



# INSTITUTE REPORT

Volume 53, Number 5, February 2025

## Commissioning and Graduation

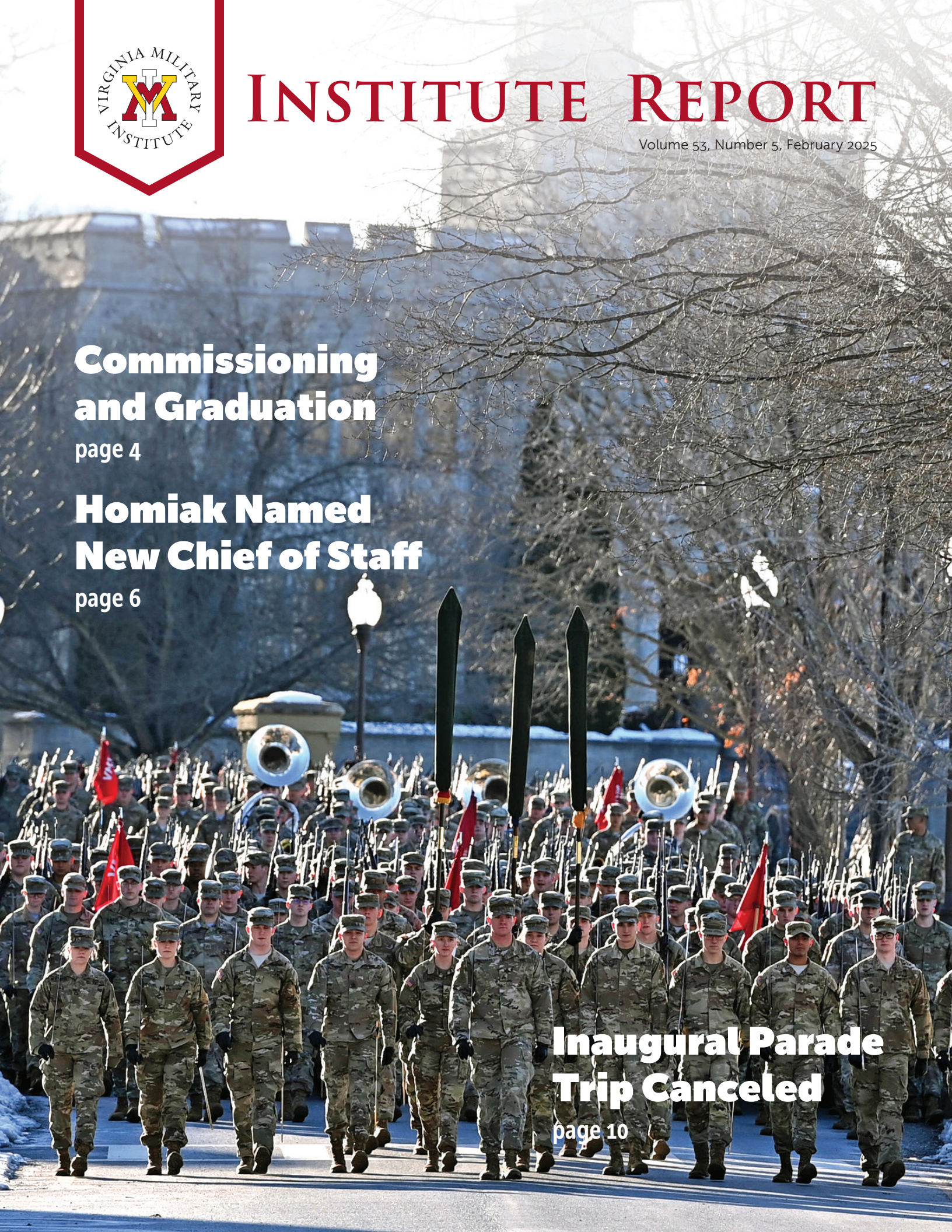
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# Governor Youngkin Visits Post

By Marianne Hause

Gov. Glenn Youngkin paid a holiday visit to post on the last day of fall semester classes, Thursday, Dec. 12.

During his visit, Youngkin met with Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent, who gave him a briefing of the new strategic plan, "Forging 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders," which was rolled out in November.

Following the meeting with Wins, Youngkin ate lunch in Crozet Hall with the Corps of Cadets, who gave him a rousing standing ovation as he walked in the door. The governor thanked the Corps for the warm reception, and told them that for him, visiting VMI is always an honor and provides many glad memories. He reminded them that throughout their lives, they will be asked questions about who they are. "You can answer boldly because you know who you are. You are men and women who live by a code that stands for honesty, excellence, and courage. You put honor above self, and therefore you are the best among us. If you work hard and have the great privilege of graduating from this outstanding institution, you will lead, and you will serve."



Gov. Glenn Youngkin addresses the Corps of Cadets during lunch Dec. 12 in Crozet Hall. – VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Continuing on a lighter note and in the spirit of giving, the governor added, "I'm wondering what things might distract you from finishing a term paper or scoring well on a test. Maybe there was a moment where you were late, or didn't do something you were supposed to do. This is not a moment for me to say that's okay, because it's not. This is a moment for me to relieve those distractions that might keep you from doing your very best this week, because I want 'A's on every

paper and on every test. Therefore, by the power vested in me as governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia and commander in chief of the Corps of Cadets, I do grant amnesty to those cadets who have unserved duties and commitments," he declared to ecstatic cheers, applause, and table banging. "Most importantly, I wish you a very Merry Christmas."

Before leaving post the governor lingered, speaking individually with cadets, shaking their hands, and posing for photographs with them. 🎅



Gov. Glenn Youngkin chats with cadets in Crozet Hall after granting them amnesty for unserved duties and commitments. – VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

# INSTITUTE REPORT

Volume 53, Number 5, February 2025

The Institute Report, VMI's news magazine, 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](mailto:VMIReport@vmi.edu).  
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On the cover: The Corps of Cadets practice on Letcher Avenue for the Inauguration Day parade, prior to the event being canceled due to freezing temperatures.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.


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# December Commissioning and Graduation

By Marianne Hause

A seasonally cool morning warmed into a day full of happiness and celebration in a crowded Memorial Hall as families and friends gathered to witness 38 cadets cross the stage to receive their diplomas during the commencement ceremony Dec. 19.

Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent, welcomed the assembly and congratulated the graduates on their persistence in completing the arduous, demanding journey of earning an academic degree from VMI. He reminded them of the values they learned on post: honor, self-discipline, courage, selfless service, resilience, and excellence, and how those values will serve them well for the rest of their lives. Wins charged the graduates to thank their family members and friends who encouraged them during their time at VMI, and asked them to stay in touch and return as often as they can to support the Institute. Wins then introduced the keynote speaker, Maj. Gen. James "Pat" Work, commanding general for the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division.

Work offered the graduates a few simple perspectives on leadership that he has discovered during his 29 years of soldiering. All the insights begin with the letter "E," the first being energy. "Leadership requires energy. On this day in 1776, Thomas Paine channeled the energy of the colonies when he published the essay, 'The American Crisis,' which contained the line, 'These are the times that try men's souls.' Just a short week later, General Washington inspired his flagging troops to cross the Delaware at night. It was leaders like Paine and Washington, and their ability to energize that kept the American project alive."

Work's second insight was encouragement. "Indeed, iron sharpens iron. Everybody with a pulse needs encouragement. The term encouragement literally means to fill



Maj. Gen. James "Pat" Work addresses the graduating cadets in Memorial Hall. —VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

with courage or to share courage. You have encouraged each other. Never forget that courage is contagious."

Expectations was the third insight Work discussed. "I'm blessed to be the 53<sup>rd</sup> commander general of America's first airborne division, and it's in this role that I stand on the shoulders of warrior giants, and I stand shoulder to shoulder with our young paratroopers. We have standards or expectations for our leaders. The most fundamental questions you can consistently ask yourself in the coming years might be, what am I trying to do? Whose am I? Who am I, and what are my expectations of my life? Keep expectations of your life high."

The next insight was effort. "Effort is a choice." Work quoted Angela Duckworth, Ph.D., who said, "Effort counts twice on the road from talent to achievement. Our skills improve when we invest effort. Effort turns skill into achievement."

When speaking of the insight of endurance, Work invoked VMI's most famous graduate and one of the nation's most influential public servants who never ran for elected office, Gen. George C.



Family members and friends gather in Memorial Hall to witness 38 cadets cross the stage to receive their diplomas Dec. 19. —VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

*Continued on next page*

Marshall Jr., VMI Class of 1901. “Marshall spent 15 years as a lieutenant, and finally promoted to captain in 1917 as America entered the Great War. His life epitomized endurance. On the same day Nazi Germany invaded Poland, [General John J.] Pershing’s favorite lieutenant assumed duties as Army chief of staff. He went on to be secretary of state, president of the American Red Cross, and eventually secretary of defense. His was a story of remarkable endurance. He kept grinding in his craft, and when the nation called, he was ready time and again.”

When he entered the Army as an infantry officer, Work was committed to developing his expertise, the next “E” in the series. “We spend most of our days preparing for a few moments of combat, but when it happens, it’s straightforward. Real people in the real world follow real experts. I’m still deadly serious about expertise, and I still know that I’ll never be good enough. No matter what you choose to do, choose to do it well.



Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 congratulates Melanie Jimenez '25 as she receives her diploma in Memorial Hall. – VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Expertise matters.

“Leaders must set an example,” he continued. “We can choose to set an example and accept that others want inspiration just like we do. I hope you choose your examples wisely. As an Army paratrooper, I live by what might be called the golden rule of airborne leadership, ‘Leaders are first in the paratroop door and last in the chow room.’

“Edge matters in a rough and tumble world. After numerous combat deployments, I’ve seen hard days and edge is the shock absorber. Edge can be powerful. Don’t apologize for it, just control it. It’s up to us to persist on the hard days, and to resist temptation and self-doubt by being prepared. As you depart these hallowed halls, continue to hone the edge you have

developed here.”

Work stated that at this point in his life’s journey, largely colored by his roles as husband, father, friend, and soldier, his philosophy is profoundly simple, to demonstrate empathy for others. “We can be confident and caring at the same time. Be intentional about your work, to understand others, to connect with others, and to put yourself in others’ shoes, even if people don’t care for it. Life’s a team sport. Be an empathetic teammate.”

Work ended his insight list with eulogy, and spoke of what author David Brooks refers to as eulogy virtues. “The idea is simple. What do you want people to say about you when you’re gone? Someday I will have a tombstone, and on one end will be my birth year. In the middle, there’s going to be a dash that leads to my last year. Your dash is your life. Your dash is the choices you make, the relationships you build, the people you love, the work you do. What are you doing with your dash? Make a choice. Choose wisely.”

Work commissioned from the U.S. Military Academy West Point in 1995. He completed the Infantry Officers Advanced Course, the Command and General Staff Officers Course, and led multiple commands throughout his career. He served as aide de camp to the 20<sup>th</sup> Secretary of the Army before serving with U.S. Special Operations Command. In 2011, Work assumed command



Graduates toss their gloves in celebration after receiving their diplomas in Memorial Hall. – VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

See Graduation and Commissioning, page 12

# Homiak Named New Chief of Staff

By Marianne Hause

Retired U.S. Marine Corps Col. Travis Homiak '95, former commanding officer of the Naval ROTC unit at VMI, has been named the new chief of staff, assuming the position most recently held by Col. John Young.

As a cadet, Homiak double majored in international studies and German, and was a member of the swim team. He earned the Lemuel MacKennie Long Jarman Award, and the First Jackson-Hope Medal, for highest attainment in scholarship. Upon graduation, he commissioned into the Marine Corps where he served for over 30 years.

Originally a ground intelligence officer, Homiak served as a scout sniper platoon commander before entering the reconnaissance and special operations community. He was the first ground intelligence officer to serve as a reconnaissance platoon commander in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division and served at every level of command up to the regimental level. He was commanding officer of the Marine Raider Training Center at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

Homiak was deployed multiple times including leading 3d Reconnaissance Battalion in combat in the upper Sangin River Valley of Helmand Province, Afghanistan, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom; serving as a reconnaissance battalion operations officer in Fallujah, Iraq, during Operation Phantom Fury/Al Fajr; and leading a U.S./U.K. special forces team that trained Yemen's national counterterrorism force.



Col. Travis Homiak '95

Homiak holds two Master of Arts degrees from the Marine Corps University in Quantico, Virginia, and a third from the National War College in Washington, D.C. He holds a doctorate in war studies from the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ontario. Prior to his retirement last summer, Homiak oversaw the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the VMI NROTC unit.

Homiak shared he is humbled and excited to have been selected for the position. "VMI was a foundational part of my journey, and I look forward to working hard so others can continue to have a similar experience," he said.

Brig. Gen. Robert W. Moreschi, dean of the faculty and deputy superintendent for academics, who served as chair of the search committee, stated that Homiak brings a wealth of skills and experience to the position. "In his capacity as chief of staff, Colonel Homiak will serve in a critical management role, coordinating the strategic and tactical decisions and actions of the senior leadership team while also functioning as a key advisor to the superintendent," he said.

Homiak will be joined on post by his wife, Phornphan, and their two children.

A national search was conducted to identify the new chief of staff, with input from the senior leadership team and numerous faculty and staff. 🌿

# Kendrick Named Director of Global Education

By Marianne Hause

Col. Jeff Kendrick, professor of French in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, has been named director of the Office of Global Education, assuming the position most recently held by Todd Lee Goen. Kendrick has held the job of interim director since September 2024.

Since his arrival at VMI in 2013, Kendrick has served the Institute in a variety of relevant roles. Founder and co-director of the VMI in Paris program since 2014, he chaired the International Programs Committee from 2018 to 2024, and currently coordinates the Civilizations & Cultures requirement as a member of the Core Curriculum Oversight Committee. He held resident and program director positions for Project GO from 2021 to 2024. Kendrick's primary research interests include polemic and violence in the French Wars of Religion, gender in sixteenth century French devotional poetry, and the integration of classroom technology with language learning. He has published and presented on Marguerite de Navarre, Joachim du Bellay, polemic and politics in the French Wars of Religion, using sitcoms in the French classroom, student-centered learning, and flipping the language classroom.



Col. Jeff Kendrick

Kendrick retains his academic rank as professor of French, and will continue serving as special assistant to the dean for permit and calendar issues.

VMI emphasizes global outreach in many ways: study tours, cultural exchanges with foreign military academies and civilian universities, international internships, and study abroad programs.

Over 10% of the Corps of Cadets take advantage of global education every year. VMI offers semester study abroad programs with approved third-party providers, exchange programs at military academies, and direct enrollments at universities abroad, as well as summer study abroad opportunities both through VMI faculty-led summer programs and through approved third-party providers.

Cadets are permitted to study abroad after their first year at VMI, and may study abroad one regular semester—spring or fall—and as many summers as they like.

The Institute has several scholarship funds to aid cadets who want to go abroad. The Office of Global Education assists cadets with applications for national scholarships, including the Fulbright, Olmsted, and Boren Scholarships and all aspects of planning study abroad programs. 🌿

# Employee Retires after 52 Years

By Marianne Hause

In an era when most employees remain at a job for less than five years, Chris Clark, who is retiring from VMI after 52 years and under the leadership of six superintendents, is a rare gem.

Clark began her career at VMI in August 1972, while still a senior taking business classes at Lexington High School. As part of the cooperative education program, Clark went to school in the morning, then drove to VMI in the afternoon for paid work experience in the registrar's office.

After her high school graduation in May 1973, Clark applied for a full-time job at VMI and was hired to work as a file clerk and switchboard operator in the basement of Smith Hall. Clark explained, "The file room was filled with cabinets of files of VMI alumni from the time of its founding. A staff member in another department was charged with reading several different newspapers, and clipping articles and announcements which mentioned VMI or the name of an alumnus. I would receive the clippings, mount them on paper, and file them. We would include marriages, births of children, promotions, anything that pertained to the alumni. When anyone with the proper clearance and the permission of the particular alumnus came in to examine a file for a background check, like the Secret Service, Department of Defense, or the FBI, we would provide the information."

Clark learned to print letterhead on the multilith, a small printing press used to duplicate office forms housed in the file room. "I would have to put an apron on to run the multilith, and I'd finish with black ink all over my hands," she laughed. Understandably, Clark grew intimately knowledgeable concerning alumni, as well as every post phone number during the 20 years she worked in the office.

In 1993, Clark was transferred to the public relations office, which is now known as communications and marketing (C&M). There, she was exposed to new experiences, expanded her computer skills, and learned about publications. "Public relations was different. I like people, I've always been a people person, and I loved my job. It gave me purpose to get up and go to work."

Clark recalled the famous people who visited VMI during her



Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 presents a meritorious service award to Chris Clark for 52 years of service at her retirement party Jan. 15 in the George C. Marshall Research Library. —VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

time in C&M, like Ruby Sales, the teenage girl whose life was saved by Jonathan Daniels '61 in August 1965, and President George H. W. Bush. She remembered working long hours when female cadets first matriculated in 1997. "That week we often came in at six o'clock in the morning, and worked all day, sometimes until nine o'clock at night. But we did what we had to do."

Former director of C&M, Stewart MacInnis, often relied on Clark for her insight into the VMI environment. "She had so much more experience here than the rest of us. Also, she spent more time in the basement of Smith Hall than most VMI employees spent in the workforce over their entire careers," he joked.

It was in the C&M office that she met her husband, Burton "B.R." Floyd. It was Floyd who assisted her with the multilith and tutored her on the computer. Their professional camaraderie grew into friendship. "We had a good relationship. We would go to lunch together, and sometimes we would go to dinner or a movie. We both liked the same things, and for many years we were the best of friends." Later, the friendship matured into love. Though they had known each

other for decades, they didn't marry until 2020. The couple maintained their professionalism as colleagues while on post.

Clark described retirement as bittersweet. "VMI has been my life since high school, but it's time to start this new chapter, and hopefully it'll be as good to me as VMI has been. I've met so many people who have become my friends."

Her retirement plans include learning to quilt. "My mother and my grandmother used to

make beautiful quilts and I'd love to learn to do that." She plans to continue to work the polls on election day as she has done for over 20 years, and she also wants to do volunteer work. She is a member of Lauderdale Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in Lexington where she is a member of the women's ministry, and chairman of the Janet White/Willing Workers circle.

Clark, who comes from a large extended family—both her father and mother each had nine siblings—jokes that she is kin to almost



Chris Clark listens as Mike Strickler '71 shares heartwarming stories from his time working with her. —VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

See Employee Retires, page 16

# College Debates and Discourse Program Flourishes

By Lt. Col. Kim Connolly

The College Debates and Discourse Program continued its development throughout the fall semester, beginning with a partnership with the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia and the national College Debates and Discourse Alliance. In early September, these organizations led a day-long workshop on the Braver Angels debate format for faculty, staff, and students from across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

VMI's civil discourse and debates faculty fellows, Col. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl, professor in the Department of Economics and Business; Col. Sara Whipple, assistant professor in the Department of Psychology; and Lt. Col. Kim Connolly, assistant director for programs and conferences for the Center for Leadership & Ethics (CLE), participated in panel discussions on VMI's successful development of its debates and discourse program. "While these are called debates, they are actually community conversations where no one wins or loses," explained Dimitrova-Grajzl. "The format of the Braver Angels debates allows for a variety of viewpoints to be shared and for active listening to take place. We find that people appreciate the chance to share their opinions and their personal stories. A common remark during debriefing, immediately after the debate, is that while participants may not have changed their minds completely, they find their positions have softened and are less rigid."

Later in September, VMI hosted an intercollegiate debate on immigration in collaboration with Southern Virginia University (SVU), Washington and Lee University, and Mountain Gateway Community College. The event was opened to the community, and approximately 120 participants representing a wide variety of viewpoints took advantage of the opportunity to voice their opinions. "We chose this topic because it was one of the main issues in the presidential election," Whipple stated. "We and our cadet fellows wanted to demonstrate the power of this proven discussion format on a topic that can be contentious." As a follow-up to the debate topic, visiting economics professor, Michael Hicks '84, gave a talk titled, "The Fiscal, Economic, and Social Effects of Immigration: County Level Evidence in the USA." Students, faculty, staff, and community members who attended the immigration debate, also attended Hicks' talk which delved deeper into the subject.

SVU, which has fully embraced the debate format after being



Col. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl speaks during an intercollegiate debate on immigration in late September. —VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

introduced to it last year at VMI, has held its own events. In November, they held A Braver Civil Discourse (ABCD) workshop post-election titled, "How Should We Act as Peacemakers in a Politically Divided Nation?" The ABCD workshop format fosters solution-oriented conversations, and consists of two parts. During the first part, attendees simply share their viewpoints. In the second part, attendees are asked to offer solutions. Twelve VMI cadets participated in the SVU event.

Also in November, a lunch conversation session branded as, "Food for Thought Conversations," was held at VMI, which gave cadet fellows an opportunity to moderate on a small scale. The topic was political correctness. The small, informal gathering provided an opportunity for cadets, faculty, and staff to share their thoughts and opinions.

The final VMI-focused debate of the semester took place Dec. 5, with about 70 cadets, faculty, staff, and local alumni participating. The resolution was, "VMI continues to hold its cadets to the highest standards." A common theme which emerged from both the affirmative and negative sides was, it is up to cadets to consistently police themselves. Academic, military, physical, and social standards were discussed, as well as the corresponding written standards in the Blue Book and the White Book.

Cadets welcomed the opportunity to participate in the debate. "I believe the Braver Angels debates are an all-around benefit to VMI," said Josiah Farrell '28. "With how separated each of the classes in barracks can be, the format allows cadets to open up and speak their minds without the pressure of the class system. I also feel that addressing questions to the chair eases the fear of public speaking and prompts cadets to engage when normally they would not."

VMI's new strategic plan, "Forging 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders," includes an objective to increase opportunities for the VMI community to debate ideas candidly and civilly, through the CLE. New offerings, including the ABCD workshop format, and a class based on debating economics, are some of the additional activities planned for the future.

Cadet fellows for the 2024-25 academic year are Bella Bruzonovic '25, Earl Filgo '25, Katy Layman '26, and Zach Denton '27. The cadet fellows help choose debate topics, recruit opening speakers, and promote the debates. ❄

# Squire Named Outstanding Faculty

By Marianne Hause

Col. James C. Squire, the Jamison-Payne professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, has been named one of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) and Dominion Energy's 2025 Outstanding Faculty. He is the first recipient in the award's history to receive it twice, the first time in 2004 in the Rising Star category.

Born in England, Squire graduated from the U.S. Military Academy West Point in 1989, and was awarded a Bronze Star as an Army military intelligence officer during deployment in Desert Storm. Squire taught in an inner-city high school before earning his doctorate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he taught, consulted in patent litigation and engineering, and performed biomedical engineering research.

He began teaching at VMI in 2000, and has received numerous teaching, research, and mentorship awards. The VMI Class of 2009 elected him their honorary brother rat. Squire is the first-named inventor of eight patents, has published more than 50 papers, and authored two textbooks, including the recently published, "Introduction to Python and Spice for Electrical and Computer Engineers." He is co-founder of three high-technology startups, MATTS LLC, Tick Rover LLC, and VMIne LLC. Squire is heavily involved with community service and currently volunteers as an EMT with the Lexington Fire Department.

Col. Shawn Addington, professor and head of Squire's department, stated that he is the ideal faculty member.

"Jim is diversely talented and endlessly dedicated to his students,



Col. James C. Squire

a genuine and selfless professional. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with Jim for almost a quarter century. He is most deserving of this recognition."

Brig. Gen. Robert Moreschi, dean of the faculty and deputy superintendent for academics, described Squire as a scientist with a liberal arts mindset.

"Jim is, simply put, one of the most creative and engaging educators in the commonwealth. He is a mentor and colleague who generously gives his time, talent, and passion to cadets and faculty. That generosity of spirit in turn opens doors for those who have worked with Jim through which they

discover possibilities they could not otherwise have envisioned. This is the essence of Jim Squire and why he truly is worthy of being awarded the SCHEV Outstanding Faculty Award."

Since 1987, these awards have recognized faculty at Virginia's institutions of higher learning who exemplify the highest standards of teaching, scholarship, and service. Nominees are selected by their institutions, then a panel of peers reviews the applications. A committee of leaders from the public and private sectors selects the final recipients. This year, the program received 83 nominations. This group was narrowed to a field of 24 finalists and then to the 12 recipients, each of whom will receive a \$7,500 gift from Dominion Energy at an in-person ceremony on March 4, 2025, in Richmond.

Squire lives in Lexington with his wife, Laura, and their two sons, Kevin and Ryan. Additional information on Squire may be found at [vmi.edu](http://vmi.edu) and on his personal website, [www.jimsquire.com](http://www.jimsquire.com). ❁

# Cadets Visit the National Gallery of Art

By Lt. Col. Catharine Ingersoll

Fourteen cadets in Lt. Col. Catharine Ingersoll's Art of Renaissance Europe class visited the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. last semester, to experience the beauty and masterful composition of artworks from the European Renaissance.

Ingersoll explained that seeing art in person provides a more powerful experience than looking at the same works on a screen. "Physical features such as brushstrokes and shades and tones of color emerge more richly to the human eye. Cadets are fortunate to be only three hours away from world-class collections of art. The National Gallery, for example, is the only museum in the Western



Gretal Shank '25 gives a presentation to her classmates on Sebastiano del Piombo's 1516 painting, "Cardinal Bandinello Sauli, His Secretary, and Two Geographers." —Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Catharine Ingersoll.

hemisphere to house a painting by Leonardo da Vinci," she said.

Prior to the visit, each cadet researched one of the works in the National Gallery's Italian Renaissance collection. They then gave presentations at the gallery to educate their classmates. After the trip to D.C., cadets wrote papers to analyze their paintings and place them in cultural context. "Being able to critically examine the complex relationships between art objects and cultural phenomena is a major learning outcome for this course and other art history and visual culture courses," explained Ingersoll. ❁

# Post-Wide Preparations for Presidential Inaugural Parade

## Arctic Blast Prevents Corps Participation

By Marianne Hause

The VMI Corps of Cadets was scheduled to make their 16<sup>th</sup> appearance in a presidential inaugural parade Jan. 20, but word reached VMI the Friday evening before that because of the extraordinarily cold weather forecast for inauguration day—the coldest since President Ronald Reagan’s 1985 inauguration—all events would be moved indoors, precluding VMI and other large groups from participating. The news was extremely disappointing, but more than that, it slammed the brakes on the movement set in place by teams of staff members across multiple departments throughout post that had banded together working extra hours, completing tasks outside their purview to ensure the cadets arrive to Washington, D.C. prepared to show the world the polish and precision that is uniquely the VMI marching Corps.

VMI made its first appearance in a presidential inaugural parade in 1909 when William Howard Taft was sworn in as the 27<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. They returned to the nation’s capital for both of Wilson’s inaugurations in 1913 and 1917, Truman’s in 1949, Eisenhower’s in 1953, Kennedy’s in 1961, both of Nixon’s in



Cadets line up on the bricks in front of barracks before starting a practice parade. —VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

1969 and 1973, Carter’s in 1977, Reagan’s in 1981, George H. W. Bush’s in 1989, George W. Bush’s in 2005, both of Obama’s in 2009 and 2013, and Trump’s in 2017. While some may assume it is a tradition for the Corps to march in every presidential inaugural parade, it is not a given. All organizations

wanting to participate must apply and be selected.

According to Col. Gary Bissell ’89, assistant superintendent in the Office of Operations and Planning, his office placed the presidential inaugural parade on the VMI calendar two years ago. Bissell explained, “We also made sure there were no classes scheduled for that day. Planning in earnest began this past October in anticipation of being accepted, and we submitted the application before Thanksgiving. It included a video, photographs, and a letter of endorsement from Governor Youngkin, secured by VMI’s government relations director.” The wait to hear back began.

Winter furlough had begun Dec. 20. Cadets had gone home, and faculty and staff members were well into their break from work, focused on celebrating the holidays. Bissell finally received the acceptance email from the Presidential Inaugural Committee (PIC) on the evening of Dec. 22. He was thrilled that VMI’s aspiration had been realized and immediately spread the good news to all other pertinent VMI staff members. From that time on, Bissell’s office had continuous coordination and communication with the PIC.

In order to get the Corps to D.C., there were still a series of mandated requirements to be completed with firm deadlines that included security clearance; coordinating transportation; scheduling inspections of weapons, uniforms, and musical instruments; scheduling parade practices; planning for all three meals for the day; and coordinating media coverage.

Bissell asked many staff members to cut their holiday short and assist in the tedious task of credentialing with the Secret Service, all cadets and staff members participating in the parade. Each cadet and staff member’s name, date of birth, social



Col. Shannon Eskam, Katrina Butner, Brig Gen. Bob Moreschi, and Lt. Col. Daren Payne ’90 upload cadet information onto the Secret Service website Dec. 27 in order to get them credentialed to march in the inaugural parade. —Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Michelle Ellwood.

*Continued on next page*

security number, phone number, and email address had to be entered onto a secure Secret Service portal, as well as uploading their photo.

The Office of Global Education had to provide passport and visa information for the approximately 30 international cadets.

The commandant's staff held briefings for the cadets on the first day of their return from winter furlough. Practice parades were conducted each afternoon that week, perfecting the wide turns required to smoothly march down Pennsylvania Avenue. Cadets made multiple circuits down the snow covered Parade Ground, up Letcher Avenue, to the front of barracks, practicing their "eyes left" to the George C. Marshall Statue, serving as a stand-in for President Trump. An additional mandate from the Secret Service required that the bolts be removed from the rifles taken to the parade. The commandant's staff conducted inspections of the rifles to make sure that task was completed. Following the cancellation of the parade, they conducted another inspection making sure the bolts were restored.

Lt. Col. Matthew Halligan, director of the Regimental Band, and Maj. Brian Donaldson, director of the Pipe Band, held extra rehearsals, perfecting their musical repertoire of VMI's fight song, "The Spirit" and "Shenandoah," a song closely associated with VMI. In addition, Halligan created a marching formation for both bands to perform flawlessly, even though they were



VMI regimental commander, Brian Pritchard '25, leads the Corps down the snow covered Parade Ground as they practice for the presidential inaugural parade. —VMI Photo by Jake Falcone '27.

spaced between a battalion of cadets. He also inspected the instruments to make sure they were polished to a gleaming shine.

Halligan was also tasked with making passenger rosters and loading plans for all 29 buses. Some upper class cadets were designated as bus captains, responsible for 47 personnel, their Secret Service credentials necessary to march in the parade, all uniform items, rifles with bayonets, sabers, food, and water.

The impeccable appearance of the Corps required an inspection of uniforms. Some overcoats needed minor repairs, and several pairs of spats worn by the Pipe Band

needed buttons moved and Velcro attached to ensure a proper fit. The VMI Tailor Shop was responsible for those repairs.

The Military Store, the office responsible for providing all uniform items for the Corps, made sure the cadets would not be missing any part of their uniform by packing a box of commonly forgotten items including shoes, laces, socks, hats, gloves, sashes, rifle straps, and brass.

As Napoleon Bonaparte famously said, "An army marches on its stomach," and Lee Clark '93, director of Auxiliary Services, ensured that the cadets would be well fed while away from post. By the time the trip was canceled, 900 boxed lunches had already been assembled for Inauguration Day, including special meals for cadets with allergies or dietary restrictions. Arrangements had been made for the cadets to stop at the New Market Battlefield Museum to have supper after the parade. Parkhurst Dining, VMI's catering provider, was to drive up to New Market to meet the buses at 8 p.m. to distribute the meals. Brittney Phillips, site manager of the museum, planned to position extra lighting in the parking lot for Parkhurst. She arranged for staff members to direct the buses entering and exiting the park to ensure a smooth flow. The New Market town manager, police chief, and maintenance director had all been notified of the arrival of the 29 buses. "When we heard about the



The Corps get their uniforms inspected in preparation for the inaugural parade. —VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

See Parade Preparations, page 16

## Commissioning and Graduation *continued from page 5*

of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 187<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (Air Assault), and in 2013 began service as a staff officer in the Operations Directorate of the Joint Staff. In 2016, he took command of 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. He later served as executive officer to the 39<sup>th</sup> chief of staff of the Army before an assignment as military deputy director of program analysis and evaluation, deputy chief of staff (DCS), Headquarters Department of the Army (HQDA). In 2020, Work returned to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division as the deputy commanding general for support. From May 2021 until August 2023, he led the Operations, Readiness, and Mobilization Directorate within DCS, HQDA. Work graduated from the Marine Corps War College in 2016 and earned a Master of Public Policy Degree from Georgetown University in 2010. He and his wife, Mara, have two children.

The presentation of candidates for degrees was delivered by Brig. Gen. Robert W. Moreschi, dean of the faculty and deputy superintendent for academics, followed by a standing ovation and the traditional tossing



Col. Joe Hansen administers the oath of office to Jarrett Taylor Herndon '24 and Joseph Matthew Slezak '24 during the Commissioning Ceremony in Memorial Hall. –VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

of the gloves.

One cadet, Owen Michael Clarke '25, a biology major from Midlothian, Virginia, maintained a four-year cumulative GPA at 3.5 or higher, designating him as a distinguished graduate.

Seven cadets, Antonio Cirrus Ahanj '24, Grayson Robbins '24, Vaughn Austin Hall '25, John R. Harris '25, Brayden J. Hohman '25, Melanie Abigail Jimenez '25, and Holden Reid Wilkerson '25, graduated with distinction by maintaining a four-year cumulative GPA between 3.0 and 3.499.

The commencement ceremony was livestreamed and may be viewed on the VMI YouTube channel.

The evening before commencement, the Commissioning Ceremony was held in Memorial Hall, where two graduating cadets, Jarrett Taylor

Herndon '24 and Joseph Matthew Slezak '24, commissioned into the U.S. Army as second lieutenants. Offering remarks and administering the oath of office was Col. Joe Hansen, professor of military science at VMI's Army ROTC unit.

Hansen graduated from Washington State University (WSU) in 1996 with a bachelor's degree in anthropology, then enlisted into the Army combat engineers the following year. He deployed all over the world including South Korea, Iraq, Afghanistan, Germany, and Turkey. Hansen is a graduate of the Warriors Leader's Course, the Field Artillery Basic and Advanced Courses, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the School of Advance Military Studies. He holds multiple master's degrees including criminal justice from WSU; military art and science from the School of Advanced Military Studies in Leavenworth, Kansas; and strategic studies from the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Among Hansen's awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit with C device (oak leaf cluster), Bronze Star Medal (3<sup>rd</sup> award), the Purple Heart, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal (3<sup>rd</sup> award), and the Joint Service Commendation Medal. ✱



Jarrett Taylor Herndon '24 and Joseph Matthew Slezak '24 congratulate each other after taking the oath of office in Memorial Hall. –VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

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## Holiday Festivities

December activities on post kicked off the holiday spirit. The Building BRIDGES Club and the Office of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion hosted a holiday card making event Dec. 9, allowing cadets, faculty, staff, and family members to create cards to be sent to veterans at the Virginia Veterans Care Center and to residents at local assisted living facilities. Spirit Night was held Dec. 11 where cadets enjoyed a special dinner served by Parkhurst Dining in Crozet Hall. That evening, community members enjoyed carol singing by the Glee Club in barracks and a candlelight service with the chaplain's office in Memorial Hall. That same evening, the Promaji Club hosted a holiday cookie decorating party. Faculty and staff were also treated to a holiday meal in Crozet Hall Dec. 17.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin and courtesy of Col. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl.



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## 20-Mile March

Rats and their dykes—1<sup>st</sup> Class mentors—march 20 miles around post Feb. 1. The annual event is a bonding exercise between the dykes and rats prior to Breakout. Originally scheduled to occur on the Chessie Nature Trail, lingering ice and slippery mud from recent winter weather caused safety concerns for the cadets and community.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



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## Legislative Reception

Alumni, faculty, staff, and cadets gathered at the Library of Virginia in Richmond on the evening of Feb. 5 to thank members of the legislature, along with executive branch officials and staff, for their service and support of VMI. The reception is sponsored by the VMI Alumni Agencies. Earlier in the day, cadets visited with members of the General Assembly and heard from Gov. Glenn Youngkin. —VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.



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## Keydets Sweep Citadel in Basketball

For the first time since 2019-20, the Keydets got their first season sweep of The Citadel. It was a packed crowd in Cameron Hall Feb. 8, as VMI took the win with the final score 82-70. Earlier in the season, the Keydets won in Charleston 75-70. These games moved VMI to tie The Citadel in the all-time series of this rivalry, 62-62. The team also swept Western Carolina in both contests this year. The season continues through March 1, with the Southern Conference Basketball Championship occurring March 7-10 in Asheville, North Carolina. — VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



# All-Southern Conference Faculty and Staff Recognized

By Marianne Hause

Mattie Queensberry Smith, Ph.D., instructor in the Department of English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies at VMI and recently appointed poet laureate for the Commonwealth of Virginia, and Col. Shannon Eskam, assistant superintendent for strategic enrollment management/director of financial aid, were recognized during halftime at the Feb. 8 home basketball game against The Citadel Bulldogs in Cameron Hall. They have been named members of the All-Southern Conference Faculty and Staff Team for the 2024-25 academic year. With two representatives chosen from each of the Southern Conference's

10 member schools, the All-Southern Conference Faculty and Staff Team recognizes individuals who have demonstrated service to their schools and made contributions to campus life and the local community. Michael Cross, Southern Conference league commissioner stated, "The Southern Conference loves shining a spotlight on the remarkable faculty and staff at our member institutions. Each of the honorees is a leader and mentor at their respective school, and we applaud their service and dedication. We are grateful for the way they cultivate the distinctive and exceptional environments found across the 10 SoCon campuses, serve as cornerstones in their communities, and exceed what is expected in their role."

Smith joined VMI in 2013. She teaches Writing and Rhetoric I & II throughout the academic year and summer sessions. She holds a doctorate in education, curriculum, and instruction with a concentration in Integrative STEM Education (I-STEM Ed.) from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Smith uses the I-STEM Ed. model in her classes to develop cross-disciplinary writing in which cadets explore issues related to their majors and career interests. Smith encourages her students to submit works to literary journals.

As a recipient of a 2023-2024 Cyber-Grant awarded by VMI's Cyber Defense Laboratory (Cyber), Smith, with Stephen A. Ralis '25, wrote a literature review of research regarding cyber tools used to support critical reflective writing within technology and engineering design-based, problem-solving activities. Smith and Ralis presented their review at the Writing Education Across



Mattie Queensberry Smith, Ph.D



Col. Shannon Eskam is joined by Michael Cross, Brig. Gen. Bob Moreschi, and Col. Jay Johnson in Cameron Hall as she's recognized as a member of the All-Southern Conference Faculty and Staff Team for the 2024-25 academic year. Mattie Smith was unable to attend. —VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Borders (WEAB) Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, last September.

As founding member and executive vice president of the Rockbridge-Shenandoah Chapter for the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association (AFCEA), Smith facilitates local community outreach and education through community development activities dedicated to emerging leaders in STEM and cyber-related fields at VMI and surrounding colleges. She has mentored cadets and other college students volunteering to present micro-bits microprocessor

coding challenges in five local elementary schools. Her collaboration with colleagues in VMI's Department of Computer and Information Sciences has expanded programs shared by AFCEA and VMI, including mentorships with industry and agency professionals dedicated to national cybersecurity and local technological innovation.

Eskam began her career at VMI in 2022. She oversees the Office of Admissions, the Office of Financial Aid, cadet marketing, and helps coordinate post-wide retention efforts. She is responsible for developing, implementing, and overseeing the execution of the multi-year comprehensive strategic enrollment

management plan, and ensuring compliance with Title IV and other relevant state and federal laws and regulations. Serving as a liaison to VMI athletics, she will uphold National Collegiate Athletics Association and Southern Conference rules.

She came to Lexington from Casper, Wyoming, where she served as the director of financial aid, deputy Title IX coordinator, enrollment services supervisor, and veterans affairs certifying official at Casper College. Prior to Casper College, she worked at Gillette College in Gillette, Wyoming, as the assistant director of financial aid services.

Eskam earned her doctorate degree in higher education administration and a bachelor's degree in communication with an emphasis in marketing from the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming. She holds a master's degree in organizational management from Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska.

She and her husband reside in Lexington with their two school-aged children and three dogs. 🐾



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## Parade Preparations

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impending weather, we discussed the clearing of the George Collins Parkway, the entrance road to the battlefield museum, with the maintenance director and town manager. The parkway is considered a secondary road, so it is normally plowed last, but the maintenance director ensured me it would be open and ready for the arrival of the buses Monday evening, and he would correspond all this with VDOT. Our maintenance team was also preparing for the extra work to get our lot cleared quickly," said Phillips.

Staff in the Office of Communications & Marketing worked with members of the media in producing news coverage of the parade practices as well as VMI's history with inaugural parades.

As a consolation to the cadets for missing the ceremonies in D.C., and since the buses were still at their disposal, and meals had already been boxed, the commandant's office arranged for alternative activities off post Jan. 20.

Though the cadets did not experience firsthand the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, they will always be heartened by the memory of the many people at VMI who worked above and beyond and banded together in the unified goal to get them there. ❄️

## Employee Retires

*continued from page 7*



Chris Clark runs the switchboard during the early years of her VMI career.  
—Photo courtesy of Chris Clark.

everybody in Rockbridge County. Her son, Seth, is an officer for the VMI police department, and his wife, Ruth, works for VMI Alumni Agencies in the Office of Finance & Administration. They are the parents of Clark's only grandchild, Lily, who attends Rockbridge County High School. ❄️