McNamee to address Northern Virginia graduates

By Joan Ziemba

Provost Mark G. McNamee will address nearly 400 graduate students as they participate in Virginia Tech’s 22nd Commencement ceremony in Northern Virginia on Sunday, May 12, at 2 p.m. in the Schlensiger Concert Hall and Arts Center in Alexandria.

McNamee has been provost of the university for less than a year. He joined Virginia Tech not long after President Charles Steger established a university goal to move into the ranks of the top-30 research institutions in the nation. “Serving Northern Virginia is essential to our role as a land-grant university but as important are our relationships in Northern Virginia, which are essential to the success of our strategic plan,” McNamee said.

Former dean of the division of biological sciences at the University of California, Davis, McNamee brought to Virginia Tech his experience as a researcher and administrator of the UC-Davis biotechnology program, life-sciences informatics program, and centers in neuroscience, animal behavior, molecular biology, and genomic and genetics development — areas in which Virginia Tech is taking a lead in the state and in the nation. He received his bachelor’s degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and his Ph.D. in physical chemistry from Stanford University.

The students receiving degrees during Commencement have studied in the more than 45 graduate programs at the Northern Virginia Center in Falls Church and at the Washington-Alexandria Center in Alexandria.

University reaps NCC Tech Nite awards in Roanoke

By Larry Hincker

Virginia Tech and Blacksburg were well represented at the annual New Century Council Tech Nite awards program May 2 in Roanoke.

Tracy Wilkins, the Alphonse and Maria Stoobart professor and director of the Fralin Biotechnology Center, was awarded the High Tech Entrepreneur Award in recognition of his business success. Wilkins owns Tech Lab, Inc. which has spawned annual growth of more than 25 percent for the last three years. This company, spun off from work in Wilkins university labs, uses recombinant DNA technology to produce medical diagnostic kits. Wilkins also created another successful company, TransPharm, which later merged with PPL Therapeutics, an internationally recognized Scotland-based biotech firm.

Massimiliano Di Ventra, assistant professor of physics, was awarded the Egg Factory Innovation award for his work. Di Ventra invented a transistor that uses single organic molecules to amplify electrical current. It has been heralded as a key component of the emerging field of molecular electronics, which could replace silicon-based microelectronics within 10 years. Di Ventra also received a CAREER Award from the National Science Foundation.

Krisnan Ramu, a professor in electrical and computer engineering, was a finalist for the Egg Innovation Award. In addition to Wilkins, three Blacksburg entrepreneurs with connections to Virginia Tech were finalists, Brett Malone, Phoenix Integration; Mary Miller, Interaction Design and Development; and Bob Summers, nanoCom Corporation. Five of the seven finalists companies for the High Tech Company Award are located in Blacksburg or Christiansburg.

Comprehensive Computer Solutions

Virginia Tech was singled out for excellence in economic development by the keynote speaker, Patrick VonBargen, executive director of the National Commission for Entrepreneurship. He credited Virginia Tech for developing an infrastructure conducive to entrepreneurs. He also noted a recent report by Southern Growth Policies Board that identified Virginia Tech as one of 12 universities from across the nation with exemplary practices for economic development. (See story in May 3 Spectrum, page 1)

University graduates were also honored at the event. The Egg Factory’s John Kent Cooke Foundation Scholarship recipients each won $5,000 to $10,000 for their graduate education.

Seniors receive Cooke foundation scholarships

By Liz Crumbley

Seniors Sara Hupp and Rebecca Weber are among a group of 50 students selected to receive the first Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Graduate Scholarships, each worth as much as $50,000 per year for up to six years of graduate study.

The 50 scholars were chosen from a roster of 675 applicants from Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia. The late Jack Kent Cooke, who built a media empire and owned the Los Angeles Lakers and Washington Redskins, set aside the bulk of his estate to establish a foundation to support education endeavors.

The foundation has set aside about $10 million for the next six years to fund this first class of 50 scholars.

“I find technology, such as aircraft, to be very beautiful in the way it depends on natural processes to perform,” said Hupp, who majors in mechanical engineering at Virginia Tech and will use her Cooke Foundation scholarship to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Hupp is an honors student at the university and has received several scholarships as an undergraduate. She is a member of (See SENIORS on 4)

Alumni center campaign enters final stages

By Larry Hincker

The campaign to fund a new alumni and conference center on the campus of Virginia Tech has entered the final stage as university officials announced that they had raised more than $12 million towards the $16.2-million goal that will help meet construction costs.

Betsy Flanagan, vice president for University Relations and Development, said, “With the continued support of our generous alumni, Virginia Tech is on track to complete the campaign by late summer or early fall. This will be a signature facility for the entire campus.”

Plans for the 191,360-square-foot alumni and conference center were first made public in October, 2000. The facility will feature a new alumni center, a high-tech conference center, and a 150-room hotel. The center will be located at the corner of Campus Drive and Prices Fork Road.

In announcing the progress on the new facility, President Charles Steger said that it would be named the Holtzman Alumni Center in honor of Bill Holtzman of Edinburg, who generously supported the center. Holtzman, who earned his undergraduate degree from Virginia Tech in 1959 and his master’s degree from Cornell in 1961, is president and founder of Holtzman Oil Corp., the second largest employer in the Shenandoah Valley.

Steger also announced that the conference center will be named the Skelton Conference Center in honor of Bill and Peggy Skelton of Blacksburg. “Bill and Peggy are the dynamic duo of Virginia Tech,” said Steger. “Their ties to the university stretch back seven decades. Throughout those years, the Skelton’s unmatched support of our students and athletic programs has been a key factor in Virginia Tech’s success.”

Bill Skelton served as director and dean of Extension. Peggy Skelton was a faculty member and director of the Cooperative Extension Family Resource Program in the College of Home Economics (now Human Resources and Education.) Since their retirement both have continued to serve the university in many ways.

University officials said they hope to begin construction on the facility in spring 2003, with completion scheduled for spring 2005.

Employee Bonus Payments, Leave Program Information

Governor Mark Warner and the General Assembly have approved a program of bonus payments or leave to be granted in fiscal year 2002-2003 to all salaried classified employees. Employees must make a selection and notify Personnel Services of their choice before 5 p.m., May 31.

Employees who fail to submit the re- (See EMPLOYEE on 2)
Events

Friday, 10
- Senior Day, Horticulture Plant Sale, 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., Greenhouses. International Graduation Reception, 11 a.m., Cranwell Center. VTCC Ceremony, 3 p.m., DBHCC auditorium. Graduate School Ceremony, 4:30 p.m., Cassell Coliseum. Army Commissioning, 5 p.m., DBHCC auditorium. VMRCVM Ceremony, 7 p.m., Squires Commonwealth Ballroom. New Virginians, 8 p.m., Squires Haymarket Theatre. Staff Senate, noon, Veterinary Medicine Heritage Room.

Saturday, 11
- University Commencement, 9 a.m., Lane Stadium. Horticulture Plant Sale, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Greenhouses.

Sunday, 12
- Mother’s Day Buffet, 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., DBHCC.

Wednesday, 15
- Staff Appreciation Day, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Rector Field House.

Thursday, 16
- Pay Date for Faculty and Staff Members.

Bulleted

New Campus Guides available
Copies of updated “Campus Guides,” brochures that target visitors to campus, are now available from the Publications and Outreach Communications unit of University Relations. The guide includes a map of campus as well as information on how to get to campus, campus tours, parking, shuttle service, selected campus telephone numbers, and on-campus dining. It also provides information on the area’s museums and galleries, points of interest, hotel and motel accommodations, and bed-and-breakfast facilities.

Departments can request up to 25 guides free from Phyllis Olinger at 1-6867 or phylvo@vt.edu. Copies exceeding 25 will cost 28 cents each.

Wildflower photos on exhibit
The Virginia Museum of Natural History exhibit, “Wild about Wildflowers,” continues through May 15. The exhibit features the photography of Hal Horwitz.

The exhibit focuses on such flowers as the large-flowered trillium, showy lady’s slipper, wild bleeding heart, and purple fringeless orchid.

For more information and museum hours, call 1-3001.

Forest-finance course slated for June
The Department of Forestry in the College of Natural Resources, with the Division of Continuing Education and the Society of American Foresters, will offer forest-land managers a course in “Forest Finance” to be held June 12-13 in the Donaldson Brown Hotel and Conference Center.

Registration fee for the basic course is $175, and the fee for the applications and case analysis session is $295. The two-course module is $425. Registration deadline is May 28. For more information about the course, call 1-5212 or e-mail library@vt.edu. For more information about registration, call 1-5182 or register on line at http://www.conted.vt.edu/forfin.htm.

Alzheimer’s conference scheduled for Roanoke
An Alzheimer’s Education Conference will be held June 27 at the Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center in Roanoke.

To register, contact Jane Todd at the Division of Continuing Education at 1-2044, (janetod@vt.edu) or go to web site http://www.conted.vt.edu/creativecare.htm.

Faculty Senate Elects Officers
Faculty Senate elections for the upcoming academic year were held in April. Officers elected were Edd Sewell, president; Diane Zahn, vice president; and Sam Easterling, secretary-treasurer. Sewell is associate professor of communication studies, Zahn is associate professor of urban affairs and planning, and Easterling is associate professor of civil and environmental engineering.

Habitat-evaluation workshop scheduled for May

By Lynn Davis
The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences in the College of Natural Resources will present a five-day workshop on habitat-evaluation procedures (HEP), May 13-17 in Falls Church.

The Habitat Evaluation Procedures are an approach to evaluating wildlife-habitat quality, developing wildlife-habitat management plans, assessing potential impacts of projects to wildlife, and developing ways to compensate for wildlife-habitat losses associated with project impacts. The class schedule will consist of an introduction to accepted models, spatial concepts, community modeling, baseline and impact on habitat units, predicting futures, computer analysis, habitat-management evaluation methods, HEP software use, as well as some field exercises and case studies.

Dean Stauffer, associate professor of wildlife science, and Richard Stiehl, senior wildlife scientist at Duke Engineering and Services in Bellingham, Wash., will instruct the HEP classes. Stauffer has been conducting research in the area of wildlife-habitat relationships for more than 20 years and has a special interest in habitat assessment and impact evaluation. He has been teaching HEP classes since 1991.

Who is eligible?
All full- and part-time salaried classified employees, hired before May 1, 2002. Employees who were evaluated “contributor” or higher on last evaluation. Note: Wage employees are not eligible for bonus payments or leave under this program. Are employees funded on grants eligible for the bonus or leave?
All classified employees, who meet the other eligibility criteria, will receive the bonus payment, bonus leave, or combination, regardless of how their salary is funded.

Will probationary employees be eligible to receive the bonus or leave?
Probationary employees who are granted the awards will receive part of the bonus payment or leave amount, depending on when they were hired. (See chart below).

Hire or Rehire Date Percentage of Award Granted
July 1, 2001—September 30, 2001 Full award
October 1, 2001—December 31, 2001 75 percent of full award
January 1, 2002—March 31, 2002 50 percent of full award
April 1, 2002—April 30, 2002 25 percent of full award
May 1, 2002, and later No award

How will the bonus be calculated?
The bonus is based on salary as of July 1, 2002. Changes in salary after July 1 will not affect the amount of the bonus. The employee’s regular salary will be used to calculate the bonus, overtime pay and temporary or acting pay will not be included in the bonus amount.

Can the department restrict employees’ choices?
Departments with critical operations that require staff coverage may not be able to ap
Gray receives governor’s award

Betty Gray, a laboratory and research practitioner IV for the Tidewater AREC in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, has received the Governor’s Award for Long-Term Quality Service.

The award for long-term quality service is one of several awards designated as part of Virginia Public Service Week. The criteria for nomination include long service and consistent contribution to the agency’s mission. The nominated employee may consistently provide long-term quality service over four decades.

Gray’s nomination states, “Betty was hired at the Tidewater Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Holland (now Suffolk), as a lab aide B in 1955. During the ensuing 45-plus years, her skills increased and she was relocated to a higher classification level. Today she prepares samples for laboratory analysis and records the weather and maintains an extensive database of weather records. Further, Betty supervises day-to-day operations in the

(See GRAY on 4)
Undergraduate wins Goldwater scholarship

By Liz Crambley

Erik Herz, a junior working on under-graduate degrees in materials science and engineering (MSE), economics, and international studies, has been selected to receive a Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship for the 2002-2003 academic year.

The Goldwater scholarship will provide as much as $7,500 to Herz during his senior year. The U.S. Congress established the scholarship program in 1986 to honor Sen. Barry Goldwater (now deceased) and to encourage outstanding students to pursue careers in mathematics, the natural sciences or engineering.

Herz became interested in biomaterials during a study-abroad program at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia in 2000. “I saw how beneficial that field can be,” he said. “The biomaterials I’m interested in can be placed into the human body and used as carriers for drug-delivery systems to treat diseases.” Another impetus for his interest in this field was the death of his father from cancer in 1993. “Through research, I hope to find new ways to help people,” he said.

Seizing opportunities as early as possible, Herz has worked on faculty-directed research projects during all but one of his semesters as a Virginia Tech student. Since September 2001 he has worked in the Virginia Tech Optical Sciences and Engineering Research Center as principal lab technician, fabricating semiconductor quantum-dots. “Researching quantum-dots is essential because of its implications for the study of cancer,” he said.

“Erik has distinguished himself as an outstanding undergraduate researcher,” said Ron Kander, former professor of MSE and now a department head at James Madison University. Herz was involved in several sponsored-research projects in Kander’s polymeric materials laboratory at Virginia Tech.

Economics, his second major, is a subject Herz finds “stimulating—I enjoy learning about the ways businesses and industries operate.” He chose international studies as a third major “because I have an international background—my parents came to the U.S. from Switzerland—and I’m interested in travel and learning more about other countries.”

Herz spent spring semester 2001 studying classical Roman history and Italian at Virginia Tech’s European center in Riva San Vitale, Switzerland.

A member of the Hillcrest Honors Community, Herz has been named to the College of Engineering’s Dean’s List every semester. He has received numerous scholarships while at the university, including the Paul E. Torgersen Leadership Scholarship, Gilbert and Lucille Scay Scholarship, Honors Community Scholarship, Knobler MSE Book Scholarship, and others.

During his senior year at Virginia Tech, Herz plans to conduct graduate-level research and he will remain at the university to complete his master’s degree in MSE.

The nomination states that Gray “performs beyond her daily duties by volunteering her time and resources on many weekends and holidays by coming to the center throughout the year to record data as part of the National Weather Observation Services. She not only records this information but also collates it into publishable form to be used in support of the research and Extension programs of the center. She also assists in the field by helping with research plot harvesting with cotton and other crops. Betty always is rated as a most valuable member of the harvest crews with her positive attitude and strong work ethic.”

Planning to be present for the awards ceremony in Richmond are Fred Stokes, director of Tidewater AIRC; Norris Powell, Gray’s supervisor; and Dan Hallock, Gray’s former supervisor.

Virginia Public Service Week, May 6 through 12, is an opportunity to reward and recognize employees for their hard work and dedication to the state and raise public awareness of the contributions state employees make every day.

Lynn Davis, public-relations coordinator for the College of Natural Resources, was one of 55 employees from state agencies who was randomly selected by the state’s Department of Human Resource Management to participate in the Governor’s Award ceremony as employee ambassadors to thank award recipients on behalf of other employees. Davis will travel to Richmond today to help Warner host the state employee awards reception at his home.

EMLOYEE

Continued from 2

Bonuses will be included in the August 30, 2002, paycheck. An employee must be on the payroll in an active employment status on August 30, 2002, to receive the bonus.

Can the bonus be tax sheltered?

Employees who elect to receive a bonus payment may contribute some or all of the bonus payment to their tax-shelter plan to avoid paying income tax on the bonuses, so long as the employee does not exceed the annual maximum-deferral amounts. Personnel Services will send additional information about tax shelters to employees who select the bonus in early July. FICA tax must be paid on the amount that is contributed.

Bonus Note to Faculty Members:

Policies for faculty members regarding the bonus program are under discussion and pending Board of Visitors approval in June. None of the deadlines listed above for classified employees apply to faculty members. More information regarding faculty recommendations will be included in an upcoming issue of Spectrum.