



INSTITUTE REPORT

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Staggered Return Marks Beginning of Spring Semester

By Mary Price

This January, cadets' return to post after the Christmas furlough looked much different than it ever had in years past. They had been off post since before Thanksgiving due to the coronavirus pandemic.

To increase the safety of the VMI community, and that of the local community, cadet return was stretched out over a six-day period, and all cadets were tested for COVID-19 via the rapid antigen test upon arrival. In addition, cadets were asked to self-quarantine for 14 days prior to their assigned return to post.



See Spring Semester, page 12 Cadets leave Maury-Brooke Hall on the first day of class, Thursday, Jan. 21.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Commandant to Retire in 2021

By Mary Price

Col. William J. Wanovich '87, commandant of the VMI Corps of Cadets since 2014, will retire at the end of the 2020–21 academic year.

Prior to becoming commandant, Wanovich capped off a 27-year U.S. Army career by serving as professor of military science of VMI's Army ROTC unit, a position he held from 2010 to 2014. During his time there, VMI commissioned just

under 400 Army officers and earned the MacArthur Award among the senior military colleges in 2013 and 2014.

In his role as commandant, Wanovich strove to develop professionalism, discipline, and traditional military skills training among the Corps of Cadets. Highlights of his years developing the daily military regimen have included participation by the Corps in the inaugural parade for

President Donald Trump on Jan. 20, 2017, and in the inaugural parade for Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam '81 on Jan. 13, 2018.

A native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Wanovich was a distinguished military graduate from VMI with a bachelor's degree in economics. He held rank in the Corps throughout his cadetship,

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'Ethos of Citizenship'

Course on Ancient Greece Teaches Roots of Citizen-Soldier

By Mary Price

At most colleges and universities, an elective class on ancient Greece taught at 8 a.m. would draw few takers. But not at VMI, where Maj. Christopher Blunda, assistant professor of history, has found his class filled, with a waiting list.

This spring, Blunda is teaching History 302, Ancient Greece, to a capacity crowd of 22 cadets. The outcome was similar last fall, when he taught a course on ancient Rome.

"I was very surprised and pleasantly so to find out there was so much interest in antiquity here at the Institute," said Blunda, a New York state native who joined the VMI faculty in August after receiving his doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley. "It's great news."

Blunda's course on ancient Greece is designed to center around the aspects of that civilization most known to modern-day Americans: the development of democracy in Athens; the primacy of military service; the dyarchy, or two kings, model of governance in Sparta; and Alexander the Great's conquests.

"The real core of ancient Greek history, in my mind, is the late archaic and classical periods," said Blunda. "Sparta is going to be a central topic in the course. Cadets are very interested in that, and for obvious reasons. Citizenship and military service were equated there in a unique way."

There's one concept from ancient Greece that might pose a stumbling block to college students elsewhere, but not at VMI: that of the citizen-soldier.

"The citizen-soldier idea—that makes a lot more sense here at VMI than it might elsewhere," said Blunda. "The cadets live and understand it in a way that other students can't."

There's also much to discuss in how the ancient Greeks viewed military service, versus how it's seen today. "In the ancient world, military service wasn't only an honor and a privilege; it was an integral part of being a citizen," Blunda explained, adding that when the Athenians voted to go to war, it was themselves, not others, whom they were committing to battle.



Maj. Christopher Blunda, recently hired assistant professor of history, teaches his course on ancient Greece in Kilbourne Hall.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Cadets show interest in Maj. Christopher Blunda's 8 a.m. course on ancient Greece, which is at capacity this semester.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

"That can seem a bit foreign to us today due to selective service," he commented.

Like all historians, Blunda keeps a sharp focus on primary sources in his classes. Cadets will read the writings of Herodotus and Thucydides, both famed historians of ancient Greece; as well as Aristophanes, the comedic dramatist, along with Plato, Aristotle, and others. And once cadets have completed those readings, they'll be asked to write in response

to them—but without essay prompts.

"I want to see [cadets] wrestling with complex sources and working to interpret them," said Blunda. In so doing, he explained, cadets will be developing their critical thinking skills—and according to Blunda, studying the ancient past is a great way to do that.

"Ancient history does more to foster critical thinking than many other fields, mainly because we rarely have perfect information

due to uneven survival of the sources and chronological and cultural distance," he noted. "You always have to assume there's another way to interpret what you're reading."

The skill of evaluating what they're reading or watching will serve cadets well throughout their lifetimes. "Over time, I'd like to see that thought process become more and more second nature, so they're critical readers of magazines or of what they see on TV or what have you," said Blunda.

"Very few things in this world present information in a straightforward way.

There's almost always some level of interpretation that needs to be identified."

The past, Blunda believes, can help us understand the present, with the greatest rewards going to the sharpest of observers.

"Ancient history still contributes a great deal," he stated. "It frames important issues and sets up important discussions. We always have to interrogate the work it's doing." ❁

The Institute Report, VMI's monthly newsletter, publishes eight issues during each academic year. Inquiries, suggestions, news items, and address changes should be directed to Editor, Institute Report, VMI Communications and Marketing, Lexington, VA 24450-0304; (540) 464-7207; or VMIReport@vmi.edu.
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The VMI COVID-19 information portal is available at www.vmi.edu/COVID.

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was a member of the Cadet Investment Group, and was the class treasurer on the Ring Figure Committee.

Commissioned in the U.S. Army Infantry upon graduation from VMI, Wanovich deployed to Operation Desert Shield/Storm in 1991 and the next year served as a battalion supply and logistics officer in Homestead, Florida, providing humanitarian assistance as part of Operation Hurricane Andrew. He served in a number of leadership and staff positions and in a security assistance role for Egypt, Africa, and Iraq.

He served as both secretary of the Coalition Joint Staff and later as special troops battalion commander in Headquarters, XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg, deploying to Iraq for 12 and 15 months. This included command of Task Force Dragon, which provided security, support, and services to more than 4,100 members of the Multi-National Force and Multi-National Corps in Iraq staffs.

He is a graduate of the United States Army War College, where he earned a master's degree in strategic studies.

His awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal (7 awards), Joint Service Commendation Medal, Army Commendation Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, Joint Service Achievement Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge, Master Parachutist Badge, and Ranger Tab.

Wanovich and his wife, Tina, have two daughters, Regan and Grace. Tina Wanovich has been a special education teacher at Rockbridge County High School for the last 11 years. Regan is a sophomore at James Madison University pursuing a nursing degree. Grace is a senior at Rockbridge County High School, applying to several colleges.

Wanovich also has two stepchildren: Katie LeFleur, who is an interior design consultant in Gulfport, Mississippi, and Jordan Dillon, who is an orthopedic office administrator in Zanesville, Ohio.

In retirement, Wanovich looks forward to spending more time with family. He and Tina have a grandson, Finley, and they are very blessed to be welcoming another grandchild and celebrating a wedding with Jordan in the spring, and a high school graduation for Grace in June. ✪



Col. William J. Wanovich '87

Virtual Ceremony Highlights 2020 Graduates

By Maj. Michelle Ellwood and Mary Price

On Saturday, Dec. 19, families of Virginia Military Institute graduates celebrated at home as a virtual commencement ceremony was streamed to computers, tablets, and phones. The plan announced in the spring was for the winter commencement ceremony at VMI to be in person, and celebrate the accomplishments of May, September, and December 2020 graduates, but due to stricter guidelines announced by the state, the in-person event could not be held.

Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, interim superintendent, provided a welcome and also gave the remarks during the ceremony. He emphasized to the graduating class who would cross the "virtual stage" to express their gratitude to those who helped them along the way. Some have already moved on to military training, graduate school, or their first job out of college.

Wins acknowledged the tremendous changes that the coronavirus pandemic brought to the Corps, and reminded the audience that the world will always bring surprises and challenges. "While the world you graduate into ... is novel to our



Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, interim superintendent, addresses the nearly 400 graduates and their families during the December virtual commencement ceremony.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

generation, it is not unique to history," he stated. "VMI cadets have graduated in times of war, natural disaster, social upheaval, economic uncertainty, and disease."

Building trust, creating a foundation of integrity, and treating others with respect and civility are ways that graduates will continue to grow as leaders, Wins stated. "Stay the course, pursue your dreams."

Nearly 400 names were called by Brig. Gen. Robert "Bob" Moreschi, deputy superintendent for academics and dean of the faculty. Of those recognized, 198, or 51 percent of the graduating class, commissioned into

the armed forces. The top three majors for 2020 graduates were economics and business (55 majors), international studies (54 majors), and civil engineering (53 majors).

Valedictorian of the Class of 2020, 2nd Lt. Patiphan Kaeosanit, described himself as "just a random kid from Thailand who was lucky enough to win a Thai Army scholarship to attend VMI." Arriving in

Lexington with limited English, Kaeosanit found himself warmly accepted by his roommates and brother rats, many of whom went out of their way to help him acclimate to American culture and make sure he had places to go during holiday breaks.

"We worked as a team and always pushed ourselves to a higher standard," said Kaeosanit, who graduated with a computer science major after having held multiple ranks within the Corps and serving as a cadet EMT.

Continued on next page



Cadets commissioning into the Army take their oath from Col. Scott Brannon, commanding officer of VMI Army ROTC, in a virtual ceremony Dec. 18.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

In his remarks, Kaosanit counseled his brother rats to, “protect our values, because without them, VMI can never produce leaders the world desperately needs.”

Kaosanit is now serving in the Royal Thai Army.

Awards that are typically presented at the May commencement ceremony were instead presented at the virtual ceremony. The First Jackson-Hope Medal for highest attainment in scholarship, accompanied by the Commander Harry Millard Mason Academic Proficiency Award, a cash prize to the recipient of the First Jackson-Hope Medal, was presented to 2nd Lt. Joshua David Austin '20, a distinguished graduate with Institute Honors who majored in international studies and minored in Asian studies, national security, and history. He serves as vice president of the Class of 2020. Austin, a distinguished Naval

graduate, commissioned into the U.S. Navy upon graduation.

Austin also received the Society of the Cincinnati Medal, which is presented to that member of the graduating class who has distinguished himself or herself by efficiency of service and excellence of character while at VMI. The Cincinnati Medal is accompanied by two cash prizes, the Richard J. Marshall Award and the Sumter L. Lowry Award.

The Second Jackson-Hope Medal for second highest attainment in scholarship, accompanied by the Col. Sterling Murray Heflin 1916 Academic Proficiency Award, a cash prize awarded to the recipient of the Second Jackson-Hope Medal, was presented to Jennifer Ann Baily '20, a distinguished graduate with Institute Honors who majored in biology and minored in mathematics. She is pursuing a Ph.D. in microbiology

at the University of Tennessee following graduation.

Four VMI cadets, plus one cadet from the Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership (VWIL) at Mary Baldwin University, commissioned into the armed forces Dec. 18. A fifth VMI cadet, Nathaniel McPeak '21, is expected to commission into the Air Force in February and serve as a missile officer once he receives the necessary security clearance.

All four VMI cadets commissioned into the Army, after hearing recorded remarks from Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy '96. Second Lt. Eugenio Ajavon '21 is serving in the Signal Corps, while 2nd Lt. Matthew Liener '20 is in the Infantry. Second Lt. Mark Peterson '20 is serving in the Field Artillery, while 2nd Lt. Timothy Stallings '20 commissioned into the Army Reserves in the Corps of Engineers. ❁

Jackson Statue Relocated

VMI began the process of relocating the Stonewall Jackson statue from the front of barracks to the Virginia Museum of the Civil War and New Market Battlefield State Historical Park Dec. 7, 2020.

The cost of relocating the statue is \$209,000. These funds will be paid out of VMI's facility maintenance and operations account.

VMI personnel will work to install the statue in the roundabout in front of the Virginia Museum of the Civil War. The estimated completion is summer or fall 2021. VMI historian, Col. Keith Gibson '77, says that this location provides important historical context to the statue.

“Though Jackson did not fight in the Battle of New Market, the Luray Gap of the Massanutten Mountain, which can be seen from the battlefield, played a strategic role in concealing his army's movements against Union troops,” Gibson said. “How fitting it is for the statue of Stonewall Jackson to look out over the Luray Gap, which played such an important part of his Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1862.”

The Stonewall Jackson statue was given to VMI in 1912 by sculptor, Sir Moses Ezekiel, Class of 1866, VMI's first Jewish cadet and a veteran of the Battle of New Market.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye and H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Major Construction Projects Kick Off

By Maj. Michelle Ellwood and Mary Price

Two long-awaited construction projects have gotten underway in recent weeks.

In December, site clearing began for the Institute's new aquatic center, officially known as the Corps Physical Training Center Phase III. The center, which is expected to be completed by the end of November 2022, will be built alongside North Main Street, immediately adjacent and connected to the Corps Physical Training Facility. The center will also be connected to the Knights of Pythias building.

"It will attach to the new aquatic center via a glass walkway," said Col. Keith Jarvis '82, director of construction, of the Knights of Pythias building, also known as the American Legion building, which was moved in 2014 to make way for the Corps Physical Training Facility. "As part of the project, we'll renovate the Legion



An architectural rendering shows the new bridge that will soon be placed over the South River on the Chessie Nature Trail.—Image courtesy of Lt. Col. Daren Payne '90.

building, and it'll be utilized for conference and office space that supports the aquatic center."

The pool will be 50 meters long and 25 yards wide, a feature that allows swimmers to compete in meets that measure distances in meters and those that measure distances in yards. The pool will also allow for water polo, diving competitions, and high-water entry exercises, often done in years past in the Maury River. The existing

pool in Clark King Hall, constructed in 1969, when the Corps of Cadets was much smaller, has remained in demand not only for swimming and diving practice, but also water polo, ROTC activities, and physical education classes.

State funding—about three-quarters of total cost of the \$44.2 million facility—was included in the biennial budget proposed by Gov. Ralph Northam '81,



The aquatic center will be built along North Main Street, connecting to both the Corps Physical Training Facility and the Knights of Pythias building.—Image courtesy of Col. Keith Jarvis '82.

Continued on next page

and that funding remained in the budget as it passed through both houses of the General Assembly. The remainder of the overall cost of the project came from private donations.

When the aquatic center is completed, it will bring to an end the phased approach for athletic facility renovations and additions that began in 2014, which included renovations of Cormack and Cocke Halls and the building of the Corps Physical Training Facility, which opened in the fall of 2016, providing significant and enhanced indoor fitness training elements for cadets, as well as home to the Institute's NCAA track teams. The building provides a venue for ROTC and individual cadet physical training in inclement weather. Altogether, the three phases of the Corps Physical Training Facility cost \$164 million.

During construction of the aquatic center, community members and visitors can expect short-term road closures on Main Street. Also, a temporary sidewalk will be provided, along with lighting to facilitate pedestrian access along Main Street.

The second project is a pedestrian bridge carrying the VMI-owned Chessie Nature Trail over the South River. The original bridge was washed away by Hurricane Isabel in 2003, and ever

since then, trail users have had to detour onto Stuartsburg Road to continue on the trail, which is a 7.2-mile journey from Lexington to Buena Vista.

A majority of the funding for the \$2.08 million project is coming from a grant from the Eastern Federal Lands Access Program and VMI. Additional funding came from the IDA, which is made up of community members from Lexington, Buena Vista, and Rockbridge County.

Work began in the final weeks of December and will continue through the winter and spring months.

"It's all site prep work right now," said Col. Keith Jarvis '82, director of construction. He explained that in mid-March, a pre-engineered and prefabricated bridge, approximately 220 feet long and made of galvanized steel, will be put in place.

Completion is planned for late April, just in time for the busy trail and river season. Plans for a new bridge have now been in the works for several years, but the project had been held up due to adjustments to the project scope to align with the project budget and site constraints. F&B Contractors from Bedford, Virginia, is performing the work. ❀

Sen Receives Outstanding Faculty Award

By Maj. Michelle Ellwood

Col. Tinni Sen, professor of economics in the Department of Economics and Business, was recognized in early December as one of 12 recipients statewide of the 2021 Outstanding Faculty Awards. These awards, announced by the State Council of Higher Education (SCHEV) and Dominion Energy, recognize faculty at Virginia's institutions of higher education who exemplify the highest standards of teaching, scholarship, and service. This year, the program received 72 nominations for the award.

Sen joined VMI as an assistant professor of economics in 2001. She holds the Alexander P. Morrison 1939 professorship and has been the recipient of VMI's Thomas Jefferson Teaching Award, the VMI Distinguished Teaching Award, and Washington and Lee University's James G. Leyburn ODK Award for exemplary service to her community. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Mississippi, master's degree from the University of Kolkata, India, and her bachelor's degree in economics from Lady Brabourne College in Kolkata.



Col. Tinni Sen

She has co-authored two books and several articles. She is co-authoring another book expected out in 2021, and is co-piloting a study for implementing a Mindfulness Training for Resilient Leaders program at VMI.

She has a strong record of community service, working over the years with 50 Ways Rockbridge, Habitat for Humanity, Project Horizon, Rockbridge County NAACP, Rockbridge Regional Library, and



Col. Tinni Sen, professor of economics and business, teaches in Scott Shipp Hall on the first day of class for the fall semester.—VMI File Photo by Kelly Nye.

local schools. She is also faculty co-advisor to the VMI Promaji Club, VMI's club for cadets of color.

Sen lives in Rockbridge County with her husband, two daughters, and two cats, and expresses her gratitude for being part of the VMI faculty.

Sen is the 10th member of the VMI faculty to receive a SCHEV award in the past 18 years. Most recently, Col. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl, professor of economics and business, received an Outstanding Faculty Award in 2019. Each recipient of this year's award receives a \$7,500 gift from Dominion Energy at a virtual ceremony in the spring. ❀

After More Than Two Decades, Hutchings Retires

By Mary Price

You might say that Col. Eric Hutchings '77 is something of an expert on VMI's three-legged stool: academics, athletics, and military training.

As a cadet-athlete, Hutchings experienced all three legs of the stool. As commandant from 2000 to 2007, he was primarily responsible for the military leg. Later, as special assistant to the athletic director for military affairs, he made it his business to help cadet-athletes learn how to balance that stool, even when the "legs" or responsibilities seem to be tilted more towards one side than another.

On Dec. 31, Hutchings retired, capping off more than two decades of service to the Institute.

The paths that life has taken him on would have likely proven to be a complete surprise to his 18-year-old self in 1973, freshly arrived as a football recruit from Columbus, Ohio. The legendary Bob Thalman, head coach of the Keydet football team for much of the 1970s, had brought him to the Institute with assurances that he'd play as a freshman.

"I was young and excited and all I wanted to do was play football," recalled Hutchings.

And that's exactly what he did as a defensive lineman, helping the team earn the Southern Conference championship in 1974.

Even now, Hutchings can remember Thalman, a man of intense energy and can-do spirit, inspiring the team in the locker room, "There's no one on the planet who can beat us this day."

Buoyed by Thalman's intensity, the Keydets toppled Eastern Carolina for the Conference championship in a home field victory, 13-3.

Academically, Hutchings eventually found his footing as a history major, but today he laughs at the memory of being told, as a 3rd Class cadet, that he wasn't going to cut it as a civil engineer.

"These grades are awful," he remembered the late Col. Donald Jamison '57, then head of the civil engineering department, telling him. "We can't let you be an engineer. You might build something that would collapse, and the school would get sued. I think you're a history major."

Up until that point, Hutchings had been tutored and kept afloat by the late Col. George Piegari, professor of math and computer science, and as life often comes full circle, years later, Piegari also tutored Hutchings's son, Michael Hutchings '10.

"He got us both through rat calculus," said Hutchings of Piegari.

While Hutchings had come to VMI ambivalent about commissioning, he became surer about wanting to serve his country during his cadetship.

His commissioning was delayed by a football injury, but Col. William Buchanan '50B, commandant, and Col. Beverly Read '41, a highly decorated Korean War veteran, made a special trip to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, to commission him and others. Thereafter, Hutchings spent 23 years in Ranger, Airborne, and Special Forces units, while serving overseas in Germany, Italy, and Korea.

By 2000, Hutchings had been selected as a full colonel, but accepting that rank would have meant uprooting his family yet again, this time so he could attend the War College. Seeking stability for his wife, Janine, and their three children, Hutchings accepted the job as VMI's commandant instead.

At the time, the Institute was facing many challenges. Women had joined the Corps of Cadets just three years prior, and as Hutchings put it, "the jury was still out" on



Col. Eric Hutchings '77 receives the meritorious service award from Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, interim superintendent, during a Dec. 17 ceremony in the Corps Physical Training Facility.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

whether their integration would be a success.

"It was too early to claim victory or defeat," he stated.

Turnover in the commandant's office had also added to the uncertainty, and since many policies and procedures weren't documented, what went on in barracks was largely reliant on what had happened in the previous year or two.

"The cadet Corps was somewhat rudderless," Hutchings noted. "A lot of things weren't written down. The Corps loosely operated on a kind of tribal wisdom."

As commandant, Hutchings sought to improve the military professionalism of the Corps. He did so by bringing in young veterans to serve as role models for the cadets.

"You need lots of overwatch," Hutchings stated. "Plus, you need that youthful example. Kids want to talk to a young officer about their options in the military. They don't want to talk to old Col. Hutchings, you know, who was at Gettysburg."

Hutchings also codified much pertaining to the Rat Line and cadet self-governance.

To develop and maintain a consistent approach to cadet training, including the Rat Line, Hutchings wrote what he termed the

Continued on next page

“rainbow books” to complement the cadet Blue Book. These books, which covered cadet government and various cadet staff operations, were meant to act as a “handrail” for cadets, Hutchings explained. He also developed the nine-day matriculation program which is the cornerstone of modern rat training.

By 2007, Hutchings had reached the point of wanting a job that was less physically demanding but would still allow him to be of service to the Corps. He found that position as chief of staff to then-Athletic Director Donny White, and for a brief period of time, he also served as coach to the Institute’s NCAA rifle team.

Under current Athletic Director Dr. David Diles, Hutchings served as special assistant to the athletic director for military affairs. The long title essentially translated to helping cadet-athletes, especially those commissioning, to balance their athletic and military obligations while still maintaining their grades. Managing cadet time was somewhat akin to being an air traffic controller—but in this case, the job was synchronizing cadet obligations rather than managing planes.

Conflicts between athletic and military obligations are frequent at VMI—so common that Hutchings dealt with them on a daily basis.

“I’m telling staff and faculty, ‘Cadet X can’t do this today because tomorrow we’re playing Citadel,’” said Hutchings.

It wasn’t a small job, either, just from the number of cadets involved. The Institute fields 18 NCAA athletic teams—11 for men and seven for women—making oversight a real challenge. When events such as parades were scheduled, Hutchings determined where members of each team might be that day and informed the commandant’s

office of who would be missing. He also briefed coaches about player performance in the Corps and which cadets might be candidates for future rank.

College athletes, he noted, often have inherent leadership skills and the necessary physical courage for military service. “If you can harness that for the Army, for the nation, then that’s huge,” said Hutchings.

Hutchings’s next step after retirement might be described as professional grandpa. Janine Hutchings already spends much of her time traveling between the couple’s three children—son Michael is in Rhode Island; daughter Jennifer, in Ohio; and daughter Amanda, in Colorado—and caring for the six grandchildren who’ve come along in recent years.

“I’m not as proficient as her, but I’m more fun,” said Eric Hutchings of his role as grandpa.

After almost a quarter-century at VMI, Hutchings continues to tout the philosophy of the three-legged stool.

“There’s just a lot of great young people here, and I’m interested in making sure they get the absolute most out of VMI,” he commented. “Our regimen instills leadership attributes in these cadets daily.”

“Col. Hutchings filled tremendously important roles within our department, and previously as commandant,” said Diles, athletic director since 2013. “I’m appreciative of his deep commitment to VMI and wish him, and his family, only the very best as he moves into a well-earned retirement. I’m pleased that he’ll be remaining in Lexington, and I expect that we’ll continue seeing him highly involved and supportive of VMI.” ❁



Scott Shipp Renovation Progresses

In early January, the 28,000-square foot addition, plus the newly renovated 1955 portion of Scott Shipp Hall, were opened for cadet and faculty use, with ample natural light and spaces set aside for cadet collaboration and study. Renovation of the original 1918 portion of the building is now underway, with completion of the \$43.2 million project expected by early November. —VMI Photos by Kelly Nye and Mary Price.



Marshall Foundation Closes Museum, Shifts Focus

By Mary Price

The George C. Marshall Foundation has closed its museum as it shifts its focus toward a more digital era.

The news came in early January in the form of a letter from Paul A. Levenson, president of the George C. Marshall Foundation, to organization members. Dedicated to preserving the legacy of George C. Marshall, VMI Class of 1901, the Foundation has operated the museum on post since 1964.

Like nearly all public attractions, the museum was closed for much of 2020. In 2019, approximately 5,600 visitors came to see the museum's collection of artifacts from Marshall's storied career as an American statesman—a career that included time spent as chief of staff of the U.S. Army during World War II as well as secretary of state and secretary of defense after the war, among many other roles. It was during his time as secretary of state that Marshall developed what came to be known as the Marshall Plan, bringing much-needed aid to postwar Europe.

Museum attendance had dropped over the years, Levenson noted, and the Foundation's leadership chose to reallocate



The Jeep that Gen. George C. Marshall, VMI Class of 1901, rode in during World War II was one of the Marshall Museum's most well-known attractions.—VMI File Photo by Kevin Remington.

resources in hopes of reaching a wider audience.

"We want to maximize reach," said Levenson, who has led the Foundation

since the fall of 2019. "We want to reach beyond these four walls."

While the museum has perhaps been the most well-known aspect of the Marshall Foundation's operations, it also operates the George C. Marshall Research Library, which attracts researchers from all over the globe. Going forward, the Foundation plans to digitize its collection of almost 400,000 documents written by Marshall and members of his family to make them more accessible.

The library, Levenson stated, is pre-eminent to the organization's mission.

"That's what this place was founded to do," he said. "It was founded to collect [Marshall's] papers and make them available, much like a presidential library."

In addition, the Foundation plans to continue its Legacy Lecture Series focusing on the life of Marshall and the times in which he lived, and add new programs for Foundation members. A nascent initiative will be to develop distance learning programs for students that highlight Marshall's example and



Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Mrs. Eisenhower, along with President Lyndon B. Johnson and Mrs. Johnson, visit the Marshall Museum during its May 1964 opening.—Photo courtesy of the Marshall Foundation.

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legacy in the areas of civics, government, leadership, and ethics.

“Classroom teachers are dying for really good resources that address topics that their students need to know for curricular purposes,” noted Levensgood. “We’ll have

units that use Marshall’s example as sort of a pivot or a jumping off point to talk about civics, government, and leadership.”

As 2021 unfolds, decisions will need to be made about what to do with the museum’s collection, which consists of just under 3,000

items. Some may be donated to the VMI Museum, said Levensgood, while others may be returned to the individuals who donated them. It’s not yet been determined what will occupy the space formerly taken up by the museum. ❄

Superintendent Applications Being Received

By Mary Price

Progress is being made toward hiring VMI’s 15th superintendent, in the wake of the Oct. 26 resignation of Gen. J.H. Binford Peay III ’62.

In early November, the Board of Visitors appointed the Superintendent Search Committee, chaired by Gene Scott ’80, chair of the Board of Visitors External Relations Committee. Tom Watjen ’76, also on the VMI Board of Visitors, is vice-chair of the committee. All but two members of the search committee are members or former members of the Board of Visitors; the two non-BOV members are Sam Stocks ’90, president of the VMI Alumni Association, and Col. Emily Miller, chair of the Department of English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies and one of the longest-serving among current Institute faculty members.

Assisting with the superintendent search is WittKieffer, an executive search firm with extensive experience in higher education. In December, WittKieffer staff administered a survey and conducted listening sessions with members of the VMI community to learn more about the qualifications, skills, and experience required of VMI’s next superintendent.

In early January, a job description was posted to WittKieffer’s website and applications were opened. The position is advertised online, including but not limited to sites like the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Diverse Jobs/Diverse Positions in Higher Education*, *HigherEd Jobs*, *Inside Higher Education*, and *Association of Military Colleges & Schools of the United States*.

As of the end of January, Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins ’85, interim superintendent, had not publicly announced whether he would apply for the position. During January, Wins conducted listening sessions of his own with faculty, staff, and cadets to learn more about what they see as VMI’s strengths and weaknesses, and how the next superintendent can build a stronger VMI.

In its executive summary of the Institute accompanying the job description, WittKieffer stresses the strength of VMI’s academic

program and the success of its graduates in a variety of domains. In describing the kind of leader VMI needs, WittKieffer notes:

“The ideal candidate to be VMI’s next superintendent will be a visionary, pragmatic, and empathetic leader who can draw on his or her experience in higher education, the military, and other venues.

The candidate will demonstrate a deep respect for VMI’s mission and method of education: a strong commitment to cadet success and the development of the whole person is essential. Also important are outstanding judgment, excellent diplomatic skills, and the courage of conviction necessary to generate confidence across the community.”

Fundraising—including

lobbying for support from the General Assembly—is also mentioned as a must-have skill. In addition, the document states that the new superintendent will “take the leadership role in the evolution of VMI’s culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

The ideal candidate is described as having skills and experience in most if not all of the following areas: military leadership; higher education leadership; intercollegiate athletics; experience beyond academia and/or the military; respect for and dedication to VMI’s history, mission, and values; and commitment to the Corps of Cadets. Additional qualities and experience sought by the board include the ability to advocate for the Institute and board governance.

The active recruitment period for applicants will continue through March 5, with the goal of having a new superintendent announced in late May. To learn more about the superintendent search process, visit www.vmi.edu/about/governance/board-of-visitors/superintendent-search. Anyone wishing to communicate with the Superintendent Search Committee may do so by email: superintendentsearch@vmi.edu. ❄



Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins ’85 conducts a listening session for employees in early January in Marshall Hall.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Cadets testing negative were allowed to report to barracks to begin the check-in process. Cadets testing positive were required to report to isolation. Any cadet testing positive at the VMI Infirmary on Oct. 20 or later was not required to be tested; likewise, cadets testing positive on that date or later at an off-post facility could skip the return-to-post testing by providing a copy of their test results.

For the entire return period, Jan. 12 to Jan. 19, the Marshall Hall parking lot was closed so it could be used as a reception and testing area for cadets. First to arrive on post, on Jan. 12, were members of the regimental staff, cadet EMTs, and guard team. The next two days were set aside for the arrival of members of select



Cadet EMT Jon Duran '22 administers a COVID-19 nasal swab test for a cadet returning to post for the spring semester.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

athletic teams, including but not limited to the football, basketball, lacrosse, and track and field teams.

On Jan. 17, members of each company's cadre arrived, plus rats and cadets being readmitted. The next day saw the arrival of 1st Class cadets, members of the battalion and regimental staffs, and Band Company. All other cadets arrived Jan. 19.

Parents were not allowed into barracks at any point during the return process, and the VMI Bookstore was only open to cadets needing to buy books and other supplies for the semester.

Wednesday, Jan. 20, would normally have been a day set aside for cadets to march in the inaugural parade for President Joe Biden. Even with no parade this year, cadets were given the day off from classes. Classes began Thursday, Jan. 21.

As currently scheduled, the semester ahead looks unlike spring semesters in past years, with no spring furlough or Easter break. Spring field training exercises (FTX) are set for April 9–13. Graduation week activities are tentatively set for May 14–16.

This semester has brought with it, though, an increase in the percentage of classes being offered in person. For spring 2021, 64 percent of classes are being offered in-person, with 22 percent hybrid and 14 percent online. During the fall semester, 44 percent of



Cadets check in to move their things back into barracks after Christmas furlough. Cadets received brightly colored bracelets to indicate their COVID-19 test results.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

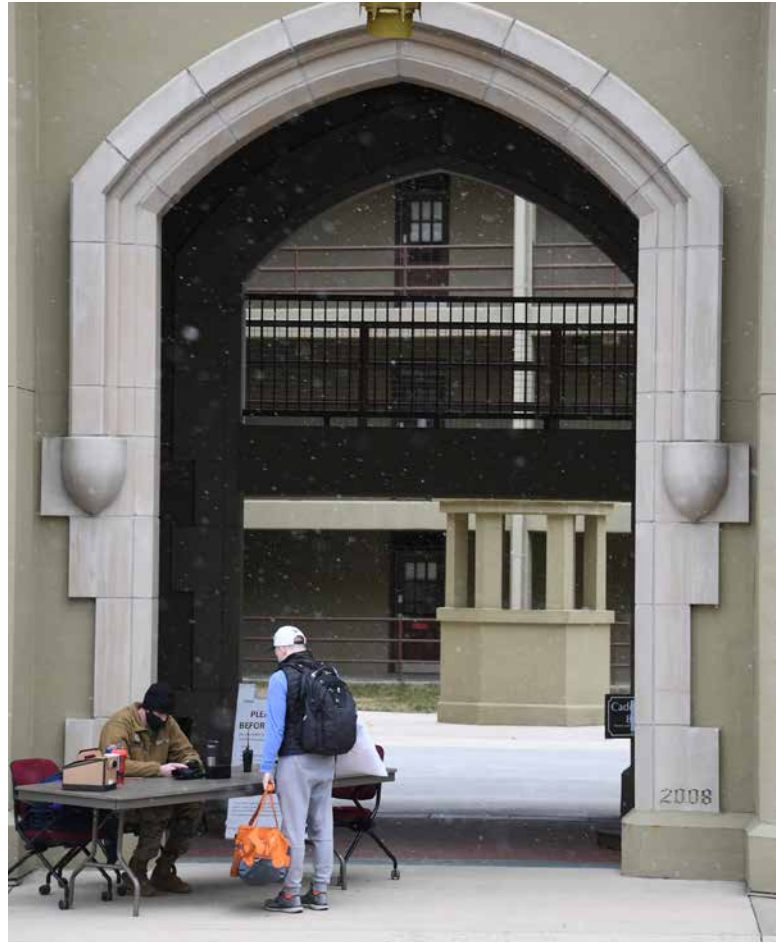
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courses were offered in person, with 34 percent hybrid and 22 percent online.

As was the case during the fall semester, many facilities on post, including most athletic buildings, Preston Library, and the VMI Museum, remain closed to the general public. The Stonewall Jackson House is currently closed for the winter, with reopening set for March 1. The New Market Battlefield and the Virginia Museum of the Civil War are open seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. ❄️



Cadets walk to class from barracks on the first day of the spring semester, Jan. 21.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Andrew Hamrick '21 passes through a final checkpoint before moving back into barracks on Jan. 18.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Diversity Officer to Focus on Strategy and Collaboraton

By Mary Price

The search is underway for VMI's first chief diversity officer.

At the end of October, in response to continuing national media coverage, the Board of Visitors authorized the hiring of such an officer, who would be charged with ensuring equitable recruitment and treatment of all members of the VMI community.

In addition, a permanent Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee has been established on the Board of Visitors. That eight-member committee, chaired by BOV member Mike Hamlar, met for the first time in late November and approved a charter, which calls for it to review the Institute's inclusivity performance, commonality of purpose, and compliance with the Institute's statement on equity and maintenance of a welcoming and affirming environment.

In addition, the committee will review reports on gender and ethnicity data related to recruitment, admissions, and composition of the Corps of Cadets, faculty, and staff.

The job opening for a chief diversity officer was officially posted on the Institute's website in mid-January. The job description states that the officer "champions the importance and value of a diverse and inclusive environment and leads the development of a vision and effective strategy to create a culture for diversity, equity, and inclusion through collaboration and training initiatives that actively engage faculty, staff, and cadets while supporting the unique VMI educational system."

The officer, who will report to the superintendent, will liaison with the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, as well as with the Commonwealth's chief diversity

officer and associated offices within the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia.

Even before the job opening was posted, the Institute's senior leadership had several recommendations of individuals who might be well suited to the position. "There's a lot of interest in it," said Brig. Gen. Dallas Clark '99, deputy superintendent for finance, administration, and support.

Clark said that a search committee is now being developed to evaluate applicants for the position, but the timeline for hiring the chief diversity officer is somewhat dependent on the search for a new superintendent.

"The final selection of the position will be coordinated with the superintendent's office," he stated.

The diversity officer will likely be on board in time for the start of the 2021-22 academic year, if not before. ❄️

VMI Letters Program Seeks to Spread Holiday Cheer

By Mary Price

This holiday season, everyone needed a little extra cheer, but that was especially true of residents of elder care facilities and nursing homes, who were facing little to no visitation from friends and family due to the surging coronavirus pandemic.

Thankfully, the Building BRIDGES Club at VMI stepped up to share the holiday spirit with some of these senior citizens. Fourteen members of Building BRIDGES, a community service club, joined with 21 VMI faculty and staff members, 8 members of the Omicron Delta Kappa (ODK) national leadership honor society, plus members of two NCAA sports teams—men's soccer and wrestling—to write old-fashioned snail mail letters to residents of two local nursing homes, Kendal at Lexington and Heritage Hall.

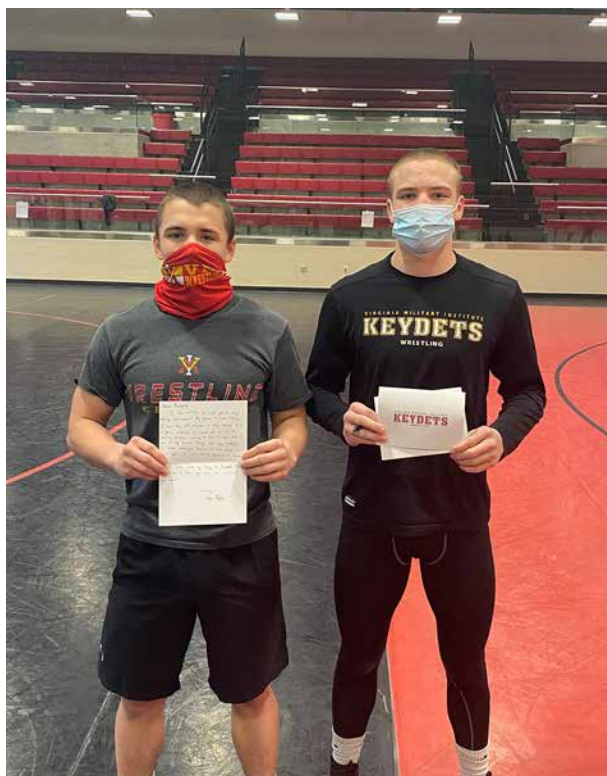
The idea came from Katie McCommons '21, cadet in charge of Building BRIDGES, which in years past has helped build houses for Habitat for Humanity and assisted with fundraisers for Project Horizon, among many other outreach efforts.

McCommons and Col. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl and Lt. Col. Sara Whipple, faculty advisors to Building BRIDGES, were searching for ways to engage the local community in a socially distanced or virtual format when they heard that a local holiday event aimed at helping senior citizens, Be a Santa to a Senior, wasn't going to happen this year due to the pandemic.

Seeing an opportunity, Dimitrova-Grajzl, Whipple, and McCommons offered Melissa Gladwell-Sayre, the coordinator of the Be a Santa to a Senior program, to have members of the VMI community write letters to those seniors instead.

VMI faculty, staff, and cadets signed up quickly—and thanks to their kindness, over 100 seniors received letter

McCommons explained that one of the goals of Building BRIDGES is to build relationships between members of the VMI community and local residents. Before the pandemic hit, visiting seniors living



Wrestlers Luke Fegley '24 and Freddy Junko '24 took time during Christmas furlough to write letters to local senior citizens living in facilities.—Photo courtesy of Jim Gibson.

in nursing homes was high on the group's priority list.

"I thought with the limitations imposed by COVID-19, the best alternative to an in-person visit would be to establish a holiday letter program," wrote McCommons in an email. "We wish for these important members of our community to know that they are thought of and for them to feel cared for during these tough times."

McCommons noted that her grandparents have felt isolated thanks to the pandemic, so she's sure that others feel the same way.

"Everyone involved in this project will benefit from this relationship," she stated. "We are all experiencing difficulties in one shape or form during this ongoing pandemic, but we are stronger together. I am very excited that we were able to get the VMI community involved with this project and have so many people interested in writing these letters."

"We are so thankful that VMI is embracing our community and brightening the days of our residents during these trying times," said Connor Staton, director of marketing and admissions at Heritage Hall.

"The letters they have received help make it easier for them to keep a smile on their face and a positive attitude when positivity has been hard to come by. We look forward to seeing how our relationship with VMI will grow in the future."

And even once the pandemic has passed, McCommons also hopes to keep the relationship going. "Even without COVID, I imagine the holidays may be a lonely time for some residents," she commented. ❄️

EMTs Receive Vaccinations

Allen Xu '21 receives his first round of the COVID-19 vaccine at Carilion Rockbridge Community Hospital Jan. 15, along with 13 other cadet EMTs. At press time, three VMI infirmary staff members had completed the vaccination series, and seven had received their first dose, as well as four counseling, and six athletic trainers.—Photo courtesy of Donnie McBrayer.



ATHLETICS

A Moving Target

By Maj. Michelle Ellwood

Juggling athletic schedules and logistics for a Division I school is a challenge during any academic year, but the 2020–21 athletic seasons could take the medal for most chaotic and confusing—for athletic staff, coaches, athletes, and fans. Several athletic teams have had testing for COVID-19 multiple times per week at various parts of the academic year, adding a new routine to game day preparations. Team meals and travel were arranged differently than in the past, and many scheduling arrangements came down to last-minute decisions.

The rifle teams kicked off competition in late September and will continue through the Southern Conference championships in March. The men's and women's swimming and diving teams participated in only two meets this year, winning across the board. Cross country teams had a strong performance in their only regular season meet on Oct. 30 in Charlotte, North Carolina, at the Tom Scott Open, and finished well at the Southern Conference championship meet Nov. 21 in Macon, Georgia.

Basketball opened the season at home on Thanksgiving Eve, with up to 250 spectators allowed in Cameron Hall. Even with a host of



Greg Parham '21 goes up for a shot during the Keydets' 110-103 victory over the Citadel Jan. 16 in Cameron Hall.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

game cancelations and changes, the team competed well, handing league power Furman its first league loss of the year, and beating

the Citadel, with both teams over 100 at the end of the game. While several games were canceled, most were replaced with other opponents, and several games hosted "sell-out" crowds. A game day hot dog was not an option, as concession stands remained closed.

Wrestling, along with basketball, was the other winter sport that was allowed to host an audience, and the athletes remained in Lexington for much of December. Cormack Hall matches began in early January, and the last regular season match will be against rival the Citadel.

Indoor track opened its season at the fourth annual Keydet Invitational on Jan. 16, winning multiple events and receiving strong marks in others. A special highlight was Jahanzib Shahbaz '21 breaking the national Pakistani



Zach Brown '23 wrestles against an Ohio University competitor in Cormack Hall, Jan. 16.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

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record in the 3,000-meter with a time of 8:12, shattering the national mark of 8:30. Teams were spread throughout the Corps Physical Training Facility, and no outside spectators were permitted.

Athletic staff, players, and fans are still trying to wrap their heads around spring football games, which are scheduled to begin Feb. 20, with the first home game planned for Feb. 27 against Furman. Quarterback Reece Udinski '21 has been named Southern Conference Preseason Offensive Player of the Year.

At the time of print, the VMI baseball team is expected to start Southern Conference games on March 19, allowing 10 weeks of conference play. Women's soccer will begin conference games in late February, and men's soccer will begin in mid-March. Announcements regarding spectators and other arrangements will be released as the seasons approach.

It's a milestone year for the Southern Conference as Feb. 25 will be its 100th birthday. As one of the oldest conferences in college athletics, it will celebrate throughout 2021 with special



Jonathan Gray '22 competes in the Keydet Invitational Jan. 16 in the Corps Physical Training Facility, later coming in first in the men's 400-meter with a time of 50.53 seconds.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

videos and commemorative teams being selected. VMI joined the conference in 1923.

All VMI athletic news, competition results, schedules and changes, and athlete highlights can be found at www.vmikeydets.com. 🦋

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