 honor. He also received the division Coach of the Year honor three consecutive seasons from 1997-99 and again in 2013. Mihalik also earned the American Football Coaches Association’s regional Coach of the Year honor in 1997, 1998 and 2013.

In 1991, he received the Tri-State Intercollegiate Football Officials’ Association’s top-coach award and, in 2012, he was selected as the winner of the Eastern Collegiate Football Officials Association’s sportsmanship award.

He has been inducted into five different halls of fame: SRU Athletic (1997), Butler Area Sports (2001), Cambria County Sports (2006), Pennsylvania Sports Western Chapter (2012) and Bishop Carroll High School (2012).

“I have always maintained the coaching awards I have been fortunate enough to receive should be cut up and presented to the assistant coaches and players,” Mihalik said. “Throughout the years, I have had the good fortune of having excellent assistant coaches and players, and they deserve the credit.”

That sentiment and desire to share the honors with his assistants and former players is what made Mihalik so special to Slippery Rock football. He always put family first and treated the players on the team as a second family, a group he would call a brotherhood.

“At that point in time all head coaches were also faculty members, so I was honored to have the opportunity to not only be named the head football coach at Slippery Rock, but also to continue teaching as a professor at my alma mater,” said Mihalik. “How fortunate can one guy be to have those opportunities?”

Over the next 28 years Mihalik would leave his mark on the University in many ways, perhaps none bigger than on the academic side.

Mihalik would be instrumental in helping create the safety management program that is now the third largest program at Slippery Rock University, a program that has some of the best job placement rates and highest starting salaries of all majors offered at the University.

“I am extremely proud of the safety management department here at The Rock,” said Mihalik. “I always knew I wanted to teach and to have the opportunity to teach in
The family atmosphere extended beyond just the coaches, players and support staff for the program. Mihalik made efforts to include students, cheerleaders and the band as part of the program. You could see him before every home game making his way over to the "Rock Rowdies" student section to salute them. After every game, win or lose, Mihalik would lead the team to the sideline to salute the fans as the band played the Alma Mater, reminding everyone there was more than just a football game taking place.

The family environment was an extension of Mihalik's own family, which adopted The Rock football program as their own. Thoughout the last 28 years, you could find Mihalik's brothers at nearly every game, his mother at as many games as she could get to before her passing, and his wife and daughters at nearly every game. You could find the whole family tailgating before every home game and nearly every away game.

This was especially notable at the first game of the 2011 season, when the entire family was present as Mihalik was honored for his 40 years of service to the University by SRU officials renaming the stadium "Mihalik-Thompson Stadium." It was among the last chances Mihalik’s mother, Helen, had to see her son coach before she passed away in 2012.

"Some of my favorite photos from that experience are of her holding the plaque and looking up at the name on the stadium," said Mihalik. "I was very fortunate to have her with me for that moment in my life."

Mihalik took great pride in having his name on the stadium, and it showed with the team’s performance in home games after the renaming ceremony. The Rock own a 26-2 record at home beginning with the 2011 season, going undefeated four times in five years. Slippery Rock currently owns the nation’s longest home winning streak and has won 17 straight games spanning three years at Mihalik-Thompson Stadium.

"I always wanted to go out on top," said Mihalik. "This year just felt right. To win the PSAC West for the third year in a row, to repeat as PSAC champions and to reach the NCAA quarterfinals were all great accomplishments, but I am incredibly proud of our home record. To know each time I see that stadium that we went undefeated at home for the last three years of my career and didn’t lose a single game in that stretch-- that is something special. Rock Nation made this one of the hardest places in the country to play. I can’t thank everyone enough for making home games at The Rock so special."

Mihalik also noted that he would never leave the program if it wasn’t in a great position to continue to succeed.

"I would never want to leave the cupboard bare," he said. "This team has a lot of talent and great individuals returning next year. It has an incredible staff and Shawn Lutz (the new head coach) knows the tradition and the culture of this program. He is the right choice to lead this team. The time was right for him to take over and continue building what he’s been a part of for the last 20 years."

"Slippery Rock University has been my life for 44 years," he said. "It has provided me with the opportunity to have a wonderful teaching and coaching career. Most importantly though, I met my wife Laura at The Rock and we raised our daughters here in a stable and wonderful area. The University will always hold a special place in the hearts of the entire Mihalik family."

From all the great memories from which to choose, Mihalik doesn’t hesitate for a moment when he shares what the most important was to him.

"Slippery Rock University has been my life for 44 years," he said. "It has provided me with the opportunity to have a wonderful teaching and coaching career. Most importantly though, I met my wife Laura at The Rock and we raised our daughters here in a stable and wonderful area. The University will always hold a special place in the hearts of the entire Mihalik family."

What comes next for Mihalik will be very well deserved family time with Laura and their grandchildren. Beth and her husband Jamie have a daughter, Hannah, and Jenny Lee and her husband Teddy have a son, Tyler. Ironically, both of Mihalik’s daughters are expecting their second child in April – within a week of each other.

"I won’t be going anywhere," said Mihalik. "Slippery Rock is our home and will continue to be. I will really miss being on the sideline, especially when some of our current guys break major records over the next couple years, but I will be there to shake their hand and congratulate them. It just won’t be right on the sideline."
'Doctor' Wilma

Just call her

After 57 years at Slippery Rock University, Wilma Cavill, recently retired assistant professor in safety management, would be the first to tell you that nothing much surprises her anymore. Dec. 12, 2015 she got the surprise of her life.

The University surprised Cavill, who had served as the University’s grand marshal for commencement and other academic programs, with an Honorary Doctorate of Public Service during the winter commencement ceremonies. SRU President Cheryl Norton awarded the “surprise” honorary degree on behalf of the council of trustees and the University. “This honorary degree for public service recognizes the immeasurable contributions Wilma has made to Slippery Rock University and more importantly, the students we serve,” Norton said.

Cavill began her affiliation with SRU in 1948 as a physical education major and member of the gymnastics team, serving as captain her junior year.

After graduating, Cavill taught physical education in her hometown and received her master’s degree in education from Westminster College.

In 1958, Norman Weisenfluh, SRU president from 1953-1964, invited Cavill to campus to talk to her about returning to the University. Cavill accepted a position supervising student teachers and as an aquatic specialist, and she never looked back.

Lovingly known as SRU’s ‘elder statesperson,’ Cavill served under, and commanded the ear of nine presidents, (14 if you count all the actings and interims), pioneered women’s athletics and settled disputes as a faculty union leader all while educating thousands of students.
Within two weeks of her employment, Cavill would begin a six-year run coaching gymnastics, serving as head women’s coach and assistant men’s coach.

Lovingly known as SRU’s ‘elder statesperson,’ Cavill served under, and commanded the ear of nine presidents, (14 if you count all the actings and interims), pioneered women’s athletics and settled disputes as a faculty union leader all while educating thousands of students.

She was instrumental in the development of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties, the organization that represents faculty and coaches, and was a member since its founding in 1971. She’s now a proud member of APSCURF, the retired members branch of the organization.

At her retirement, she was the longest serving faculty member in Pennsylvania’s State System of Education.
Some choose to become a police officer in order to serve justice. Others do so to protect the community in which they live. Patrick Deachilla did it for his father.

Deachilla, a 2009 Slippery Rock University graduate, is picking up where his father, William Martin, left off – patrolling the streets of Baltimore as a newly-minted member of that city’s Northern District Police Department.

Not only is he keeping watch over the same streets that his father once did, he’s doing so wearing the same badge number.

Martin was shot and killed in the line of duty October 1989 as he and his partner were responding to a reported drug deal. At the time of his death, Martin was a 10-year veteran of the force, leaving behind his wife, Kim, and 3-year old Patrick.

According to the Baltimore City Police Department, the badge issuance is the first line of duty death legacy in the history of the department.

“The whole thing has been kind of surreal,” said Deachilla, who was presented with his father’s badge number when he was sworn in Oct. 27, 2015 along with 35 other officers.

“The deputy commissioner presented it to me. His family has had continuous service in the department since 1921, so he appreciates what this was all about. It was truly an honor.”

In addition to badges, police academy graduates are presented with commemorative spantoons (wooden batons) that have their police identification number engraved upon them. Deachilla’s included an extra inscription, “The Legacy Continues,” along with his father’s ID number.

“I thought the ceremony would be like any other,” said Deachilla. “I thought they’d hand me my badge, toss the patrol car keys at me and tell me to go to work, but it was much more than that and I’m very grateful. It was very emotional and as it was happening, I was feeling bad for my fellow officers as the night was about all of us completing this journey together, not about me being singled out because of my circumstance.

“But everyone was just great about it and very supportive. They knew my story and many of them mentioned that they were honored to share in what went on which meant a lot.”

The idea for the passing down of the badge number didn’t come from
Deachilla, but through his mother, Kim, via a family friend, shortly after her son entered the academy.

Kim Deachilla then spent “about four months” getting the idea passed through the police department’s chain of command until it finally reached the commissioner’s office.

“The idea got one of two reactions,” said Kim Deachilla, “Either people thought it was wonderful, or they thought it was creepy given his father’s death. Traditionally, once a badge is retired, it stays that way, but enough people further up the ladder found it a wonderful way to honor my deceased husband’s memory, so they helped make it happen.”

Law enforcement wasn’t Patrick Deachilla’s first career choice. The former SRU athletic training major previously worked as a physician extender for an orthopedic surgeon, as well as a high school athletic trainer, before answering the call to serve and protect.

It was while taking part in the 2014 Police Unity Tour, an annual 208-mile bicycle ride from New Jersey to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C., that Deachilla felt the time was right for a career move.

“It wasn’t as though I saw myself being an athletic trainer forever,” said Deachilla. “When I was in that field, I was all in. I love sports, I love medicine and that field provided a great combination of the two.

“Being a police officer was always in the back of mind. It was my backup plan if athletic training didn’t work out. The problem was, I knew my mom didn’t want that for me after what happened to my dad.”

But when Kim Deachilla and her husband Paul met Patrick at the memorial, saw his interactions with not only the Baltimore officers, but also other officers from around the country, she knew where her son belonged.

“I always wanted something different for him because of what happened to his father,” said Kim Deachilla. “When I saw how he fit right in as part of that group … the camaraderie, the exhilaration, the acceptance of him as one of their own, I knew that brotherhood is where he belonged.

“I was hoping he’d choose another department – not because we don’t love Baltimore, but because of the circumstance with his father – but he’s where he should be, and I’ve never been prouder.”

Patrick Deachilla added that the choice of department was never in question for him given all that the city had done for his family at the time of his father’s death. “The department and the city did so much for us, it’s only right that I give a little back,” he said. “Baltimore has always had my heart and always will. I applied to other departments to just to make my mom happy, but I’m where I was meant to be.”

Martin’s former partner, Herman Brooks, who was also shot the night Martin died, attended Deachilla’s police academy gradation. “I can’t express how much it touched me when I found out that Billy’s son was receiving his father’s badge,” said Brooks. “It was almost like Billy was here applauding with us.”

The Deachilla family’s connection to Slippery Rock University didn’t end with Patrick. His sister Nina participated in the Winter Commencement Ceremony Dec. 12, 2015, graduating with a degree in communication: public relations.
UNEXTINGUISHABLE
PASSION
Brush fires, vehicle extractions, defibrillators and false alarms are not exactly the kind of material one might find on the ACT. But for many Slippery Rock University students those things are as common as essays, spring break and cramming for final exams once they arrive on campus.

For decades, students from SRU have been volunteering their services with the Slippery Rock Volunteer Fire Company. No matter if they're in class or out on the town, they are on call and ready to serve the community at a moment's notice.

"Without a doubt, the department relies heavily on the support it gets from the University's students," said Ken Taggert, SRVFC fire chief. "Honestly, if it wasn't for them, we would not be able to properly serve the area."

Serving the area is no small feat. The SRVFC is responsible for servicing approximately 120 square miles with a roster that—while numbering 50 volunteers in total—includes just 20 active "call running" members. Of that total, 10 are SRU students. Declining membership is a trend that not only affects the Slippery Rock department, but volunteer fire companies nationwide.
Nationally, 69 percent of all firefighters are unpaid volunteers, a number that has declined 13 percent over the last 30 years according to the National Volunteer Fire Council, an advocacy group for volunteer emergency personnel.

In Pennsylvania, 96 percent of all fire departments are volunteer, many of which are struggling due to decreases in resources and funding, according to the Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee. These problems have resulted in many departments suffering from severe staffing and funding shortages that sometimes prevent them from satisfactorily responding to incidents or being able to provide adequate equipment for their departments.

“We receive a lot of our funding from the townships and from tax dollars,” said Taggert, “with most of that going toward gear, equipment, the trucks and our basic bills.

“We’re fortunate in that we haven’t really lost anything (funding wise),” Taggert continued, “but we haven’t really gained either. Everything gets more expensive by the day, which doesn’t make it easy, but we’re holding our own.

“From a personnel standpoint, part of the issue is that no one does anything for free anymore,” Taggert said. “Other states, like Maryland, provide a retirement benefit (for volunteer firefighters), which is a nice incentive. However, Pennsylvania does not and that’s part of the reason we’re losing local people.

“But as far as SRU, there’s been no decrease at all. We’re very fortunate to have such a great group of dedicated volunteers whose efforts do not go unnoticed.”

Volunteers like Matt Brand, a freshman from Butler, Pennsylvania, are critical to the squad. The safety management major arrived at SRU with more than three years of fire experience courtesy of his time with the Adams Area Fire District in Mars, Pennsylvania while he was in high school.

“I didn’t want to wait too long to find the firehouse or to lend a hand,” said Brand. “I applied (to the SRVFC) a couple of days before fall classes began.

“Being a firefighter is such a rewarding and interesting experience,” Brand continued. “As cheesy as it may sound, you’re helping people in their time of need, and that really means something. They are distressed and they are looking to you for assistance…their house is on fire, they’re trapped in a vehicle…and while they may not be outwardly joyful, you know they are grateful.

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For some, being “a part of something like that” can last well beyond their years at SRU.

A case in point is Mike Grinder, a 2010 graduate and former political science major. Having originally attended the University from 1997-2000, Grinder is a career firefighter. He currently serves as a captain for Montgomery County Fire/Rescue in Maryland, a company he’s been with for 15 years.

“I thought I’d possibly go to law school or work on political campaigns,” said Grinder.
based on his choice of major. “But my dad and uncle were both volunteer firefighters and my experience began in my hometown as a junior firefighter when I was 14 years old.

“It was natural for me to join the department in Slippery Rock,” Grinder continued, “and as much as I loved the University, I loved hanging out at the firehouse even more which led to my decision to pursue firefighting as my career.”

A career that later necessitated Grinder’s return to the University. “I’m one step away from being a battalion chief at the moment,” said Grinder. “To go beyond that, to be the chief, the minimum requirement is a bachelor’s degree. I needed to finish what I had started in order to secure my future, so I went back to Slippery Rock about five years ago.”

Despite being able to finish the bulk of his degree online, Grinder found it important to attend his final classes in person. “I love the town and the people,” said Grinder. “I met my wife in Slippery Rock, and the fire department played such a big part of who I became… I not only wanted my degree to come from (Slippery Rock), but I wanted to do it ‘hands on’ like you’re supposed to do it.”

Grinder took that “hands on” approach a step further during his time back on campus to again log a few volunteer hours with the SRVFC. “I like to help out whenever I get back to town,” he said.

Connor Mayes, a junior park and resource management major from Mill Hall, Pennsylvania, has been with the SRVFC for almost 16 months, signing on because it sounded like something “fun to do.”

“I drive by the station every day,” said Mayes, “and when I saw the ‘Help Wanted’ sign out front, I stopped in to learn more. I wasn’t sure I wanted to lean toward the law enforcement end of my major and now that I’ve experienced (firefighting), I’m thinking that fighting forest fires is where I’m headed.

“Working for the department will not only provide me with valuable training for down the road, but will help me network and make connections that could be really valuable.”

The experiences gained through the SRVFC may also help to smooth out the rough edges for young firefighters like Mayes.

Just part way through his training – which included four months and more than 135 hours of classroom and hands-on experience – Mayes’ first call was to a utility pole fire at which he promptly froze upon arrival.

“It was more or less a ‘deer in the headlights’ situation,” Mayes said with a laugh. “Everyone knew what they were doing and jumped into action grabbing gear and tools and I was just kind of standing there thinking ‘Um…guys?’

“I’m much better now. I promise!”

For counterpart Lizzie Martin, a junior adapted physical activity major from Cheswick, Pennsylvania, joining the department via the “buddy system” with Mayes was the only way to go.

“I originally was looking to be an EMT,” said Martin, “but I don’t have a car on campus, so I had no way of getting to the training sessions. Once (Connor) joined the department I thought I’d give it a try… plus I’d have a ride to class.

“The way I see it, someone has to do it and if everyone keeps telling themselves that someone else will do it, no one ever will do it. I see it as my chance to step up, give something of myself to the community and have its back.”

Matt Chamberlain, a 2000 SRU graduate, saw his time with SRVFC as an opportunity to not only serve the community, but to establish his own identity. “I had joined the local department where I grew up in Volunteer firefighting by the numbers

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<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>69 percent</td>
<td>Of a total of 1,140,750 firefighters in the U.S., 786,150, or 69 percent, are volunteers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 percent</td>
<td>Decrease in the number of volunteer firefighters since 1984, which dropped from 897,750 to 783,300 in 2012.</td>
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<td>24 percent</td>
<td>Percentage of volunteer firefighters age 50 and older in 2013, an increase from 12 percent since 1987.</td>
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<td>$140.7B</td>
<td>Estimated amount saved annually by local municipalities in salary and benefit costs.</td>
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Source: National Fire Protection Association
Towanda (Pennsylvania), while I was in high school,” said Chamberlain.

“My older brother, Chris, had done the same before me and at home, that’s what I was... Chris’ brother,” Chamberlain continued. “But at Slippery Rock, no one knew him. I walked into the department and became my own person and my own firefighter. My time with the department provided a well-rounded growth experience for me as an individual, which was very important.”

Chamberlain, who majored in park and resource management, works as a natural resources officer for the state of Delaware. He has also served as a volunteer firefighter with the Aetna Hose, Hook and Ladder Company of Newark, Delaware since 2009.

“Being a firefighter requires nerves of steel when the moment calls for it,” said Mike Wilson, a 2001 SRU graduate and former SRVFC volunteer who worked alongside Grinder and Chamberlain. “That’s probably why I’ve done so well teaching driver’s education to high school students over the past five years.”

Wilson, a volunteer firefighter with Undine Fire Company 2 in Bellafonte, Pennsylvania, recalled the “family-friendly” feel of the firehouse, and the camaraderie born out of the living arrangement, while the department would gain from having close to 24-hour, on-site coverage that would help reduce response times.

Taggert added that he’d like to kick off the program with enough housing to accommodate three to four students, with future expansion for six to eight University volunteers.

The proposed program would add yet another unique element to the continuing relationship between the department and its University volunteers, something that’s not lost on Brand.

“Being a part of this department allows me to do things that are very different from what other people my age often do,” he said. “It isn’t just fires we’re putting out. We’re running medical calls, helping to settle domestic disputes, responding to vehicle accidents and rescuing pets or loved ones.

“If being a part of something like this doesn’t help you mature, nothing will. It’s an experience like none other and I wouldn’t trade it for the world.”

“I t really was a network of brothers and sisters. Many times, the majority of the group you went on calls with were all fellow SRU students.”

-Mike Wilson, ’01
When the former international student arrived in Slippery Rock in the winter of 1993, he was awakened from a deep sleep by the screams of passing sirens.

“It was my first night in town,” said Soler, “and I had been stuck at JFK (International Airport) for 12 hours waiting for my flight to Pittsburgh. Once we boarded the plane, we sat on the tarmac for another six hours before takeoff due to weather or maintenance issues. By the time my buddy picked me up and I got to bed, I was wrecked.

“As soon as I fell asleep, I hear this incredible shrieking and as I’m jumping out of bed, I’m wondering if it’s an air raid siren or something,” he continued. “I had no idea what was going on.”

But as the Philippine native soon discovered, Slippery Rock was not under attack, rather Soler had been startled by the sounds of a hurried fire truck.

“As I watched it go by, with nothing else moving anywhere in the dark,” said Soler, “I knew there was an attraction.”

Fast forward 23 years later and Soler is still logging time with the Slippery Rock Volunteer Fire Company, only now he works as a volunteer paramedic – putting in 16-24 hours per week – in addition to his full-time job as an outreach marketing representative for Allegheny General Hospital’s LifeFlight program.

Prior to his position with Allegheny General, Soler served as an EMT with Butler Memorial Hospital, shift supervisor/EMT with Butler Ambulance and as the assistant fire chief with the South Butler Fire Department, all as a result of his involvement with the SRVFC.

“It’s very important to me to keep some hours with the Slippery Rock department. (This department) gave me my start and set me on a career path that I’ve loved. It gave me my purpose, so I have a responsibility to give back to the (fire)house and the community.”

“He had great stories to share about the fulfillment of helping others and giving back,” Soler said, “so I got myself down to the department and told them I wanted to be a part of it all.

“I was new to Slippery Rock, new to the University…and fraternity life wasn’t something that interested me. I wanted something else. I thought about what my cousin had said and the call of that first siren…I knew where I belonged.”

Soler had been with the department for only one week when the Kiester Apartments caught fire, leaving many of the SRU students who lived at the complex without a place to live.

“I was pretty limited as to what I did at that fire,” said Soler. “I did some crowd control and changed out air tanks for the other firefighters, but the energy of being there and being part of the solution was huge. I knew I wanted to learn more and play a bigger role.”

Bigger roles were exactly what Soler took part in as his time with the SRVFC continued.

Following his initial time as a firefighter, Soler would go on to serve the department as an EMT and paramedic before being elected to serve as medical officer. Before Soler, no college student had ever become an officer with the company. In that role, Soler was responsible for the operation of the department’s rescue services, including keeping the unit’s two ambulances on the ready at all times.

As Soler’s climb up the company ladder continued, it only confirmed for him that he had found his life’s calling.

“The firehouse was always my home away from home,” said Soler. “I’d spend my weekends hanging out there, going on calls, even when I wasn’t on duty.

“Being there made me feel at peace,” Soler continued. “Whether you’re on a truck, or a hose line or riding in an ambulance, you know you have a greater purpose and you get instant gratification.

“You’re saving someone’s home, someone’s property or someone’s life…you’re making a real difference.”

And it would seem that that snowy night in 1994 made all the difference for Soler as well.
The opportunity to collect and fit people in need with shoes, winter boots, socks and foot care items such as moisturizing lotion and soap is a great way for students to apply new knowledge as they provide service to a local population in need. Physical therapists work with people across all economic strata.”

Soles for homeless Souls
When Nancy Shipe, a Slippery Rock University assistant professor in the School of Physical Therapy, volunteers at a Pittsburgh street ministry for the homeless, she feels compelled to serve people with no place to live due to domestic violence, job loss, bad health and just plain bad luck.

Shipe is confronting the problem by working with SRU doctor of physical therapy students to collect and fit the homeless with shoes, winter boots, socks, coats and other supplies. The primary goal is to provide people at risk for foot complications with boots and shoes that fit well and warm socks to deal with cold weather elements. Like people in the general population, many poor and homeless have diabetes.

“People with diabetes are at a greater risk for foot wounds as well as foot and leg amputation,” Shipe said.

“Working with the homeless helps her and her students develop cultural competence and put theory into action, all while providing service to people in need. "Part of the curriculum of physical therapy students is assessment, management and prevention of wounds and amputations," she said.

Poorly fitting shoes may cause a foot wound that may become an obstacle to employment, although many factors contribute to underemployment and homelessness.

“The most poignant statement I ever heard from a volunteer was, ‘I realize I am one bad decision away from being here myself,’” Shipe said.

Shipe, who joined SRU in 2007, has been helping the homeless for 12 years as a youth ministry leader at St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Freeport, as well as SRU physical therapy groups. A licensed physical therapist for more than 30 years, she is board certified as a clinical specialist in orthopedic physical therapy.

SRU student participation in the project is voluntary. Volunteers collect needed items, which they then distribute in the late fall or early spring when the needs of the homeless are great. Shipe meets students in Pittsburgh to assist them with fitting clients with shoes and dispensing the items collected.

The group recently distributed 50 pairs of shoes, 20 coats, more than 50 pairs of socks, scarves, hats, gloves, sweats, pants and blankets.

Shipe and students directly interact with the homeless at the corner of Boulevard of the Allies and Stanwix Street in downtown Pittsburgh. She said it is important to see the poor and homeless as people, addressing them by name and asking if they have family members who also could be served.

In many cases, students experience an “aha” moment.

“Second-year physical therapy students learn about shoe prescription and care of people with diabetic foot complications,” Shipe said. “The opportunity to collect and fit people in need with shoes, winter boots, socks and foot care items such as moisturizing lotion and soap is a great way for students to apply new knowledge as they provide service to a local population in need. Physical therapists work with people across all economic strata.”

Shipe said the team's encounters with the homeless have defied stereotypes.

There is "Dave," who has boys ages 3 and 5 and needed items for himself and his sons. "Chester" lives on the streets and has physical problems but felt valued as a person by the team's contact. "Mary," a 60-something Croatian immigrant, occupies a low-rent apartment but cannot afford food. Her favorite color is red and she would love a parka or red winter boots size 10 or 11, Shipe said.

And then there was a young man in his 20s who is homeless but recently landed a job in a North Side grocery stocking shelves.

“The man must wear black pants for work but only had a single pair of pants,” Shipe said. "That made it difficult for him. He had to wash the only pair of pants he owns daily in order to be appropriately groomed for work. In this case, the difference between him remaining homeless or continuing to work so he could afford an apartment was a pair of black pants."

Shipe said many people in crisis are polite and care about the needs of others.

She said “Chester” waited until the end of the shoe and clothing distribution time to take additional supplies. “He did not want to take items others may need. Then there was a pregnant woman whose coat no longer fit, so she selected a donated coat and left her smaller coat for someone else,” Shipe said.

The general public, Shipe noted, typically avoids interacting with the poor and homeless in a personal or physical manner. Students participating in the project work on overcoming barriers to help the person, she said.

“Physical therapists therapeutically touch and handle patients in many settings regardless of the individual’s personal hygiene, cleanliness of their clothing or economic status,” Shipe said.

Similar to the non-homeless, the homeless run the gamut of age, race and gender.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, in January 2015, 564,708 people were homeless on a given night in the United States. Of that number, 206,286 were people in families and 358,422 were individuals. Nearly one-quarter of all homeless people were children, under the age of 18 (23 percent or 127,787). Nine percent (or 52,973) were between the ages of 18 and 24, and 68 percent (or 383,948) were 25 years or older. About 8 percent of the homeless, 47,725, are veterans.

“I have met convicts who served their time, vets, families with small children, teens on their own, drug addicts and people with mental illnesses,” Shipe said. “I have also met people who choose to live on the streets due to domestic violence or economic circumstance. I am not afraid since we are all on neutral territory. I often see the same people and get to know them a bit. We share a handshake or hug like other friends.”
The other
He doesn't hold a membership card, pay any dues or attend any meetings, yet Henry Norton finds himself in a rather exclusive club. Slippery Rock University’s first-ever “First Man” is not only somewhat of a rare breed, but a trailblazer to boot.

Married to Cheryl Norton, who in 2012 became the first woman in SRU’s history to be named president, Norton has served the role of inaugural presidential spouse not once, but twice. And, given that women make up only 26 percent of the college and university presidents in the United States, that puts him in pretty rare company.

Prior to arriving in Slippery Rock, Cheryl Norton served six years as the first female president in the history of Southern Connecticut State University (2004-2010), making Henry Norton – you guessed it – SCSU’s inaugural presidential husband.

“I like to joke that if Hillary (Clinton), or any woman, becomes president (of the United States), I’m one of the few spouses that could actually educate the new ‘first husband’ on things like etiquette, responsibilities…and how to follow in his wife’s footsteps,” said Henry Norton with a laugh.

But make no mistake; Norton has walked his own path. The oldest of three children, Norton lived what he termed “a pretty standard childhood” in 1950s Wallingford, Connecticut; a town that also produced a U.S. congressman, a U.S. senator, a World War I flying ace and infamous talk show host Morton Downey, Jr. He was named after his maternal grandfather who died 10 years prior to his birth.

“We lived in a fairly small town where we walked to school and came home for lunch,” said Henry Norton. “Everyone knew everyone else, you played Little League and outside with neighbor kids and you didn’t challenge authority.”

A three-sport athlete in high school – lacrosse, cross-country and wrestling – he would leave the East Coast to attend college, settling on Denison University, a private, liberal arts college 30 miles east of Columbus, Ohio.

Denison would also be the school of choice for the future Cheryl Norton. However, getting the eventual first couple off on their first date proved to be a challenge – at first.

Entering his senior year at Denison, Norton was employed as a director at the school’s student union, which included working shifts at the information desk, as well as ensuring delivery of student mail. Given that on-campus mailboxes were located directly across from the desk Norton manned, the tasks were harmonious, if not advantageous.

“At that time, they only hired male students to work the (information) desk,” said Norton. “As we were all boys interested in meeting girls – and looking for dates – you couldn’t have asked for a better job…or place to scout out girls.

“It was a definitely one of the perks that made the job highly coveted.”

It was during this time that he became “increasingly aware of Cheryl,” and took full advantage of the opportunities to put himself in front of SRU’s future president.

“She was on the women’s basketball team, so I knew of her, but the job allowed me the chance to say ‘hello’ to her when she came to get her mail,” Norton said. “From there, she’d usually head up to the fourth floor to study. Part of our job responsibility was to patrol the building and that usually led me upstairs…when she was there.”

Eventually working up the courage to move beyond daily pleasantries, Norton “extended an invitation for Cheryl” to join him on a university scavenger hunt, which she accepted – eventually.

“She was a bit hesitant to go as she had a test to study for. I asked her when (the test) was, and it wasn’t for a whole week,” said Norton. “So, I desperately asked if she could take one day off…just an evening… and she agreed.”

However, the night before the event, a fraternity brother paged him to the house phone and he just knew it was going to be bad news.

“Like a lot of high school and college aged boys, I didn’t have much confidence in my appeal to girls,” said Norton. “And when I heard it was Cheryl on the phone, I thought ‘Here I am again, failing with the girls…shoot.’”

Having suffered what he deemed a “plausible” knee injury during basketball practice, Cheryl Norton explained she’d be unable to meet the scavenger hunt’s demands of running back and forth across the campus.

Having suffered what he deemed a “plausible” knee injury during basketball practice, Cheryl Norton explained she’d be unable to meet the scavenger hunt’s demands of running back and forth across the campus.

After already having to convince her to take a study break in the first place, her injury report was another blow to his efforts. A bit frenzied, yet undeterred by this latest news, he battled on.

“If I was going to drown,” said Norton, “I was going to grasp at anything I could to stay afloat. As I felt myself going down for the last time, I blurted out, ‘How about a movie?’
“This is a great University with great people. I love this campus. It’s kind of like living in a park with buildings.”

While attending a festival reception, Norton spied an old friend from his childhood. The woman, whose father was Norton’s family doctor in his youth, was serving as the executive assistant to the festival’s director — which had just lost its accountant.

“We lived a quarter mile down the road from each other growing up,” said Norton. “She put me in touch with her boss and I ended up spending eight years with the festival, up until we left for SRU in 2012.”

Despite a desire to continue in his chosen field once in Pennsylvania, a double knee replacement forced him to “work on himself” rather than on numbers.

“I looked into a couple of situations,” said Norton, “but there was nothing really going on, so I settled back into what I called a ‘forced retirement.’” If that’s what you can call his schedule of University activities. As SRU’s “first dude,” a title given to him by students, Norton helps represent the face of the University by attending University fundraising activities, sporting events, alumni meetings, student lectures, concerts, plays and community activities.

While he doesn’t receive any compensation from the University, Norton said he loves the role of being a University Ambassador. “How couldn’t I? This is a great University with great people. I love this campus. It’s kind of like living in a park with buildings.”

While he no longer heads to an office each day, Norton still finds plenty of work to do with the couple’s two German Shepherds, Salor and Xjinni, through the sport of Schutzhund.

Schutzhund, a German word meaning “protection dog,” focuses on developing and evaluating those traits in dogs that make them more useful and happier companions to their owners according to the United Schutzhund Clubs of America.

The training focuses on three parts: tracking, obedience and protection work, similar to that of police dogs. Performance evaluations, or trials, are designed to measure the dog’s mental stability, endurance, structural efficiencies, ability to scent, willingness to work, courage and trainability.

The sport offers an opportunity for owners to train their dogs and compete with each other in terms of both the handler’s ability to train and the dog’s ability to perform as required.

After having spent 10 years involved in sled dog racing, it’s easy to understand his pull toward the sport.

“Right from the beginning, Cheryl and I gravitated toward owning working dogs versus show dogs,” Norton said. “And this is something not only a little unique, but it’s a fun time for both the dogs and me. They really seem to enjoy it. I know that I do.”

Norton spends approximately 11 hours per week training the pair, which includes time at the Penn Ohio Working Dog Club in Greenville, an association he became aware of through an SRU student.

When Cheryl Norton arrived at the University in 2012, she did so without him, but with two dogs in tow and exercise equipment that needed to be moved to the basement of the presidential residence.

Enter a pair of SRU exercise science majors who relocated the equipment. As a thank you, the Norton’s invited the students and their girlfriends to a pizza party. While discussing the dogs’ unique training, one of the young ladies said she knew of a club that specialized in just such a thing.

“The one young lady had been interning with a physical therapist in New Castle,” he said, “and she knew that the therapist had been doing ‘some sort of German’ dog training, which led me to Penn Ohio’s door. It’s funny how these things can work.”


Especially when you consider that Slippery Rock is a “fairly small town…where everyone knows everyone else,” just like that little eastern town from Norton’s youth, with each of them now being a place he calls “home.”
Editorial Information

Please note that “Class Notes” lists the year alumni received their undergraduate degree from Slippery Rock University. To submit “Class Notes,” simply email us at alumni@sru.edu or go to http://rockalumnicafe.com with your information. You can also call 1.800.GET.ROCK or fax us at 724. 738.4784. We do not publish engagements or pregnancies, but we do publish marriages and births.

(M) – Denotes master’s degree
(F) – Denotes faculty member
(FR) – Denotes friend of Slippery Rock University

Please note that the editorial staff makes every effort to publish the information given to us by alumni as it is received. Due to space restrictions in the magazine, we sometimes have to edit the information. We are proud of all our alumni and regret having to make any revisions.

1940s
Wilma Cavill, ’48, physical education, and an SRU professor of safety management, retired recently after dedicating 57 years of service to Slippery Rock. Cavill, who served as graduation grand marshal, received an Honorary Doctorate of Public Service at the December 2015 commencement ceremonies.

1950s
Earl and Shirley (Dean) Birdy, ’51, recently celebrated their 63-year wedding anniversary. They married on June 19, 1952, in Heinz Chapel. They are former teachers who met while attending school at Slippery Rock University.

1960s
John Mehalic, ’68,’72, recently completed 47 years of service to the Forest Area School District in Tionesta. He served as a teacher, high school principal and as assistant to the superintendent. After retiring in 1998, Mehalic was elected to the School Board in 1999. He served as president, treasurer, and board secretary during his 16 years on the Board, retiring in December 2015.

1970s
Elaine Larson, ’71, recently retired after working 37 years in higher education in Kentucky. Her most recent position was director of student financial planning at Centre College in Danville, a position she had for 20 years.

Bruce Russell, ’72, dean emeritus of the Slippery Rock University College of Business, has been named interim vice president for academic affairs at Butler County Community College. He will serve through December 2016, overseeing the college’s Middle States Accreditation review.

George Mihalik, ’74,’76, recently retired from his positions as head football coach and safety management professor. Mihalik devoted 44 years of his life to SRU, as a student, football player, professor and football coach.

Clyde “Owen” Long, ’75, was inducted into the Somerset County Baseball Old Timers Association Hall of Fame. Long was a two sport athlete at SRU, lettering three years in both baseball and basketball. After playing basketball for six years with Athletes in Action, and two more years in Australia, Long returned home to Somerset County. He accepted a teaching position at Meyersdale Area High School and also coached basketball. Long’s baseball career continued, playing in the Old Timers League, then on to fast-pitch softball, and finally high-arch softball.

Mike and Maria (DeMarino) Bachuchin, ’76, recently participated in the 5K Adults with Congenital Heart Defects Walk in Chicago. The Bachuchins reside in Chesterton, Indiana, and have completed 38 years of teaching (and counting). Maria is an adult with congenital heart defects survivor.


Greg Sferra, ’78, SRU director of campus recreation, did what few other athletes have achieved – he pitched a perfect game. Sferra, who plays in the Latrobe-Derry Old-Timers Baseball League, tossed a perfect game to help his Palombo’s team defeat D&Z Printing, 4-0. Sferra faced the minimum 21 batters, striking out three and didn’t issue a walk or allow a hit for the perfect effort. An avid baseball fan, Sferra has been playing in the senior league for more than 10 years.

1980s
Rodger Hicks, ’82,’87, traveled to the Czech Republic and Germany with his daughter Sierra who is studying International Relations in Prague, Czech Republic. They also traveled to Munich, Stuttgart, Fussen, Neuschwanstein, Hohenschwangau and Linderhof Castles. It’s been more than 30 years since he completed his internship at the Stuttgart American and for his master’s degree in counseling psychology from the ROCK.

Guillermo Penafiel, ’83, recently exhibited his “Capitulos” series of photographs at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Penafiel’s photographs feature multiple images from different time periods that he blends. Many of the pictures represent his Chilean heritage. He has traveled to collect images in South America, Europe and Asia. He has taught photography at the UW-Stevens Point since 1991.

Scott Pennewill, ’83, was hired as the head women’s volleyball coach at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He finished his first season with an overall record of 17-15 as a member of the PSAC West. He has been married to Darla Pennewill, ’82, for 32 years and has two daughters, Lauren, 25, and Katie, 21.

Michael Wolf, ’88, has joined KEPRO as its vice president for government relations. In his new position, he is responsible for managing KEPRO’s
public affairs efforts nationally on a wide range of issues including access to care and integration of care issues in public healthcare payer programs. KEPRO, Inc. is a leading quality improvement and care management organization.

1990s
Shawn Austad, ’95, was recently hired at RETTEW’s Pittsburgh office. A geoscientist with two decades of experience, he manages projects including exploratory test boring program formulation, slope failure design and construction inspection, project scopes and budgets and geotechnical engineering design reports. He coordinates subsurface site investigations and construction with clients, subcontractors, regulatory agencies and property owners.

Linda McElroy, ’96, was recently selected as the communications director for the City of Salisbury, North Carolina. Prior to joining the Salisbury team, McElroy served as a public information specialist for the Virginia State Bar in Richmond, Virginia.

Nicole Gough, ’97, was recently hired as a senior environmental scientist at Dewberry, a privately held professional services firm, in the firm’s Orlando, Florida, office. Gough is responsible for overseeing the acquisition of federal, state and local environmental permits for various transportation, land planning and land development projects from central Florida to the panhandle.

Carrie Rowe, ’98, has received a 40 Under 40 Award from Pittsburgh Magazine. Honorees are chosen on the scope and basis of professional and personal accomplishments as well as their commitment to and overall impact on the Pittsburgh region. Rowe is the assistant superintendent at Beaver High School in Beaver.

Todd Morando, ’99, has been named director of the Emergency and Surgical Services departments at East Liverpool City Hospital in East Liverpool, Ohio. East Liverpool City Hospital is a 152-bed acute care hospital serving a population of more than 115,000 from throughout the tri-state area of Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

2000s
Dominic Verdi, ’02, was named partner with Ernst & Young. LLP. Verdi is a member of the firm’s assurance practice, which focuses on financial statement assurance services.

Aubrey Worek, ’02, represented the United States and was one of two Americans to place in the Top 5 at the 2015 Fitness America Pageant in Las Vegas, Nevada. Worek earned her “pro card” by scoring perfect in the fitness routine round and delivering her best physique in the swimsuit round. She was the highest scoring competitor in the interview round which ranked her number one in the Fitness Open category. Worek’s passion for fitness is also her livelihood as she owns and operates two businesses based out of Pittsburgh – Wellness Solutions at Work, a corporate wellness company, and FitnessEnvi, a dance and fitness studio.

Sean Lutz, ’03, masters in sport management, has been named SRU head football coach. Lutz has been a member of The Rock coaching staff since 1996, when he joined as a graduate assistant. He served as defensive coordinator for the past eight seasons.

Jennane Jones, ’13, professional studies, recently won the Grady and Mary Roberts Student Writing Award at the Pennsylvania College Personnel Association Conference. Jones won for her written research report on the importance of college identity centers such as those advocating for women, LGBTQ and multiculturalism.

Candace Robick, ’04,’07, has been named assistant principal at the Urban Pathways 5K College Charter School in Pittsburgh. The school just recently received a distinguished award for the implementation of their Core Knowledge Curriculum in Language Arts and Collaboration. It is the only school in the State of Pennsylvania to have received this distinction.

Jon Maccoll, ’07, was recently named to lead the new women’s swimming program at the University of Sioux Falls. In his previous position, he was recruiting coordinator and assistant coach for the University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

Kevin Maksinshuk, ’08, has joined the Triangle Aquatic Center Titans age-group swim team in Cary, North Carolina. He will continue to also serve as the Apex High School swim team head coach. Prior to working for Wake County schools, he helped Triangle Aquatics by establishing rigorous training expectations and processes for the lifeguard program.

2010s
Shardea Croes, ’11, has been named president of the Aruba Paralympic Committee. She will head the country’s efforts to train athletes for the Summer 2016 Paralympic Games and the Winter 2018 Paralympic Games. The Paralympic Games involve athletes with a range of physical disabilities, including muscular, limb and paralysis problems. Athletes compete in more than 20 adapted sports, including goal ball, football, badminton, skiing and wheelchair rugby.

Trevor King, ’11, has been awarded the 2015 Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award from the International Sculpture Center. The ISC established the award in 1994 to recognize young sculptors, encourage their continued commitment to the field and draw attention to the sculpture programs of participating universities, colleges and art schools which number more than 150 from six countries. King, who is currently pursuing a master of fine arts at the University of Michigan’s Stamps School of Art and Design, had his work featured in the October 2015 edition of the ISC’s “Sculpture” magazine as well as on the ISC’s website. King has been awarded an International Institute Fellowship to work under world-renowned sculptor Sir Antony Gormley and participated in residencies at Touchstone Center for Crafts, OxBow School of Art, Haystack Mountain School and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznan, Poland.

Will Cassidy, ’13, and Jesse Solomon, ’07, have developed a project, Walk4Woodlands, that they hope will help them achieve their goal of walking across New Zealand in 2016. The pair formed Rootless, a non-profit organization in support of The Woodlands Foundation in suburban Pittsburgh. The Woodlands treats and offers camping experiences for people with disabilities. Cassidy and Solomon hope to collect pledges totaling $25,000 for The Woodlands Foundation. The money from their walk would pay for campers to attend The Woodlands programs.

Daniel Arnett, ’14, recently presented at the World Economic Forum New Champions Summit in Dalian, China. Arnett, a doctorate candidate at Carnegie Mellon University, presented on his contribution to “Andy,” a four-wheel lunar rover CMU students designed. Arnett is working on developing rover routes on the moon’s poles. At SRU, Arnett researched and built robots and drones and led planetary shows.

John Kovalik, ’14, has signed a contract to pitch for the Gary South Shore RailCats in 2016. The RailCats are a professional baseball team based in Gary, Indiana, and are a member of the American Association of Independent Professional Baseball. The RailCats won league championships in 2005, 2007 and 2013.

D’Asia Chambers, ’15, has signed a contract to play professionally in Germany for the TUS Bad Aibling Fireballs of the Damen Basketball Bundesliga League. She was one of the top players in SRU women’s basketball history.
Members of the bridal party included married July 11, 2015 in Pittsburgh, and ‘09, Casey (Hartle) Harding, ‘09. Alecia Pityk, was matron of 2015, in Buffalo, New York. Kara married Sept. 12, and Brian Miles, ‘09, ’15, reception. were present at the wedding and Joe Arafa. Many additional alumni Killmeyer, ‘14, Leanne Cherosky, ‘08, Hughes, ‘11, Jourdan Bryant, ‘12, Julia Jackson, ‘12, who met at SRU in 2009, and ’03, bridal party included Josh Johnson, and Conference Center to celebrate SRU’s Russell Wright Alumni House Johnson, ‘07, married Nov. 7, 2015, in Butler Little Theater, presented “Shootout at Slippery Rock Creek” at the 1840’s. The Old Stone House. Lukacs based the comedic, one-act play on the true story of a group of counterfeiters that operated out of the Stone House in the 1840’s.

Weddings

Ryan Jones, ’09, ’11, and Caitlin Strahota, ’12, doctor of physical therapy, married May 9, 2015, in the Elizabethan Gardens in Manteo, North Carolina. The couple currently resides in Kill Devil Hills. (Photo by Audra Krieg Photography.)
Amanda Killmeyer, ’11, and Adam Jackson, ’12, who met at SRU in 2009, married July 11, 2015 in Pittsburgh. Members of the bridal party included multiple SRU alumni: Melanie Hughes, ’11, Jourdan Bryant, ’12, Julia Killmeyer, ’14, Leanne Cherosky, ’08, and Joe Arafa. Many additional alumni were present at the wedding and reception.

Brian Miles, ’09,15, and Whitney Kasprazk, ’09,13, married Sept. 12, 2015, in Buffalo, New York. Kara (Kocon) Logan, ’09, was matron of honor. Bridesmaids were Alecia Pityk, ’03, and Casey (Hartle) Harding, ’09.

Tom Cassiloi, ’13, and Megan Shever, ’14, married Aug. 14, 2015, in the Smith Student Center Theater. The reception took place in the Smith Student Center Ballroom.

Birth and Adoptions
Kristyn (Nazaruk) Canfield, ’03, and wife Mandy Canfield welcomed their second child, daughter Landyn, born June 17, 2015. She joins big sister Bransyn.

Jason Christine, ’98, and his wife Michele Christine welcomed their third son, Jackson Carter Christine, born Oct. 8, 2015.

Jeff Fonock, ’07, and Carolyn (Przegon) Fonock, ’06, welcomed their first child, Sadie James, born Aug. 29, 2015. She weighed 7 lbs. 3 ounces and was 19-1/2 inches long. The family lives in Oxford.


Timothy James “T.J.” Hess, ’97, and Charity Roehrig welcomed a son, James Jeffrey “J.J.” Hess, born Oct. 19, 2015. He weighed 7 lbs. 5 ounces and was 19-1/2 inches long. His father recently produced his 300th week of ‘The Party To Go’ weekend mix show for CBS Radio WBJZ 100.7 STAR in Pittsburgh.

Anthony and Chelsea Legge, ’09, welcomed their first child, Enzo Michael Legge, born Nov. 8, 2015. He weighed 8 lbs. 2 ounces and was 21 inches long.

Michael Legge, born Nov. 8, 2015. He weighed 7 lbs. 5 ounces and was 19-1/2 inches long. His father recently produced his 300th week of ‘The Party To Go’ weekend mix show for CBS Radio WBJZ 100.7 STAR in Pittsburgh.

The annual golf outing for a group of “Charlie’s Boys” took place Oct. 15, 2015, in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The group is comprised of former football player’s Jerry Bebl, ’63, Al Colledge, ’63, Tony Daniels, ’63, Nick Galbraith, ’63, Bob Marcus, ’61, a current council of trustee, Ed Novak, ’62, Ken Schottz, ’61, and Al Jacks, another assistant coach. Members of the group all played or coached for former SRU head football coach Charles “Charlie” Godlasky, who died in 2013. Godlasky compiled a 31-19-4 record at SRU between 1959-64, while also serving as a professor of health and physical education. He guided SRU to three consecutive Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference-Western Division championships from 1961-63 and the overall conference championship in 1962. Godlasky’s 1963 team, which played in the All Sports Bowl against Northeast Oklahoma State College, was the first Rock football team to appear in a postseason game.
“I often say to people that our lives in the states began at SRU. It was a home away from home. So, for us, it was quite an easy decision to give back when we both got so much from SRU.”
Two Slippery Rock University graduates from Nepal, who credit the University with providing the foundation for their successful medical careers, have created a scholarship to pay it forward to other international students majoring in biology.

Sonam Ruit, ’00, a podiatrist, and Praphul Ruit, ’01, ’06, a physical therapist, said they launched the Sonam Ruit International Biology Scholarship because they believe in the value of biology education and appreciate SRU’s influence on their lives.

The scholarship supports an international biology student in good academic standing who participates in extracurricular activities. “Our goal is to help international students that are majoring in biology like myself,” Sonam Ruit said. “Being able to help others gives us both a great sense of satisfaction.”

Much has been made about the importance of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs in educating college graduates for the workforce. The Ruits, who work in York, Pennsylvania, said they want to provide their own stem for success through their scholarship.

“Praphul and I both feel a great sense of debt to SRU for providing us with a Rock solid education and the strong mentorship that has helped us both tremendously in our respective professions,” Sonam Ruit said. “I often say to people that our lives in the states began at SRU. It was a home away from home. So, for us, it was quite an easy decision to give back when we both got so much from SRU.”

Sonam Ruit practices podiatric medicine and is the managing partner of Martin Foot and Ankle in York. Board certified in foot surgery, he is a fellow of the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons. Praphul Ruit, a social work and doctor of physical therapy graduate, works part time as a physical therapist in order to be at home with their two boys, Sachen, 5, and Ugyen, 2.

The Ruits grew up in Kathmandu, where they attended the same grade school and high school but didn’t know each other. “We had to pick a major in high school,” Ruit said. “I was in the biology section and she was in the physics section. That is one reason we did not see each other much. We both came from a humble middle class family.”

Ruit said he learned about SRU from Nepal friends. “We had to pick a major in high school,” Ruit said. “I was in the biology section and she was in the physics section. That is one reason we did not see each other much. We both came from a humble middle class family.”

Ruit said he learned about SRU from his brother who had attended the University for two years before transferring to Villanova University. Praphul Ruit said she learned about SRU from Nepal friends. “The two of us met during my last semester, spring of 2000, and have been together since,” he said.

The Ruits said they suffered culture shock when they arrived at SRU, especially not having the right clothes for winter. They frequently stopped by the international office to ask questions.

“I remember being lost, carrying a map to get to all the classes the first couple weeks,” Sonam Ruit said. “Certainly meeting our new American roommates was a nervous experience. Then meeting with Nepali students that came before us gave us the feeling of home. I recall fondly the international week, especially the dinner.”

Ruit said he stopped by the biology department office with his brother to ask that Jerry Chmielewski, a former biology professor and current interim dean of the College of Health, Environment and Science, be assigned as his adviser.

“He was my mentor during my days at SRU. I worked for him at the biology department and later published a paper with him,” Ruit said. “Jerry has been a huge influence in my life. His strong work ethic and attention to detail are something I have always admired and have followed that same style now into my own practice.”

“Since my graduation from SRU, Jerry and I have stayed in close contact and now I call him a mentor and a good friend,” he said. “We have plans to travel to Nepal someday together as a family.”

The Ruits don’t confine their giving to SRU. When a 7.9 Richter scale earthquake killed more than 8,600 in Nepal last April, the couple responded.

“After the earthquake, it was very hard for me to just stay quiet here in the comfort and not do anything to help our own people that were suffering,” Ruit said. “I was not able to go to Nepal immediately following the earthquake, but I left about four weeks later.”

During the four weeks, Sonam Ruit said they started online fundraising, organized a benefit dinner and collected donated medical supplies from local hospitals, surgery centers and physician offices. The local Mormon Church donated blankets.

Ruit said he traveled to Nepal with 44 pieces of luggage filled with supplies. Working with other volunteers, they were able to provide books and supplies for more than 5,000 children, shoes for more than 500 children, food for the elderly and temporary igloo homes for 10 families.

“I also saw patients at their home and did surgery at a local hospital in Nepal,” he said. “I stayed in Nepal for eight days. "I donated funds directly to two other local hospitals that were directly working with the earthquake victims.”

The South Central Pennsylvania Red Cross recently awarded a Medical Hero Award to Ruit for his efforts.

The Ruits are not shy about praising SRU and the important role it played in their lives.

“SRU was the bedrock of each of our successful careers,” he said. “It was not just simply the Rock solid education that we are proud of, but it also laid the foundation of strong work ethics, independence and helped build our confidence in our respective careers.”
Beer-lovers, diners and environmental hipsters have been enjoying a cold one at North Country Brewing Co. in Slippery Rock for 10 years. Now the owners of the brewpub and café are pouring a tallboy for Slippery Rock University students by launching an annual scholarship to support sustainability research and economic development.

Brewery owners Robert and Jodi McCafferty have funded the North Country Brewing Fellowship in partnership with SRU’s Sustainable Enterprise Accelerator, led by John Golden, SRU assistant professor in the School of Business. The $5,000 scholarship provides financial assistance to five students involved in the Sustainable Enterprise Accelerator program. SEA combines environmental conscientiousness with ethical economic policy to provide guidance for transforming ideas into business startups.

Robert McCafferty said they hope the work of the students will help encourage local business investment, environmental awareness and responsiveness to sustainability practices.

“North Country Brewing is a lifestyle that we made into a business,” McCafferty said. “We enjoy helping others and appreciate the potential for helping Slippery Rock University students.”

The McCaffertys have lived in a sustainable manner for years. They bought an old Main Street storefront that eventually became the brewery in 1998. The building had a storied past that they worked to sustain.

“The property was originally a house and barn,” McCafferty said. “Sometime around 1835 it was registered as an Inn. In 1850, the owners added the existing storefront. The beams from the 1835 barn remain in place in the brewery today.”

Other reminders of the property’s history as a furniture shop, which produced coffins, to its time as a morgue, were incorporated in the rebuilt facility.

The McCaffertys refurbished the building with local hardwoods and on-site materials, handcrafting black walnut and curly maple into the facility’s unique fixtures. The pair opened the restaurant portion of the business in 2005. Throughout the years, the North Country Brewing Company has sold more than 100 different brews, including “Slimy Pebble Pilsner” and “Late Night Pumpkin Ale.” All their beers are free of additives and preservatives.

As demand for their brew continued to grow, the McCaffertys decided to open a production facility. North Country Canning Company was started in 2013 and since its inception has shipped beer to every county in Pennsylvania.

A year ago, they purchased The Harmony Inn, the establishment where they first met. It has since become one of the area’s destination restaurants. The McCaffertys also operate a farm that supplements vegetables, fruits and eggs for the restaurant.

As the McCaffertys like to say, “We live farm to your fork and pasture to your pint, delivering the freshest of herbs, hops, vegetables, eggs, pork and beef, home-grown with love from our very own 64-acre North Country Harvesting Co.”

McCafferty said the company’s operational ethic is “community before self.” They’ve turned those words into action. The brewery has raised more than $50,000 for Slippery Rock development through its annual Brewfest, and the McCaffertys were the driving force behind “Polish the Rock,” a yearly community clean up day that brings together business owners, residents, SRU students, faculty and staff.

The scholarship for SRU students may help them start the next big business, while instilling an ethic for responsible business practices, McCafferty said.

“Restaurants have the potential to be a very wasteful industry,” he said. “We have made a full-circle commitment in our kitchens and farms. We want the community to be a part of that circle.”
We enjoy helping others and appreciate the potential for helping Slippery Rock University students."
Auburn University has “Toomer’s Corner,” Texas A&M has the “12th man” and The Ohio State University is infamous for the “Block O.” Each of these student fan bases is unique in its game-day attire, while renowned for their ferocity and diehard support of their teams.

While not as large as some of these fan sections, there is a group at Slippery Rock University that has experienced a renaissance over the past five years and that is doing all it can to give those units a run for their money.

You may have heard of them – the “Rock Rowdies.” The group, which does its part to support all SRU athletics, has been around for years in one fashion or another, receiving the majority of its notoriety for its chants, cheers and jeers at Rock football and basketball games.

Oh, and let’s not forget their undisputed leader, SRU super senior – and superfan – D’Rae Wise.

Wise, a physical activity and fitness management major,
Winter 2016

Rowdies display fan-tastic school spirit

D’Rae Wise has everything you’d expect the leader of such a group of enthusiasts to possess, including bright eyes, a big smile, an infectious laugh, charisma oozing out of every pour and an unwavering love of all things Rock athletics.

“Being a former athlete,” said Wise, “I know you perform better when your crowd is behind you.

“I’ve had players from many of the teams tell me how much they appreciate the support. The (football) defense really appreciates the chanting and cheering... different players have told me that we really help set the tone for the games, and their play on the field really gives us the motivation to cheer louder and harder. We feed off each other.”

But it’s not only the on field play of the football team that inspires the Rowdies raucous rants. Messing with the opposition helps fuel the groups’ fire just as much.

Stationed at the front of the SRU student section, the group is conveniently located just above the visiting team locker room. Did we mention they sit on metal bleachers?

“We stomp as hard as possible since we’re above their heads,” Wise said. “We want them to know before they even take the field that we’re there. We want them to know that our presence will be felt.

In addition to the Rowdies being right above the visitor’s heads, the opponent entrance/exit to the field is adjacent to the section.

“We have a couple opportunities to ‘speak’ throughout the game,” said Wise with a smile. “It’s a lot of fun when one or two of them say something back to us. That tells us we’ve gotten into their heads, they’re not focused and that we’re doing our job.”

Former SRU head football coach George Mihalik thought enough of the Rowdies to personally acknowledge the group just prior to kickoff before each home game with a thumb’s up, a thank you and a salute.

“D’Rae is the spirit of this University,” said Mihalik in 2014. “He is the guy that gets the student body involved and makes the green and white our 12th man. His enthusiasm is unmatched.

“I appreciated all the efforts he put in to having those sections filled up, loud and rowdy and I can’t thank him enough for his efforts with the Rowdies.”

But what drives an individual to oftentimes strip off his shirt, paint his body, sport a green wig and cheer until he’s hoarse?


“I want people to have fun when they’re at the games. I want them to create lifelong memories by not just attending, but by participating. The most important thing to come out of any of this has always been about creating an atmosphere where the student body becomes one. Let’s get out of our rooms, forget about school work, support our teams, have some fun and make a few friends.”

A prime example of Wise’s words is James Coffey, an SRU freshman from Ijamsville, Maryland.

A football player from the age of 5 through his senior year of high school, Coffey attended his first Rock football game Sept. 12, 2015 when SRU defeated East Stroudsburg University, 34-9.

“I walked into the stadium for the first time and ran into D’Rae right away,” said Coffey. “He’s the CA on the floor below me, so we’ve hung out before, but watching him in action, seeing how he motivates the student section...transferring some of my game day energies into helping the team.

“Guys like D’Rae are few and far between and we’re lucky to have him.”

Wise’s odyssey as the “Ruler of the Rowdies” began Sept. 24, 2011 when SRU hosted Indiana University of Pennsylvania and posted a 20-6 victory for the Rock.

It was the Pittsburgh natives’ first SRU
No one will ever accuse Wise of not being involved. In addition to the Rowdies, he is a Residential Life community assistant, works at the ARC, serves as a campus tour guide, is manager for the men’s basketball team and handles public relations duties for the Bodybuilding & Fitness Club.

“College is about transitioning to adulthood, and if you’re going to be successful as an adult, you have to be engaged in the world. Why not start now and have fun while you’re at it?” asked Wise.

One Rowdy having a lot of fun regardless of the sport is Tayler Tadrick, a sophomore from Pittsburgh. The third person in her family to attend SRU, following her aunt and cousin, Tadrick knew of the Rowdies tradition and couldn’t wait to be a part of it.

“It’s an amazing feeling,” said Tadrick of being a member of the group. “We feed off the team and each other. The adrenaline rush of just letting it all hang out no matter what sport we’re supporting is incredible. It’s a primal release.”

Speaking of release, with his graduation date set for May 2016, Wise will soon have to relinquish his hold on the Rowdies and turn control of the group over to someone else.

But before he does that, Wise not only has a full slate of athletic events left to attend – including men’s and women’s basketball, baseball and women’s lacrosse, softball and tennis – but also a bit of business to attend to. Making the Rowdies an official student organization.

“That’s something I’ve been thinking about for some time,” said Wise, “and I’m working on that with the Student Government Association.

“If we have the right people in place that can take the group to the next level, why not make (the Rowdies) official? Then we could do even more and partner with other clubs and organizations and really make thing happen.”

Wise added that he has a couple of people in mind to whom he could pass the torch and is confident either one would do the group justice. “If we can build around them and find a couple other solid and passionate people, the Rowdies should be in great shape,” Wise said.

“It’s about finding the right leadership for the long haul.”

Whomever it is that picks up the mantle will not only need to posses drive and passion, but incredibly big feet due to size of the green and white shoes that Wise will be leaving behind.
SLIPPERY ROCK UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE PROGRAMS

• Adapted Physical Activity (on-campus)
• Counseling and Development (on-campus)
• Criminal Justice (online)
• Data Analytics (blended)
• Elementary Education (online)
• English (blended)
• Health Informatics – (online)
• History (online)
• School Nursing (online)
• MBA (blended)
• Music Therapy – (blended)
• Parks and Recreation (online)
• Physical Therapy (on-campus)
• Physician Assistant (blended)
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• Special Education (online)
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Craig Marshall, ‘80, laboratory research analyst, Center for Hyperbaric Medicine and Environmental Physiology, Duke University School of Medicine

DAY JOB: I manage a basic science lab and conduct experiments. The lab studies oxygen toxicity, sepsis and the effects of carbon monoxide in small and large animal models. The research focus is to advance critical care and hyperbaric medicine.

BACKGROUND: I grew up in Beaver Falls and earned a bachelor of science in biology in 1980. I’ve spent 35 years working at Duke University in medical research and living in Durham, North Carolina. I am married to Zermeena Marshall and have two sons, Collin and Jackson.

INFLUENCE OF SRU: Slippery Rock University provided an excellent education and good scientific foundation that has allowed me to succeed at Duke University. Hands-on experience with a variety of science instruments while at The Rock was key to being hired over other local applicants from the research triangle area of North Carolina. In 1981, the same type of practical experience wasn’t available to many undergraduates here in the RTP. Over the years my support of a memorial scholarship for James Steel has been an easy way to pay it forward to a young biology student and is a statement of my gratitude to Slippery Rock University and the memory of my friend and lab partner.

(PHOTO BY ANNE CHERRY)