Fighting Chance

James Klucarits’ crusade to save the American Kestrel
Colin Donovan takes a hurdle in stride as he prepares for a future track meet. Alvernia’s track and field team, led by new coach Jason Kilgore, is setting school records en route to becoming a strong contender in the MAC Conference. Learn more about how Donovan and his teammates are off and running on page 44.
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On The Cover: The plight of the American Kestrel is in the hands of volunteers like Professor James Klucsarits and Joshua Rusbuildt ’07.

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Alvernia University Magazine
President's Message

Springtime at Alvernia brought with it an unusual addition to the usual mix of my presidential activities: grading student essays. I have been fortunate to teach and learn alongside gifted colleagues and talented students and also have the opportunity to reflect anew on some of the student experiences that form what I like to call the “Alvernia Advantage.”

After five years of wonderful opportunities to teach each spring in the Seniors College — without the “pleasure” of exams and papers — I was invited to team-teach an interdisciplinary honors course by two of Alvernia’s finest faculty, Carrie Fitzpatrick (literature/communications) and Donna Yarri (theology). “Faith and Doubt in Modern Literature” has brought together students from many majors for stimulating dialogue about some of the big questions that should be at the heart of an undergraduate education … especially at a Franciscan University rooted in both the Catholic and liberal arts traditions.

During the semester, I spoke with several groups of students about why such courses in the humanities were important. Most were majoring in professional fields like business, nursing, and occupational therapy. What I learned is that many students, regardless of major, are drawn to humanities courses because, in their words, such courses “help me to see myself,” “to open my mind,” “to walk a mile in another’s shoes,” and “to visit other cultures and historical eras.”

Humanities courses, several noted, push them “far outside [their] comfort zone” and encourage creative, open-ended thinking rather than memorization and more passive learning. Humanities courses, said one older student, “made [him] squirm,” by posing uncomfortable questions and forcing him to question unexamined assumptions.

As I pointed out to one group of insightful students, they had praised humanities courses for apparently contradictory but really interconnected reasons: both for prompting deep self-reflection and for challenging them to look beyond themselves to probe beliefs and cultures quite different from their own.

Small wonder. Such opportunities abound at Alvernia. One large group of students that gathered last month for dinner at Cedar Hill Farm had recently returned from Alternative Break trips to places like Appalachia and Ecuador. Some were leaders in community service activities at Alvernia, such as the Earth Day of Service that despite rain drew more than 50 Alvernia community members.

That these experiences make a difference is clear in the story of Joshua J. Rusbuldt (Class of 2007), a successful Johnson & Johnson chemist who uses his three full weeks of vacation each year to further service projects that were started while he was an Alvernia student.

Along with the achievements of alumni like Joshua, Alvernia is also becoming well known beyond the local area due to its recognition as a national leader in community service and civic engagement. Yet even as our reputation expands, we continue our long-standing commitment to our surrounding communities.

Beginning next fall, there will be some extraordinary new students joining us from Berks County. Top senior scholars from the county have been offered prestigious $60,000 Shirley and Joseph Boscov Scholars Awards, made possible by Shirley Boscov, her son Jim, and his wife Cindy. I had the pleasure of calling all awardees and congratulating them on their achievement. They are an exceptional group of young people.

Our Boscov scholars will join a campus community bustling with the signs of progress. Just several months after dedicating Pacelli and Zygmunta Halls — the first two buildings of Founders Village — we will begin construction on two more buildings, raising our residential capacity to 1,000 students. Other plans for the fall include a new Educational Technology Center and a major expansion of Francis Hall including a large outdoor plaza and a new lobby, art gallery, and music and theater rehearsal spaces to complement the recently renovated theater and recital hall.

Amidst all this progress, we paused to honor a distinguished servant-leader and beloved member of the Alvernia community, State Senator Michael A. O’Pake. A large crowd gathered to celebrate his life during a tribute hosted by Alvernia on April 8. We are humbled that the Senator selected Alvernia to house his entire collection of political papers related to his four-decade career in state government. We are also profoundly grateful that he remembered Alvernia with a generous bequest of over $1.5 million. It is only fitting that the O’Pake Institute of Ethics, Leadership, and Public Service has been established in Mike’s memory.

Ethics. Leadership. Service. From the inspirational life of Mike O’Pake to the activities and reflections of today’s students, Alvernia makes a difference in people’s lives. And all of us who are blessed to be a part of the Alvernia family receive so much in return.

Thomas F. Flynn
President
Senator Mike o’Pake was a tireless advocate for Reading and Berks county, a devout Catholic, and a true believer in the transforming power of education. Those values were evident in his professional and personal life, manifesting themselves in his decades-long commitment to Alvernia University as a friend of the institution and a trustee.

He never forgot his roots or his faith, and his own dogged pursuit of education lifted him out of poverty. A testament to his character, after he had “made it,” he dedicated his life to serving others, first in private practice as an attorney, and then as a public servant for more than 40 years.

Not even death could quell his devotion to those core beliefs or deter him from making a difference. As evidence of his deep and abiding belief in our heritage and mission, Senator o’Pake named Alvernia as one of just four beneficiaries in his will, bequeathing his entire collection of professional papers, the most prestigious collection of political artifacts that Alvernia has received. In addition, he directed that the University receive an amount in excess of $1.5 million, our largest bequest to date. The gift has been used to establish The o’Pake Institute for Ethics, Leadership and Public Service, ensuring that the Senator’s legacy will continue in perpetuity.

There is no greater indication of loyalty to the university than to provide for its future through a planned gift. Individuals who have made this ultimate commitment are honored with inclusion in the St. Clare Society, and we are humbled to include Senator Michael A. o’Pake in this organization. In life, Senator o’Pake personified the qualities that define humanity at its best. In death, through his careful and considered gift planning, he has left a legacy for the ages.

For more information on the St. Clare Society or to discuss including Alvernia University in your estate plans, contact the office of Gift Planning at 610-796-8430.
With mounting interest from health care professionals within the region and nation to ensure nurses are appropriately educated for the increasingly complex challenges of the health care environment, Alvernia University and The Reading Hospital and Medical Center have formed a partnership that will increase access and opportunities for advanced education through formal degree programs.

Beginning in fall 2011 nursing students enrolling in the hospital’s School of Health Sciences will be simultaneously enrolled at Alvernia. The dual-enrollment program will allow those completing the School of Health Sciences Nursing Program to benefit from a seamless transition into Alvernia’s Bachelor of Science nursing degree program. In addition, Alvernia and The Reading Hospital plan to jointly offer an Associate’s Degree in Medical Imaging beginning in 2013, an extension of the Radiologic Technology Program currently offered by the School.

In addition to paving the way for academic progression, the partnership assures that nursing education remains accessible and cost-effective by enabling students to begin their education in a diploma program and transition into the bachelor’s degree program.

Thomas F. Flynn, Alvernia’s president said the timing for the agreement between Reading Hospital and Alvernia is ideal, given the strength and reputation of Alvernia’s nursing program and the rapidly rising educational expectations for the profession. He envisions that in addition to providing direct benefits for the Berks County community by ensuring the region has access to a pool of well educated nurses to meet the needs of residents, the partnership can become a model for institutions.

“With the partnership, we are able to establish a seamless transition for students from the Diploma in Nursing program at Reading Hospital to the Bachelor of Science degree at Alvernia,” Flynn said. “It’s about providing an education, it’s about access, and it’s about making sure students can continue their education in a seamless and accessible manner that takes advantage of the strengths of both institutions.”

“Bequest is university’s largest $1.5 million gift will establish O’Pake Institute”

It seems that even the afterlife can’t slow the late Sen. Mike O’Pake’s propensity to give back. The Reading, Pa., native who died last December after serving nearly four decades in the Pennsylvania state senate as a champion for all those in need, left Alvernia University a bequest in excess of $1.5 million, the largest received in the institution’s history.

Recognizing the Senator’s personal commitment to Alvernia’s emphasis on ethics and leadership, and in commemoration of his life of service, the university is using the funds to establish the O’Pake Institute of Ethics, Leadership, and Public Service.

“This is truly a remarkable gift for which we are deeply appreciative,” said Alvernia President Thomas F. Flynn. “Mike O’Pake would be so pleased about the Institute, humble about his role but proud to be helping shape Alvernia’s future as a distinctive Franciscan university, committed to personal and social transformation as well as to academic excellence.”

The O’Pake Institute joins the O’Pake Science Center, a campus landmark dedicated in 2006, as permanent reminders of the statesman’s transformational impact on the institution. According to Alvernia Provost Shirley Williams, The O’Pake Institute is an expansion of the university’s Center for Ethics and Leadership, launched in 2006 alongside the Holleran Center for Community Engagement.

“The Center for Ethics and Leadership has been a nucleus for dialogue on contemporary ethical issues, particularly as they involve the challenges of leadership,” said Williams. "It has promoted values-based leadership among our students as they work together with faculty and our community partners.”

Moving forward, the newly christened O’Pake Institute will build on that work, with an additional emphasis on public service. Initial programming will be introduced in the upcoming academic year, with the Institute fully operating by fall 2012.

In January, the university learned that the Senator had selected Alvernia to house his entire collection of political papers related to his remarkable career in state government. This historical archive will eventually have a presence in the Franco Library where it can be accessed by historians, scholars, and students.

Alvernia has formed a partnership with Reading Hospital’s School of Health Sciences.

Alvernia, Reading Hospital develop regional initiative

Alvernia has formed a partnership with Reading Hospital’s School of Health Sciences.
Flynn tapped for ACCU, AFCU Boards

During its annual meeting in Washington, D.C., the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities elected Alvernia President Thomas F. Flynn, Ph.D., to its Board of Directors. In addition, he was elected to the Board of Directors for the Association of Franciscan Colleges and Universities.

Both appointments are for three year periods. President Flynn is a past board member for the American Council of Education and Council of Independent Colleges.

He currently serves on the editorial advisory board of Liberal Education, the Committee on Accountability for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, and an array of state and local boards.

Environmental center slated for Angelica

Since 2001, when Tropical Storm Alison washed out the dam that caused Angelica Lake to drain, the boathouse there has remained an artifact to its past. Now, that structure is getting a second life and the scenic park that borders Alvernia’s campus is on the verge of gaining a state-of-the-art Environmental Center that will serve the region.

Alvernia is a key partner in the process and in supporting renovation of the boathouse thanks in large part to the leadership of doctoral student Alicia Sprow, who calls the project a “wonderful example of a successful multi-partner community project.” The structure will soon be enclosed to accommodate classroom space, an office, a storage area and restrooms.

For several years the Angelica Creek Environmental Education Executive Committee has been holding programs at Angelica Park for Reading School District students (pictured above during an Eco Fun Day event). The new renovations will allow for the program to expand and add students from other districts.

Founders Village halls named for Bernardine Sisters

Alvernia dedicated two Founders Village student apartment buildings this spring, recognizing a pair of memorable Bernardine Franciscan Sisters who left an indelible mark on the institution. Sister Mary Zygmunta, who among many other accomplishments was the founding president of Alvernia, and Sister Pacelli Staskiel, a legendary English professor and university administrator, were honored during the ceremony with buildings that now bear their names.

The dedication ceremony for Zygmunta and Pacelli Halls attracted dozens of students, Bernardine Sisters, faculty, staff, and members from the community who were eager to pay tribute to the two legendary figures who so impacted the university.

Sr. Zygmunta passed away in 1988; Sr. Pacelli died in 2010.

Sisters Jacinta, Florence, and Madonna from the Bernardine Franciscan Order spoke movingly about the lives and legacy of Sisters Zygmunta and Pacelli during the ceremony, vividly bringing their examples to life for many in the audience.

“As we pass their names each day, we will have a constant reminder of Alvernia’s mission and values: to learn, to love and to serve,” said Marissa DeLucia, a student ambassador who spoke during the dedication ceremony. Founders Village originally opened in 2009.

Breaking records

University receives largest number of applications

Last fall, Alvernia filled every bed on campus with the most geographically diverse class in its history. A first-year class of nearly 400 joined the growing population of almost 1,500 undergraduate students, with more than 800 living on campus.

Now Alvernia is setting records again. With the number of applications for its fall first-year class close to 1,900, the university has topped last year’s record by several hundred.

“The numbers of both inquiries and applicants have been rising in recent years,” said John McCloskey, vice president for enrollment management. “The rough economy is leading more students to look for college degrees, because they know they will need more skills to land a good job.” And Alvernia is well positioned to help those students by offering more than 50 majors.

The university also has a strong commitment to making the school affordable for all students, McCloskey said. “About 99 percent of students receive some type of financial aid.” In addition, a dual admissions agreement between Alvernia and Reading Area Community College and a special scholarship program to help those students finance an Alvernia education are already making an impact, said McCloskey.
Days of Service making a difference in Berks

Alvernia volunteers braved the rain to participate in this year’s Earth Day of Service. Students and staff cleared debris from the courtyard at St. Joe’s Villa after taking the time to learn a little about the heritage of the Bernardine Sisters they were helping. Senior Shana Brice liked the idea of helping the Sisters. “They can’t come out and do it themselves,” she said. The Villa is home to about 80 retired Sisters.

Another 20 volunteers cleaned up Thun Trail, along the Schuylkill River Trail system, and a few students cleaned up trash at Angelica Park.

Earth Day is one of three dedicated service events held each year in which Alvernia community members perform service at a multitude of outside locations. Other events are held during student orientation in August and Martin Luther King Jr. Day in February.

Study looks at athletics and recreation

An Athletics and Recreation Study Committee has been reconvened to evaluate expanded athletic, health, wellness, and recreational programs at Alvernia. The committee is assessing a range of options, including the possible addition of football, as well as plans to expand indoor recreation and fitness facilities.

“As we grow as a university, and continue to attract larger numbers of students from the wider Mid Atlantic region as well as from Berks County, it is important that we address changing needs in the athletics and recreation areas,” said John McCloskey, vice president for enrollment management. “To that end, this past year the university successfully added women’s golf and men’s and women’s indoor and outdoor track and field, and we believe we have other opportunities that require our assessment.”

The Athletics and Recreation Study Committee will develop a final report and recommendations regarding recreation and athletic programs, indoor facility needs, and the football feasibility study for evaluation by the Board of Trustees.

Presidential Perspectives features Alvernia

Readers of the popular Presidential Perspectives higher education leadership series are learning a great deal about Alvernia’s recent progress courtesy of the latest installment written by President Thomas F. Flynn.

Chapters for Presidential Perspectives are authored by notable college presidents whose institutions are in the forefront of innovative practices in a range of areas. Dr. Flynn’s contribution, “Values and Vision: Identity, Integrated Planning, and Institutional Transformation” fits perfectly with the theme of this year’s series “Economic Prosperity in the Next Decade” and is featured on the organization’s website. The series focuses on the strategies and innovations colleges and universities are employing to not only adapt to the new realities of higher education but also to thrive.

Alvernia’s recent transformation from small college to multi-dimensional university reflects all these experiences, Flynn notes in his chapter.
New student apartments planned

With enrollment growing and student interest in on-campus living options at an all-time high, the university has announced plans to break ground on construction of two additional student apartment buildings by this September. The units are expected to be completed by fall 2012 and will be the latest additions to Founders Village.

The new buildings, which will be located adjacent to Pacelli and Zygmunta Halls, will feature state-of-the-art accommodations for upper-class students and will offer both apartment and suite-style living options. It is envisioned that both buildings will include some space for campus community use. It is estimated that approximately 180 students will be housed in the units.

Pacelli and Zygmunta Halls were opened in fall 2009 and are home to more than 150 students.

Alvernia hosts HECBC Conference

The Higher Education Council of Berks County (HECBC) held its 12th Annual Undergraduate Research and Creativity Conference at Alvernia in April. More than 140 students from all five area colleges submitted scholarly work for the conference, including research papers, artwork and photography. Many were joined at the event by their faculty mentors.

Alvernia Professor of Biology Dr. Spencer S. Stober provided a keynote presentation, “Insight through Inspiration, Imagination, and Intellect.”

A faculty council including Dr. Thomas Bierkowski, Dr. John Rochowicz, and Dr. Kathleen Wisser began work in early 2010 to make the HECBC conference a success. Other HECBC members include Albright College, Kutztown University, Penn State Berks, and Reading Area Community College.

Judge to lead Alvernia Board

One of the region’s most talented leaders and sharpest legal minds is in line to serve as chair of Alvernia’s Board of Trustees, beginning July 1. Joanne M. Judge, Esq., who has served as vice chair for the past year, will fill the role held by Kathleen Herbein ’95, who completes a three-year term as board chair this June.

Judge is currently co-chair of the Health Law Department at the law firm Stevens & Lee, where she focuses her practice on transactional and regulatory matters for health care systems, long-term care, senior living organizations and physician practices. She previously served as president of Community Hospital of Lancaster, was formerly its chief financial officer, and was honored as one of Pennsylvania’s Best 50 Women in Business. In 2009 she received the Athena Award from the Berks Chamber of Commerce.

She holds a bachelor of science degree in accounting from St. Joseph University, a J.D. from Villanova University School of Law, and is a Certified Public Accountant.

“We are so very fortunate to have individuals the caliber of Joanne and Kathy to provide the leadership for our board,” said President Thomas F. Flynn. “Having strong board leadership has been so critical to our success these past several years. We can look forward to that continuing under Joanne’s direction.” Alvernia’s Board will formally vote to elect Judge as chair in June.

Sen. Schwank visits

State Sen. Judy Schwank, former member of Alvernia’s Board of Trustees, recently visited with Alvernia President Thomas F. Flynn after winning a special election for the 11th District Senate seat. Schwank will complete the late Sen. Mike O’Pake’s four-year term, ending in 2012. The District stretches across 40 municipalities in Berks County, including the City of Reading, its surrounding suburbs, and most of the eastern half of the state.
Campus news

Francis Hall construction underway

Work has begun on the exciting Francis Hall campus-side entryway and renovation that is transforming the space inside and out. A new theater and recital hall was completed in fall 2010, making possible some spectacular performances in the historic space. Beginning in fall of 2011, a new art gallery, music studios, and music and theater recital spaces will open.

Students and visitors to these new locations will enter through a dazzling multimillion-dollar student plaza that features a dramatic terraced exterior and spacious patio. A new main lobby is also included in the project.

These projects are the latest additions to a renaissance underway in Alvernia’s living and learning environment. Recent projects have included completion of a high-tech suite of Criminal Justice classrooms, a state-of-the-art laser lab supporting science programs, and a new main lecture hall. An Educational Technology Center is slated to open next fall.

Boscov Scholars announced

Last fall, Alvernia announced a major new scholarship initiative, made possible by the generous support of the Boscov family: Shirley and Joseph Boscov, their son Jim, and his wife Cindy.

Berks County high school students applied for the award of $60,000 over the course of four academic years — the highest merit award Alvernia offers.

In the end, 13 local high school seniors, from Boyertown to Twin Valley, received personal phone calls from Alvernia President Thomas F. Flynn, Ph.D., congratulating them for having been chosen as 2011 Joseph and Shirley Boscov Scholars.

“The Boscov family has long supported students at Alvernia as well as the entire Reading and Berks County community,” said Flynn. “They have been — and continue to be — a fixture of community leadership, holding education as an important foundation in their philanthropic work.”

Toast of the Town
Cedar Hill Farm has a new hot spot — Holleran Pub. The pub is a focal point of university social functions hosted at the farm, which serves as the president’s house and conference center. Jerry and Carolyn Holleran donated Cedar Hill Farm to Alvernia in 2009. The historic stone estate dates back more than 170 years and encompasses nearly 300 acres.

The first Boscov Scholars were announced during a reception at Alvernia this spring.

President Flynn, second from right, discusses Alvernia’s admissions success with, from left, Dwayne Walker, director of admissions, Christine Hartzman ’94, Stephanie Garcia, admissions counselor, and Dan Hartzman, guest program coordinator.
Theo Anderson

Leavin’ lizards!

Flying, Leopard, Gargoyle, Frog-Eyed Wonder...

No, these are not fodder for a new Harry Potter book. They’re just a few of more than 1,300 families of geckos that Alvernia students learned about this spring from one of the world’s leading lizard scholars.

Dr. Aaron Bauer, herpetologist and professor of biology at Villanova University, is currently researching evolutionary patterns in reptiles and amphibians, focusing on lizards, and in particular, geckos.

At Alvernia, Dr. Bauer spoke to students about his research on different species of geckos, highlighting the unique characteristics that define geckos and where various species are found. The event was sponsored by the Alvernia Science Association, an organization that fosters an awareness of the responsibilities and challenges facing modern scientists.

O’Pake tribute event draws smiles, tears

Alvernia’s Physical Education Center was packed in April with many from the community including students, residents, business leaders and politicians, all to pay tribute to the man known as “The People’s Senator,” Michael A. O’Pake. The event was a regional celebration of the Senator’s life, which touched so many, including those at Alvernia, where for close to 20 years he served as a trustee. Speakers included President Tom Flynn, Bishop John O. Barres, Albert Boscov, Rev. John Gibbons, State Sen. Judy Schwank, Kevin Murphy, president of the Berks County Community Foundation, and student Emily Berret.

An emotional Albert Boscov shares fond memories of his friend, the late Michael A. O’Pake during a tribute event at Alvernia.

Values & Vision: Charting Our Progress

Since launching the Values and Vision Campaign, strong progress has been made toward the $27 million campaign goal. As the university’s most ambitious fundraising campaign to date, Values and Vision is providing the needed resources to continue Alvernia’s development as a distinctive Franciscan university while enabling progress in strategic areas critical to the institution’s ongoing success. The campaign is scheduled to run through 2013.

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Alvernia University Magazine 11
Three Alvernia business department professors worked together to detail a new process for organizational planning, in order to help organizations remain viable in times of accelerating change. Their book Planning in Reverse: A Viable Approach to Organizational Leadership, was published by Rowman & Littlefield.

Di You, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Psychology


Rosemarie Chinni, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Chemistry

Rose Chinni co-authored a paper "Comparative Study of Femtosecond and Nanosecond Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy of Depleted Uranium" with Luke Emmert, David Cremers, Randy Jones, and Wolfgang Rudolph. The paper was published in Applied Optics. For this study, depleted uranium spectra were compared using femtosecond and nanosecond laser pulses.

Roxana Delbene, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Languages

Roxana Delbene attended the American Association for Applied Linguistics that was held in Chicago. She presented her paper, "How Are You Feeling? in the Healthcare Context: An Analysis of the Screenplay Wit."

Kathleen Muzevich, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor of Education

Dr. Kathleen Muzevich co-presented "Making Academic Language Accessible to English Learners: Implications for Teacher Education Programs," at the AACTE 63rd Annual Meeting and Exhibits in San Diego, with Dr. Judith K. Wenrich, professor of education at Millersville University.

Bryan Dreibelbis, CMA, CFM
Associate Professor of Business

Bryan Dreibelbis was reappointed as Director of Academic Relations on the Reading Institute of Management Accountants (IMA) Board of Directors. He has served as a member of the Reading IMA Board for the past 21 years.

Peggy Bowen-Hartung, Ph.D., CTS
Associate Professor of Criminal Justice

Peggy Bowen-Hartung presented two papers, “Impact of Collaborative Efforts with Kiwanis International, Juvenile Probation and the Court,” and “The Institutional Review Board: Friend or Foe,” at the 48th Annual Meeting of the Association of Criminal Justice Sciences in Toronto. She also chaired a session, “Utilizing Qualitative Methods to Provide Insight into Guarded Lives,” at the meeting.

Ellen Engler, M.S.Ed.
Chair and Associate Professor of Education

Dolores Bertoti
Chair and Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy

Karen Thacker, Ph.D.
Dean and Associate Professor of Nursing

Ed Hartung, M.A., JD
Chair and Associate Professor of Criminal Justice

Mary Ellen Symanski, Ph.D.
Chair and Associate Professor of Nursing

Mary Ellen Wells, JD, LLM
Chair and Associate Professor of Business

Several faculty members presented “Academic Leadership Strategies to Foster Personal Responsibility in Students,” as a group at the 28th Annual Academic Chairpersons Conference, earlier this year. Their presentation focused on strategies chairs can use to move students from attitudes of entitlement to personal, professional responsibility. All of the presenters are current department chairs or deans at Alvernia.

Anne M. Fink, MSN, RN
Assistant Professor of Nursing

Anne Fink recently published "Early Hospital Discharge In Maternal And Newborn Care" in the peer reviewed Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic, and Neonatal Nursing. She was also appointed as a National League for Nursing Ambassador.
Of course, the Beat is not dead, never has been. The Beat impulse as originated by Jack Kerouac, writer in post-WWII America was just the most current refrain of the “intense enthusiasm/don’t care at all” paradox that manifests itself in the bohemian element of any culture. What makes Kerouac's inception of the Beat so important, and at a premium these days, is its unflinching attention to the soul as the foundation of the human experience, Beat or not.

Faith is the hardest kind of attention we have to pay, and therefore easily back-listed. We Earthlings have always needed figures to inspire our attention to the possibilities of something else, something better, and definitely something that we are not used to. Faith in the intangible, the spiritual, has always been a confidence game from the start. To win our confidence, to remind us about such things has always been difficult, and gets harder as time rolls on in the “Big Attention Grab” of our modernity (post-modernity?).

Way before Mohammed, Jesus, Buddha, and Abraham, around whom the world’s major religious traditions crystallized, longer ago than the fantastic Greek myths, further back in antiquity than Vedic scripture, and still so much further back, at least to the cave paintings in Lascaux, France (17,300 years ago) — in the WAY back — probably since we climbed down from the trees, even — when the world, hence the Mind, was preverbal, raw and simple in its immediacy, knit to and same as our individual experiences of it — since when we were all about surviving

Continued on page 52

My turn

Death of the Beat?

Spencer S. Stober, Ph.D.
Director, Center for Ethics and Leadership
Professor of Biology

Spencer S. Stober served as a judge for the National Ethics Bowl in Cincinnati. The competition was sponsored by Siemens and the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics (APPE). Stober also served as Chair for an “Author Meets the Critics” session at the annual meeting of the APPE.

Jim Siburt
Adjunct, Humanities

Jim Siburt’s research on semiotics of popular culture media was featured on TheoFantastique.com.
Q: How has Alvernia’s Franciscan mission impacted you?
A: Living a Franciscan lifestyle means living a more simplified life, of service and humility. My wife and I both focus on the idea that you can be “statusified” or you can be “satisfied.” It’s easy in the music industry to get caught up in a “rock ‘n’ roll” lifestyle with more “wants” and “needs.” Settling in Nashville gives us the opportunity to be among industry professionals but in a more laid back environment where people have similar intentions and are driven by a humble commitment to serve others, serve their community and most of all serve God.

Q: You’ve helped make Ceili Rain fairly successful. Of which accomplishment are you most proud?
A: As a player, I love that Ceili Rain can find a place to live between both the mainstream world and the faith-filled world. Not many artists and bands can do that. We do not shy away from recognizing that all things come from God.

Q: What do you like most about traveling with your band?
A: I love that I get to meet people from all over the country and beyond. It blows me away how gracious people are and how they offer us so much hospitality. I love to hear stories about how they are inspired by our music, how they came to a show with a challenge or burden on their heart and leave with a complete feeling of joy.

Q: What do you like most about being the percussionist for the group?
A: As the drummer I have the responsibility for driving the band. The physicality and the energy have to be spot on, every time. I love that I get to add my own interpretation musically to great songs, unlike other players who have to follow notes and chords. I also love being set back behind everyone because I get to see everything unfold on stage and in the audience.

Q: What do you like most about performing with your band?
A: There is a certain spontaneity with Ceili Rain that is especially exciting. Since we are not based in the same hometowns, we never ever rehearse anything! We show up for an event and go live. Playing with an incredible group of talented musicians makes this a little easier because you never have to worry about anyone lagging behind.

Q: Between touring with Ceili Rain and managing Albie Entertainment, what do you do to relax?
A: There is not a whole lot of time for relaxation, but when it comes along, I value the downtime with my wife Aly. We enjoy cooking with friends, a good game of Scrabble, a visit to our favorite Mexican restaurant, participation in community projects, and of course recording music with other friends in town.

Q: What are your thoughts about your alma mater Alvernia?
A: What attracted me to Alvernia all those years ago was the balance it offered academically, spiritually and socially. Today, 25 years later, I am so proud of the growth of the school, and that it still offers students that same balance that I found most rewarding.
This spring, the annual Batdorf and Hesburgh lectures captured the attention of large audiences who were captivated by timely topics that touched on national issues.

Dr. Spencer S. Stober, professor of biology, teamed up with Dr. Donna Yarri, associate professor of theology, for this year’s Batdorf Lecture. The duo led a provocative discussion on the religious and social implications of emerging biotechnologies that are paving the way to change life as we know it.

Father Mark Swope ’84, an ethicist for the Holy Redeemer Health System, moderated the session that called attention to the theological issues and ethical dilemmas raised by new technologies and their use to alter and extend human life.

Professor Brown-Gort, associate director of the Institute of Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame, addressed a packed Bernadine Conference Center for the annual Hesburgh Lecture. His remarks on the impact of the growing national Latino community explored the forecasted increases in Hispanic populations during the next decade. Brown-Gort focused his comments on the likely influence of expanding Latino groups on various economies and communities.

The Ethics, Leadership & Community Lecture Series is sponsored by the O’Pake Institute for Ethics, Leadership and Community Service and the Holleran Center for Community Engagement.

Strike up the band
Carol Schwanger, associate professor of music and chair of the fine and performing arts department, plays the bassoon during Alvernia’s faculty recital. The recital took place in the newly renovated Francis Hall Theater and Recital Hall.

Lectures captivate crowds
Fields of Dreams

You’ve heard the stories.
Accounts of small children growing up in third-world countries with no electricity and little food, waking up before dawn to work in the fields alongside family members.

For Alvernia student Francisco Contreras, it was no story. It was his own personal reality show.

Contreras grew up in the Dominican Republic about 25 miles away from St. Francis of Assisi Elementary School in Santo Domingo. He lived in a three-room home with his great grandmother, grandmother, uncle and brother.

Waking before 5 a.m., he would follow his uncle to the rice fields. After a full day of work, he would walk more than a mile to school for three hours of class work. Because they had no electricity, evening homework was completed by gaslight. Math was scribbled into dust on the floor.

Pushed by his uncle, Contreras took school very seriously. Other kids dropped out of school early — some only learning to read and write their own names. Many thought their time would be better spent playing baseball; a misconception that Contreras also held until his uncle set him straight. The hard way.

“Most boys in the Dominican Republic think they are going to play in the big leagues. They have a very skewed perception of America,” he said. “They have a very skewed perception of America. When I was seven, I skipped school to play ball — once. My uncle came from the field to set me straight.”

Contreras never missed another day of school and never forgot the lesson. “My uncle was like a father to me,” he said. “He pushed me when I needed to be pushed, and made sure I was taking every opportunity that came my way.”

That includes the opportunity to come to the United States.

Contreras said a difficult goodbye to his uncle in 2002, when he came to Pennsylvania, and eventually moved to Reading to live with a father he hardly knew. He was lonely, could not speak English, and the shock of a new culture would make the next chapter of his life difficult. He learned — on his own — to speak English in less than a year, regardless of the jeers he received from classmates who already spoke the language, and later from Spanish speaking classmates who didn’t think he should...

By Carey Manzolillo with Sr. Rosemary Stets, OSF
be trying so hard to adapt.

Thankfully, he found some friends. A kind co-worker at the garage where he earned a few dollars each week gave him great advice when he had no one to ask about adolescence. In high school, ROTC Captain Bill Jimenez helped him to look past the often violent, drug-ridden halls to focus on classes and grades. Through his hard work, Contreras earned a full ROTC scholarship for college. And during a Latino Leadership Conference, Contreras met the late Senator Mike O’Pake who shepherded him to Alvernia. “The Senator left it for me to decide, but I think he knew Alvernia would be right for me,” he said.

Now as a full-time criminal justice major in his junior year, he has dreams of a successful career in law enforcement, a far cry from the visions of major league baseball he had as youth. But for Contreras, Alvernia’s academic rigor is actually the easy part when compared to his after-class routine. That’s when he proudly hops a bus bound for a full-time job so that he can make ends meet. During the summer, he’ll pick up another job to take advantage of the opportunities to earn more money.

So you would bet that during school breaks, Contreras would head to the beach or lounge on his sofa for some well-earned rest. Instead, he chooses to use his free time to help others by going on service trips through Alvernia’s Alternative Break program.

While on a local service trip in Reading last year, he learned about a planned winter break mission trip to his native country to work with the Bernardine Sisters there. “I signed up right away,” he said. He couldn’t wait to return home to see his grandmother in the Dominican Republic.

But what he found there was not comforting. Though he knew his uncle and great grandmother had died in his absence, he did not know what that would mean for others in his family. “Without my uncle, my
grandmother’s home is falling apart. My brother is working in the rice fields, and the neighborhood is getting worse. Without an education, many of my old school friends now have families that they cannot support. It’s very sad.”

Just 25 miles away in the Santo Domingo neighborhood where the Bernardine Sisters live, things are different. The main roads are now paved. The Sisters provide basic meals to children and use generators for power, because the government often shuts off electricity to the city.

As the Alvernia group made its way to the Sister’s complex, Contreras’ criminal justice classmate, and friend Lorena Rivera sat quietly, trying to pick out changes in the landscape. Though she has been an American citizen since the age of nine, Rivera was born to a middle-class family in Santo Domingo. Things had changed since she last saw her homeland.

“It’s hard to compare the Dominican Republic with the United States,” she explained. “There are more opportunities here…education, work.” The lure of opportunities is what prompted her family to move to America. Her parents came to the states a year before Rivera and her four siblings joined them.

Once here, Rivera had to quickly learn English and adapt to a new social norm. “I got into a lot of trouble because I was very talkative and asked a lot of funny questions. I just didn’t understand some of the cultural things,” she said. “I was in culture shock.”

Though she had a great experience in elementary school, things got harder as middle and high school classmates began to focus less on schoolwork and more on each other. Eventually, something had to change.

For Rivera, change began with new life. Rivera was 15 years old when she became pregnant with her son Wellinson. “I was living in a fantasy world,” she said. “When you’re young, you think you know what you want — but you really don’t.”

A supportive family enabled Rivera to stay in school. “It was hard. I took a bus to work and then took another bus to night school, but I never thought about dropping out.” When high school was nearing its end, she met with a guidance counselor to talk about college.

“She wasn’t very nice to me,” Rivera frowned. “She told me that no school would accept me.” But the determined young mother didn’t listen. She started taking classes at Reading Area Community College.

“I had to start at the bottom, but it was good for me,” she said. Rivera worked her way through classes and eventually made the honor roll, propelling her to think even bigger. She started looking at colleges that had opportunities for service. “Choosing Alvernia was actually based on the school’s mission,” said Rivera.
“Life is not just living for yourself, your career, your achievements. It is about making a difference in your community, being a leader, and especially, being someone who is willing to help when there is a need. Helping people is something that I believe in, and Alvernia really teaches it.”

She hopes to graduate this December with a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice and maybe take a position working in juvenile rehabilitation. “But ultimately I’d really like to go to law school and become an immigration lawyer,” she said.

“Everyone has barriers,” she explains. “Being a single mother with five classes and a full-time job is not the end of the world. There will be more barriers. You just have to break through them.” Rivera hopes to spread that message to young girls headed down the same difficult path she has traveled. She spends one hour a week mentoring a young girl through the “GoodGuides” program run by Goodwill. “I wanted to give back and maybe help young girls make better choices.”

During their service trip to Santo Domingo, both Contreras and Rivera found many opportunities to talk to adolescents in the barrio about the cultures of the two countries and to dispel Dominican myths about life in the United States as “an easy life that happens without work.”

Rivera told the children that they do not have to leave their country to make a better life. “You can have a goal and work to realize your personal dreams right in your own country,” she said. “Don’t use the excuse of weak or inadequate government support for the state of affairs in your life. Stand up as leaders within your community, and make a difference.”

Contreras recognized a tremendous growth in the Santo Domingo barrio community and credited the Bernardine Franciscan missionary Sisters for the cultural shift. He believes that the next generation of leaders will come from St. Francis of Assisi Elementary School. “The Sisters are effecting systemic change, teaching the people to care for the good of everyone, not just themselves, and stressing the importance of strong family values for the future of the country,” he said.

“If we continue to blame the government, we will always remain poor; we must organize and help ourselves and emphasize the importance of education for the children who are our future. You’ve got to work hard. Not everyone grows up to be a baseball player.”
plastics have become a symbol of 21st Century convenience, but are the benefits really worth the costs?

Death by Plastic
If fact, plastics are now found everywhere, including our bloodstream, (the results of harmful plastic-based chemicals leaching into our food and water). And they are piling up in our landfills at an incredible rate. Valued for their versatility, plastics make up more than 12 percent of the municipal solid waste stream, a dramatic increase from 1960, when plastics contributed just one percent.

However, the problem with plastic is more than its choke hold on our landfills. In fact, its other issues are far worse. “The Roman Empire may have been defeated by lead in water pipes, but...we, too, might be risking future generations with the cheapest, strongest and most ubiquitous material ever invented,” says celebrated filmmaker Ian Connacher, who spoke to an engaged audience of students, faculty and staff at Alvernia during an Earth Day presentation in April. The event was the perfect backdrop for Connacher to screen his powerful documentary “Addicted to Plastic: The Rise and Demise of a Modern Miracle.”

“Plastic might be quietly poisoning us. This is my wake-up call,” said Connacher, describing his sobering film that graphically brings to light the impact plastics are having on our global environment and personal health. His film details overwhelming scenes of out-of-control plastic consumption, from mountains of plastic found in landfills, to the site of a single soda bottle... found 4,000 miles from the Asian coast.

“By no means am I anti-plastic. I think it’s a great material, but it’s all about how we’re using it and misusing it,” said Connacher. According to Connacher, he’s always been the kind of guy that brought his own reusable bags to the store along with his reusable coffee cup, but after making this film what really struck him was this idea of toxicity, and “what’s really in the plastics we’re using?”

After speaking with endocrinologists and toxicologists, Connacher has become much more aware of which types of plastics he’s purchasing.

“And of course now, my eyes are like magnets for plastic everywhere, which made me realize how truly pervasive it is. If anything, that’s what I want people to take away from this experience, to wake up and see the world through this lens.”

Health & Longevity magazine reported that a group of 38 scientists associated with Bisphenol A (BPA) research have issued a consensus statement saying that they are particularly concerned about the use of BPA in food and beverage plastic storage. BPA is an additive widely used in plastic packaging and the resin linings of food cans.

Studies claim that BPA is functionally similar to diethylstilbestrol (DES), a synthetic estrogen banned...
long ago for use by pregnant women. Previous studies have linked BPA with a range of health concerns including increases in hormonally mediated cancers, such as prostate and breast cancers, increases in abnormal development in men, early sexual maturation in women, an increase in neurobehavioral problems such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and even autism.

It’s long been believed that foods wrapped in plastic or packaged in cans can leach chemicals including BPA and phthalates (plasticizers that keep cling wraps and other plastics flexible), both of which are known endocrine disruptors, or chemicals that interfere with reproductive hormones in the body.

However, just how much of those chemicals migrate from our food into our bodies has never been quantified until recently.

Researchers from the Silent Spring Institute, a nonprofit center devoted to studying chemicals in the environment that are linked to breast cancer, have examined how much BPA and phthalates are ingested from foods that are wrapped in plastic. By putting families on a diet free of canned food (cans are lined with an epoxy resin made with BPA) and foods packaged, stored, or cooked in plastic, they measured reductions of those chemicals in people’s bodies. Not surprisingly, their study found that those who avoid packaged foods have fewer chemicals in their systems.

The good news is that we now have an estimate of how much food packaging can contribute to overall BPA exposure according to Ruthann Rudel, director of research at the Silent Spring Institute. And she says we know how to significantly reduce BPA exposure — for many chemicals, that is still an unknown.

A Personal Choice

Connacher, and other national experts, drive home the point that consumer choice is extremely critical in reducing our dependency on plastic. Think about the amount of plastic you use every day, starting from the moment you wake up: the plastic bottles of shampoo, conditioner and body wash in your morning shower, your plastic comb, toothbrush and other grooming items. You soon are opening the plastic bag containing bread and other breakfast items, using a plastic carton of milk, and putting the plastic lid back on the coffee can as the coffee brews in the plastic coffeemaker.

Then there’s the plastic in your automobile, school and office supplies, water bottles, and other items as you make your way through the day. Plastic containers and utensils are everywhere, including “disposable” ones.

A trip to the store will have you purchasing dozens of plastic-packaged items, including plastic items themselves. The material that was welcomed as a sturdy, lightweight, and flexible material is now used in millions of applications, on billions of products.

“Plastic is piling up around the globe, but it’s the everyday choices that consumers make that can drastically help the situation,” agrees graduating senior Emily Berret. “People have to change their mindset, and realize what they do matters.”

Many people point to water bottles as an unnecessary use of plastic. Bottled water has emerged as the new age way of drinking the world’s oldest beverage. Breaking that particular addiction would do much to reduce plastic consumption.

According to the Container Recycling Institute, in the U.S. more than 60 million plastic water bottles are thrown away each day. That’s more than 41,000 every minute, in this country alone.

“The bottled water phenomenon blows my mind,” admits assistant professor Dr. Deborah Greenawald, RN, who plays a leadership role on Alvernia’s Green Team. “It’s such an unnecessary use of plastic — and why pay for water anyway?”

Economically, bottled water is indeed a poor choice. At least 90 percent of the price of a bottle of water is for things other than the water itself, like bottling, packaging, shipping and marketing, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council.

But the plastic waste created because of trendy water consumption is even more alarming. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, since plastic water bottles are shielded from sunlight in landfills, they will not decompose for thousands of years.

“Taking back the tap” is a trend that’s getting some legs, particularly on college campuses. People are using refillable water bottles and the nearest water tap to create their own take-along water.

“I won’t have bottled water served at my meetings,” says Judy Bohler, coordinator of Mission Initiative and a member of the campus Green Team. “I have a pitcher of water and cups instead.”

The proliferation of plastic disposable shopping bags is another enormous problem in the environment. These seemingly harmless bags do not biodegrade; light breaks them down into smaller and smaller particulates that contaminate the soil and water, according to the Clean Air Council. Even though many stores offer recycling bins for the bags, less than one percent of them are actually being recycled.
Like a growing number of people, Bohler uses reusable shopping bags, always keeping a few in her car for trips to any store. “Part of the vision of St. Francis was care for creation, and all creatures on earth are to be protected,” she points out. “Taking care of the Earth is a Franciscan value, and it includes simple things like not using plastic bags.”

A side benefit: reusable shopping bags are not only good for the environment, but also people find they enjoy using them. Reusable bags with their flat bottoms don’t sprawl all over car trunks and countertops like plastic bags.

In addition to saying no to plastic water bottles and bags, consumers are making choices that are smart for the earth and sending a message to manufacturers.

“I make a conscience effort to buy products made from recycled goods and to choose products with less plastic packaging,” says student Chelsea Borror, president of the Environmental Club. “Sometimes that’s hard to do but worth the effort.”

Alicia Sprow, a doctoral candidate who is also a member of the Green Team, says that being a busy mom can make it more difficult to make the right choices.

“Unfortunately, it’s so much easier to grab a plastic bag rather than to use disposable containers,” she says.

But she adds that making the right choice is important, especially to those concerned with the next generation. “We have to work to achieve sustainability in this world and be aware of where our actions are leading,” she says.

Continued on page 52
A fighting
One man’s personal quest
to bring the American Kestrel back from the brink of extinction

By Lini S. Kadaba

James R. Klucarits turns his silver Tacoma truck onto the gravel driveway off of Onyx Cave Road on the outskirts of rural Hamburg, Pa. “This is a hot spot,” the 56-year-old Alvernia University assistant professor of biology says enthusiastically as he nods toward a telephone pole, where a weathered pine birdhouse sits 11 feet above the ground. Nearby is a farmhouse, and all around stretch miles of open farmland and rolling hills.
Saving the Kestrel Hawk
On cue, a raptor the size of a Mourning Dove swoops out of the 16-by-11 inch, green box and settles on a distant tree branch. It is an American Kestrel, this one obviously a male from the flash of its rust-colored tail feathers. As Klucsarits has suggested, the bird likes this spot. A few minutes later, the quiet is broken by a characteristic “klee, klee, klee” call. A female Kestrel, brown and black wings fringed with red-brown, emerges over the nearby field. A pair! Klucsarits cranes his neck, and his companion, Joshua J. Rusbuldt, 25, scans the sky with binoculars.

“Gorgeous,” Rusbuldt says, catching his breath. He is a 2007 biochemistry graduate of Alvernia who loves Kestrels as much as his former bio teacher.

On this mid-March morning, the last day of Alvernia’s spring break, the two men are relishing the sight of spring’s first American Kestrels — once-abundant birds that have suffered disturbing declines in recent years. But thanks in large part to the work of volunteers such as Klucsarits, this ecologically important raptor has a fighting chance to wage a comeback.

For the 20th year in a row, the Fleetwood, Pa., resident will spend his summer volunteering with the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary’s American Kestrel Nestbox Project, in which he monitors the nesting and breeding success of the colorful falcon along the back roads of Berks County. “Used to be just about any road you drove on, you’d see a Kestrel pair sitting on a pole or wire,” says the longtime bird watcher — as he drives between nestbox locations — a route he follows completely from memory. “It was almost a glut of Kestrels.”

That was in 1992, when he first joined the nesting project. Now, the bird is a much rarer sight. “It’s a common species that is suddenly disappearing,” he says. “It’s cause for alarm.” Researchers, using data collected through the Hawk Mountain project and the more than dozen others like it around the country, are trying to figure out why.

Unlike most volunteers, Klucsarits is a trained scientist who brings his research interest to the fieldwork. While he hasn’t sought grants, he has published on the topic and tests his own ideas to improve the Kestrel’s success rate. Starting in mid-March, he prepares more than 40 boxes for the hoped-for pairs of birds. (The Hawk Mountain project has a total of 123 boxes spread out over 500 square miles.) Then he will return in May to count eggs. Those boxes with cinnamon-speckled spheres will get a recheck at least every two weeks through the summer. Klucsarits watches for nestlings, and

“Simply put, without volunteers like Jim, we wouldn’t be able to carry out this project at this magnitude.”

Keith Bildstein
then at 17 days, he will measure and band the birds before they fly away. He may even take blood samples.

That's been his routine for nearly two decades, with no compensation for his time or countless gallons of gas. To date, the avianophile estimates he has logged 16,200 miles, banded 1,158 Kestrels and spent 1,300 hours in the field.

It is an avocation with its share of risks: Kestrels can peck and claw your hands with fishhook-like talons, squirrels can jump out of boxes and into your face, electric fences can zap you, and you can never discount the possibility of an ornery farmer pointing a shotgun your way. Days like this wind-swept one involve the dirty job of scraping out bird droppings that smell as funky as a neglected horse stall.

But all that is OK, when you consider the wonder of a nest full of newborn chicks or the satisfaction when they grow their wings and fly the box — the box that you nailed to a side of a tree with just that hope in mind. It's all about the birds.

“It's got to be a passion to keep doing it,” he says. For six of the more recent years, Rusbuldt has accompanied Klucsarits, first as a student and now as a colleague. He uses his three weeks of vacation from his job as a formulation chemist at Johnson & Johnson in Radnor solely for that purpose. “I'm on board for life,” he says.

Kulcsarits, a tennis player, is tall and lean, with chiseled good looks and more salt than pepper in his hair. He's an easy conversationalist with his own brand of humor. For instance, he says he attracts birds. Every time he stops at a box on this day, he points out the crows in the trees. “See, birds follow me,” he says. Of course, he just pays more attention to the winged creatures than most and calls attention to the muster of crows. But for a while, he convincingly plays the role of Bird Whisperer.

“I got into this because I love working with the birds,” he says. “I just want the birds to have a place to nest.”

Kestrels are the smallest and most widespread falcon in the Western Hemisphere. Weighing only about as much as a can of Coke a third full, they are closely related to Peregrine Falcons and have wingspans that measure up to two feet. They nest in cavities of trees in open areas, feeding on insects and meadow voles and other rodents. The American Kestrel is still common enough that it has not been placed on the federal endangered species list. Only a few states, including New Jersey, list it as threatened. Nonetheless, many scientists and bird lovers are concerned about this raptor's well being.

Once numbering in the millions, Kestrels nationwide have significantly dwindled in population since the early 1990s. “They've been decreasing by a couple percent per year for at least 20 years,” says John Smallwood, an associate professor of vertebrate ecology at Montclair State University in New Jersey and an expert on the species. “We're down to half what they were a generation ago.”

That dramatic drop matters because the Kestrel is high on the food chain and therefore a sentinel bird — an alarm system not unlike the canary in the mine — for the health of natural meadows and farm lands. Its success, it could be argued, ultimately reflects our success. “They're worth investigating because they're indicators of something out of whack in our ecosystem,” says Jillian Liner, director of bird conservation for Audubon New York, which started its own Kestrel nestbox program last year.

She and other scientists note that the Northeast Kestrel population has been particularly hard hit. In 1992, the Mountain's nestboxes had 86 pairs. By 2005, that number had plummeted by nearly 60 percent to 35 pairs — a low point. Since then, the birds’ numbers appear to have recovered noticeably. Last year, 60 pairs had set up home in the boxes. Researchers have not pinpointed a single cause for the decreases. Rather, theories abound, including loss of the small farm habitat Kestrels prefer; a rise in predatory Cooper's Hawks, or the...
Saving the Kestrel Hawk

spread of West Nile virus. Some point to pesticides used in agriculture or starlings competing for nests or lack of food on migration routes.

But none completely explains the national downward trend line. Smallwood notes that many Kestrel boxes remain empty, suggesting to him that the problem is not simply lack of nest cavities. West Nile virus’ arrival around 2000 predates declines in many areas, he notes. And he said an analysis of the Cooper’s Hawk population increases do not match Kestrel decreases.

One newer idea is growth in wind farms, Smallwood says. Birds, including Kestrels, are getting shredded in the spinning blades.

However, in Eastern Pennsylvania, Keith Bildstein, director of conservation science for Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, based in Kempton, is confident that the declines have occurred mainly because of the appetite of Cooper’s Hawks and the devastation of West Nile virus. “There’s little doubt,” he says.

Klucsarits also points to development as an obstacle that might account for the loss of birds. “What used to be a feeding space is now a Target or Giant,” he says. Jason Martin, project leader for NestWatch, a national program that collects data on birds, also blames urbanization for the Northeast’s fall-off.

Key to figuring out the culprit — or more likely multiple culprits — is data analyses over the long haul, information dependent upon a flock of volunteers. “Frankly, volunteers are doing what
scientists can’t do because we don’t have enough scientists. They’re citizen scientists,” says Martin, also an ecologist at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Back in 1992, Klucarits was in his seventh year of teaching at Alvernia and interested in taking on a research project to stretch his wings. While at Hawk Mountain for the fall migration, he learned about the Kestrel study.

Before long, he was out in the meadows with Bob and Sue Robertson, long-time Hawk Mountain volunteers, who showed him how to monitor the birds and trap them in order to measure and band them. That first day, Klucarits handled his first Kestrel. It bit him. He was smitten. “I got Kestrel-itis,” he jokes. “It infected my enthusiasm.”

At the time, the project had more than 200 nestboxes, and Klucarits watched over half of them. Now, he’s down to 40, having weeded out ones that failed to attract birds. Early on, Kelly, his wife and a nurse, would help with the banding, and sometimes he took his young daughter, now 26 and a music teacher, along. But for a decade, Klucarits mostly went it alone.

He plays a critical role, according to Bildstein. Hawk Mountain’s project, which started in the early 1950s, is believed to be the oldest large-scale Kestrel nestbox effort in the country. Interns and scientists help collect data, but Klucarits is one of only two who does this type of fieldwork for the Mountain full time, which is important in order to gather usable data.

“Birds are determining your schedule,” Bildstein says. “This is not one of those things three weeks out you can say, ‘I’m going to take Monday and Wednesday off.’ Or you’ll miss this window of opportunity. ... Simply put, without volunteers like Jim, we wouldn’t be able to carry out this project at this magnitude.”

Klucarits is known for his ability to work with others, Bildstein says — and the Alvernia teacher himself emphasizes that this isn’t “my research. It’s Hawk Mountain. It’s interns. It’s a team effort.”
A graduate of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, where he earned a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in biology, Klucsarits has turned his volunteer work into six publications on Kestrels, including one in which Rusbuldt was the lead author for work he did as an undergraduate. The pair also wrote a 36-page booklet on their favorite winged friend for the Mountain.

Last year, the Kestrels in Eastern Pennsylvania had a banner year — and so did Klucsarits. Before the decline began in 2003, the Mountain boxes produced more than 230 nestlings on average. Then, that number plummeted nearly 35 percent to 150 nestlings for several years. But last year, it soared back to 209 nestlings, despite many fewer boxes than during the peak. The area also had 60 pairs — another off-the-chart number for recent years.

Klucsarits and Rusbuldt presented those findings at the National Raptor Research Federation Meeting in Fort Collins, Co. “To think we started out so humbly,” he says. “I feel like I have finally found my niche outside of my teaching activities and am part of the raptor biologist community.”

Has the Kestrel in this region rounded the corner of concern and launched a comeback? “It’s too early to say,” he allows. “We were encouraged by last year.”

Over the next few hours, Klucsarits and Rusbuldt muck out birdhouses, replace rotted boxes with spanking new ones and test another idea.

In areas where nestbox nestlings have not survived, Klucsarits wants to install an additional box located nearby in what researchers have identified as ideal conditions. “We’re going to give them a choice,” he says. “It’s more than just the orientation or height of the nest site. It’s what’s surrounding the box. Do they have enough food? That’s critical.”

In a whipping wind, he holds an aluminum ladder against a hickory tree while Rusbuldt scrambles up and hammers a new box in place, near one where nestlings have suffered from predators. Then the box is filled with a layer of cozy pine shavings. Back in his truck that sports an American Bald Eagle plate on front, Klucsarits jots down nestbox numbers, makes tick marks and notes bird sightings — all on two small Post-it notes. “It’s the key to my success,” he says, while Rusbuldt just shakes his head.

His protégé praises Klucsarits as “the best professor I had at Alvernia. ... He’s realistic and practical. He has a lot of experience. He made me work.” Around campus, Klucsarits has a reputation as a tough teacher. “There are no freebies with Jim.”

Klucsarits brings that same practicality and work ethic to the nestbox project. With the Blue Mountains as backdrop, the men are winding down their day. They’ve been at it since 8 a.m., and six hours later, they have cleaned out 20 sites, added two additional boxes, driven 72 miles and best of all, spotted two pairs of Kestrels and two additional females.

The next day, a Saturday, they plan to do it all over again.

“It would be a shame,” says Klucsarits, “to lose this bird that scientists thought would never be in danger.”

Lini S. Kadaba is a journalist based in Newtown Square, Pa. Her work has appeared in the Philadelphia Inquirer and magazines such as Connections and Innovator. She last wrote for Alvernia Magazine on John Updike’s driver.

Alvernia University Magazine 31
No Surrender
coming home from the war doesn’t mean leaving the battle behind ... ➔
hen it comes to combat, the wounds of war are not always easy to see.

While the majority of U.S. soldiers returning home from tours in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere appear unscathed, many of them, along with their families, face another long and lonely battle as the invisible wounds of war become apparent in the shape of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or traumatic brain injury.

No one knows that better than Dr. Melissa Marcario ’93, an Alvernia graduate who is in the forefront of PTSD treatment in her work with the Veterans Administration at the Pittsburgh Health Care System. She estimates that nearly one third of the veterans and active duty military personnel she encounters suffer from PTSD.

Military records reveal that about 40,000 troops were diagnosed with PTSD between 2003 and 2008, with the number increasing each year. Thousands more have been diagnosed since 2008, and officials acknowledge that many cases remain undiagnosed, leaving the door open to the risk of ongoing psychological problems and the possibility of suicide, which has plagued the armed services in recent years.

It’s estimated by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the largest U.S. group dedicated to serving veterans of recent conflicts, that of the more than 2 million troops who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan since October 2001, one quarter could be suffering from PTSD.

As someone working on the front lines with veterans who have been diagnosed with the disorder, Marcario puts that number even higher — at 30 percent — and she is determined to reach
Battling pt Sd

out to and help as many of them as possible.

Combat-related psychological disorders have, for many years and through many wars, been widely misunderstood and under-treated. And soldiers suffering from what we now know as PTSD are often as misunderstood as is their condition, receiving no treatment or inappropriate types and levels of treatment.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD describes it as an anxiety disorder that can occur following a traumatic event. Symptoms of the disorder can be traced as far back as the Civil War. At that time, PTSD was often mistaken for a cardiac condition, and so named “soldier’s heart” because its symptoms mimicked heart problems. During subsequent wars the disorder has been referred to by many names: shell shock, combat fatigue, war-combat neurosis, battle fatigue, and post-Vietnam syndrome.

“Vietnam brought the issue of PTSD into focus and created an environment of discovery related to this disorder,” says Dr. Paul West, assistant professor of psychology at Alvernia.

By the time the American Psychiatric Association named PTSD and listed it in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1980, thousands of soldiers had been affected by it, although many remained undiagnosed.

Since then, medical and military personnel have greatly increased research and their knowledge about PTSD, and treatments for the disorder have improved dramatically. Still, many veterans and their loved ones continue to struggle with the condition and other consequences of war.

“We have learned that some individuals who experience traumatic events in their lives — whether a simple incident or a sustained exposure to an event — may develop reactions to environmental stimuli creating heightened anxiety and often panic,” explains Dr. West.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, veterans experience disproportionately high rates of suicide, depression, homelessness, unemployment, and other problems. Although these conditions are widely recognized, military personnel and health care providers continue to debate over how to deal with what some call an epidemic of these types of problems.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that PTSD afflicts nearly one third of Vietnam War veterans, up to 10 percent of soldiers who fought in the Gulf War, 11 percent of veterans of the war in Afghanistan, and 20 percent of Iraqi war veterans.

Tom Tarantino, legislative associate for IAVA, sets the number higher for soldiers who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, and said the problem is inevitable.

“No one comes back from war unchanged — as many as one-third come back with some kind of PTSD, depression or traumatic brain injury,” he said during a 2009 interview with Medill Reports, a program associated with

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For some veterans, such as Michael (a pseudonym is used to protect the privacy of the patient), who served 17 years in the military and received a medical discharge in 2003, the trauma results in pain that becomes unbearable. The former Staff Sergeant, who eventually received psychiatric help and whose condition has improved, shared his story on The Iraq Vets Stress Project website. He wrote:

“While in the service, I was a Staff Sergeant and held the positions of both squad leader and platoon sergeant. After my separation, I was lost and unsure of the future. I was depressed and at one point suicidal. My dreams are of burnt bodies talking to me and to this day the smell lingers in my mind causing me to vomit. I don’t sleep for fear of dreaming and sometimes when I do fall to sleep; my final thought is will I wake in the morning or will all this finally be over.”

PTSD is known to be more common in war veterans who have experienced intense and prolonged combat exposure, and recent wars have demanded multiple deployments of many troops. Among combat troops sent to Iraq for the third or fourth time, more than 25 percent exhibited symptoms of acute stress, anxiety, or depression, according to a 2008 official Army survey regarding the mental health of its soldiers.

"our veterans who fight to defend our freedom overseas shouldn’t face another battle when they return home."

Congressman John Hall
Northwestern University’s graduate journalism school.

Marcario, 39, whose Alvernia degree is in psychology and English with a minor in computer information systems, earned a master’s and Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. She has been with the VA Pittsburgh Health Care System since an internship that began on September 11, 2001 — a day that dramatically impacted our country, its military, and the VA. Marcario vividly recalls the point at which she realized just how profound her work would be.

“When I interviewed for the internship, somebody told me that the VA was on its way out, that all the veterans were dying off,” she said. “But I knew on that first day of training that something very important was happening, and that war was very possible, probably imminent, at that point. I recognized then how important the work I wanted to do would be to a new generation of soldiers, and that I could make a real difference.”

As military personnel prepared for war in Afghanistan, launching Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001, Marcario and her colleagues pondered how those soldiers participating in the conflict would be affected. There was no way of knowing then that soldiers would return from Afghanistan and Iraq with the highest levels of PTSD since the Vietnam War.

“At that point, we didn’t know what we’d be seeing when they came back,” she said. “It was a waiting game.”

When military personnel did begin coming home after combat, it was clear that the VA’s services would become increasingly necessary and important. Advances in on-the-scene medical care in combat zones have dramatically increased the survival rate of combat soldiers. For many of those injured, however, recovery is a long and complicated process. In addition to PTSD, many veterans suffer from traumatic brain injury, which sometimes is referred to as the hallmark injury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“You’ve got to not only deal with the physical issues, but also the emotional injuries,” Marcario said. “Sometimes, the emotional problems are more difficult to address.”

Treatment strategies for PTSD are very individualized and include a number of different approaches. According to Dr. West, some common approaches include sensory desensitization and cognitive behavioral therapy to help clients reframe traumatic events. “Group counseling with PTSD victims has also shown some promise — especially when the group is comprised of individuals exposed to similar traumatic events,” he said. And because PTSD can be associated with depression, or anxiety, or both, prescribing and monitoring the impact of medications is sometimes necessary.

Marcario has treated hundreds of active and retired military personnel who have been referred to her for combat-related PTSD. Her clients typically are males, who make up the majority of the veteran population and the great majority of military personnel who serve in direct combat, thereby increasing their chances of PTSD. A licensed psychologist and member of the VA’s PTSD Clinical Team, Marcario normally works with 25 to 30 clients at a time. The problems her clients encounter are varied, she said, but PTSD continues to plague a significant population of veterans.

PTSD isn’t confined to military personnel and veterans; everyone is subject to trauma. Research indicates that about 70 percent of people living in the United States will experience one or more traumatic events during their lifetime, such as a car accident, assault, natural disaster, or the sudden death of a spouse or child. And while it’s estimated that between 14 and 25 percent of that population will develop PTSD, most people, including those who encounter trauma during military service, recover without help.

“There is a natural recovery from traumatic events,” Marcario said. “Most people, including veterans, recover on their own. For some, however, the trauma doesn’t go away, or it gets worse over time.”

However, Marcario said, those numbers may have been even higher without recent innovations that place psychiatric and medical personnel on the front lines with soldiers, giving them an opportunity to provide counseling and psychiatric medications in the field and allowing soldiers to remain with their units. The goal, she said, is to maintain

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the fighting strength and morale of a unit by keeping its members together.

“Most people in combat, believe it or not, would rather stay with their team near the front lines than be transferred away from their support unit to an area where they feel alone, isolated, or disconnected,” Marcario said. “When that occurs, some soldiers even feel like they’ve let the others down or abandoned them. Those feelings can cause more harm than good.”

Once military personnel and veterans are sent home, they must complete health screenings that are used to assess potential physical or emotional problems. It is not uncommon, however, for those being assessed to withhold information or provide information that is not accurate, making it more difficult to identify potential problems and provide necessary care. It’s thought that many vets are not forthcoming about problems and symptoms because they fear it will have a negative impact when they apply for jobs, particularly jobs within government or law enforcement.

Marcario also acknowledged that the stigma associated with mental health issues among the general population is present in military settings.

“So these returning veterans are grouped together and asked to complete a health screening,” Marcario said. “But if you answer yes to some of the questions, everyone else gets to leave, and you have to stay when you’re finished. It’s very clear who feels that they’re having problems, and many people are reluctant to admit that.”

Of the veterans who in the past did seek help for PTSD, many got caught up in military red tape or, in some cases, were simply ignored. Critics alleged that the VA in many cases withheld diagnoses of PTSD because treatment for the disorder is ongoing and expensive, and prescribed drugs to counteract depression instead.

Robert Kingsley, an Iraq War veteran from Goshen, New York, was told by VA doctors that his flashbacks and nightmares were symptoms of PTSD. He submitted a claim in 2009 and heard nothing back for months. Finally, after more than a year, the paperwork he’d submitted was sent back with a notice that it had been rejected because of a misspelling.

Distressed, Kingsley contacted the office of U.S. Rep. John Hall, chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs’ Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, and told Hall his story. The Congressman introduced an act to make it easier for
veterans to receive PTSD benefits, and the VA agreed to the rule change, which took effect in July 2010. That was good news to Kingsley, who was featured on a segment of CBS Nightly News the night before the changes went into effect, and thousands of other veterans, for whom benefits were long overdue. At a news conference announcing the change in regulations, Hall said it was good not only for veterans, but for the VA as well.

“In today’s modern conflicts, everyone serves on the front lines. Our veterans who fight to defend our freedom overseas shouldn’t face another battle when they return home,” Hall said. “PTSD cases are routinely the most complicated cases for a veteran to prove, and for the VA to confirm, often requiring drawn out investigations. This new rule simplifies the process and allows VA employees to focus their efforts on new cases and to serve more of our veterans.”

The VA currently has plans in place to spend $6 billion to improve the care it provides for veterans impacted by PTSD, traumatic brain injury, or other conditions, and President Obama’s proposed 2012 budget contains $7.2 million to subsidize research of those disorders. And the VA has increased the number of professionals available to treat PTSD patients. Marcario, who was the lone full-time psychologist in the VA’s Pittsburgh Health Care System when she started her career in 2001, said that today, she has plenty of help.

“In the past few years they’ve brought on a significant number of psychologists, so now we have plenty of staff available for clients,” she said.

While the military and the VA have been criticized for not always providing needed services or doing enough to prevent current and former members of the armed forces from committing suicide, Marcario said she’s seen significant improvement in care.

A VA suicide prevention team contacts veterans who don’t show up for appointments to make sure they’re okay, with repeated follow-ups as necessary, she said. Options are available for inpatient treatment, and military personnel and veterans have access to a 24/7 suicide prevention hotline.

“There have been a lot of changes — a lot of improvements — since I started here,” Marcario said. “I’m fortunate to be able to be involved with training people who are going to go on to be psychologists within the VA, and I also help supervise psychology students and interns. It’s a good team of people doing good work.”

Susan Shelly has written more than 30 books and is a frequent contributor to area newspapers and magazines. She lives in Shillington, Pennsylvania.
The year was 1999, and AIDS had been known to the world for more than 15 years. As part of her doctorate work in linguistics, Roxana Delbene stood outside of a small hospital room observing interactions between patients and doctors. A young man with AIDS who had been brought to the emergency ward by his family lay in the room, alone and dying. No one was coming.

Later, Delbene watched as a doctor told the man’s father that his son had died. It was heart-wrenching.

“The conversation that I witnessed between his father and the doctor had a deep influence on me,” says Delbene, an assistant professor in languages. Between that difficult experience and the passion of her professors in Pittsburgh, she made the decision to devote her dissertation to medical discourse involving HIV/AIDS patients.

But this was not the first time she had witnessed the destructive impact of stigmatized conditions. Years earlier the Uruguay native had worked in a rehabilitation clinic for people suffering from drug addictions. “I used to teach literature and creative writing to help them express themselves with the supervision of the therapists,” she explains. “I realized...”

Roxana Delbene, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Languages
Ph.D. in Hispanic Linguistics
University of Pittsburgh
Master of Arts in Hispanic Linguistics
University of Pittsburgh
Bachelor degree in Literature
“Instituto de Profesores Artigas” in Montevideo, Uruguay

Dr. Delbene has taught a variety of courses involving the Spanish language, such as Latin American literature, art and history, sociolinguistics, and in her specialization, medical discourse. Her teaching philosophy embraces an ethnographic approach within the community, which includes service learning activities.
they were suffering not only from the addictions, but also from the stigma inflicted by society and even by their own family members.”

Stigmatized identities surrounding medical practices, cultural backgrounds, and language can have a devastating effect on millions of people. The International AIDS Society breaks down AIDS-related stigmas of health care workers into three main categories: lack of awareness among health workers of what stigma looks like, fear of casual contact stemming from incomplete knowledge about HIV transmission, and the association of HIV with improper or immoral behavior. And according to the American Psychiatric Association, stigma concerns often keep many people from even seeking health care.

So today, as an international professor teaching language classes at Alvernia, Delbene hopes to bring positive diversity experiences into the classroom. “Diversity is not always easy to accept,” she says. “However, I think that when we are exposed to different cultures we can learn more not only about others, but about ourselves; although sometimes that experience could be difficult.

“I wish I could convey more efficiently the richness of the Latin American culture and its ties to the United States,” she explains. “I’m concerned that Spanish is perceived as a low prestige language because it tends to be associated with criminalization and poverty, instead of with the richness of the culture. I would like to emphasize more of the great aspects.”

Colleague Pietro DiStravolo, who has taught languages for more than 30 years at Alvernia, often tells Delbene that “teaching a language is a way to build cultural bridges.” So she frequently talks to her students about the customs of Latin America and ways of living. “We are like ambassadors of our cultures and languages,” she says.

Distrovolo considers himself to be an engineer, working to build cultural bridges between countries. And sometimes, it takes patience and understanding to make real connections.

“It is important to stress the similarities rather than the differences between people,” he says. “I believe talking about culture is very important, not only in language classes but in every class at every level. As J.W. Fulbright said, ‘Perhaps the greatest power of educational exchange is the power to convert nations into peoples and to translate ideologies into human aspirations.’”

Delbene uses her specialized knowledge of medical discourse to make cultural connections in classes. Medical discourse is a branch of study that concentrates on many different aspects of human communication in a medical or health setting. How do patients talk about medications, and is there a correlation between the way people talk and how they adhere to the medical advice? Why do some patients respond to questions with anecdotes when physicians want exact answers of their conditions? These are important questions that health professionals need to address in order to perform their jobs effectively.

“My awareness of the topic leads me to make reflections and observations when the context is appropriate, especially in the courses of Spanish for Health Care Professionals and Spanish for Law Enforcement,” explains Delbene.

But not everyone has access to such teachings. As a college-aged Uruguayan, Delbene lived under a military dictatorship. “There were many authors that we were not allowed to study and read,” she explains. “And I was thirsty for knowledge.”

Today, Delbene believes that sharing knowledge could be a key to helping the world move past stigmas and discrimination. “As scholars and professors I believe we should use our knowledge for the sake of others, whose voices are not so powerful. The way we speak about human groups is a way to enact tolerance or discrimination, and enact exclusion or inclusion,” she says.

“...we should use our knowledge for the sake of others, whose voices are not so powerful.”

Roxana Delbene
For 24 talented FirstEnergy managers, getting an MBA degree to boost their careers and support the thriving energy company’s business results may not have been a walk in the park. But it was as easy as strolling across the hallway at the organization’s Reading, Pa., based headquarters thanks to a customized program Alvernia developed and delivered at their offices with amazing results.

Balancing a demanding corporate job in a fast-paced, thriving company with the desire to earn a graduate degree can sometimes seem overwhelming. Just ask Jennifer Rivera.

She started taking classes toward her MBA from Alvernia but stopped when demands on her time stretched her too far. Dr. Tufan Tiglioglu, associate professor of business, kept asking her when she would come back.

Instead, Rivera’s MBA classes came to her.

Rivera works at FirstEnergy Corp., which owns the Reading-based Metropolitan Edison (Met-Ed) electric utility. Before coming to Alvernia, Tiglioglu was a research assistant at the Wind Science and Engineering Research Center at Texas Tech University. With his engineering background and experience as a business faculty member, he thought he could arrange a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree program just for Rivera and her coworkers.

For Tiglioglu, who directed Alvernia’s MBA programs at the time, the idea was an example of how the university could offer the Greater Reading business community avenues to support their growth by helping their top-performing managers gain advanced business training. And this isn’t the first time Alvernia has offered MBA programs for a specific industry. An online MBA program for medical professionals graduated its first students in May 2010.

“We believe in long-term relationships and...
partnerships with these companies,” said Tiglioglu, who now heads the Ph.D. program at Alvernia. “They have mutual benefits.”

So FirstEnergy and Met-Ed employees at the utility’s offices north of Reading received an e-mail gauging interest in taking courses toward an MBA, taught by Alvernia faculty but at Met-Ed’s offices. In all, 24 workers enrolled out of the more than 700 who work at the facility.

Each had a different reason for signing up. Rivera wanted to finish what she’d started. Others thought an MBA would open up new career opportunities. Tracy Parmer, who works in customer support for Met-Ed, heard the voice of a guidance counselor who told her during her junior year of high school that if she couldn’t finish chemistry class, she’d never accomplish anything. “That’s stuck in my head ever since,” Parmer said. For her, an MBA was another personal challenge.

Classes began in January 2009. Sessions took place for four-and-a-half hours every Thursday night, with a few weeks off in the summer. Each of the 12 classes took seven weeks to complete.

And in the end, all 24 students graduated in December 2010.

The roster represented a virtual cross-section of the company’s demographics. While Rivera’s position involves promoting energy efficiency, her classmates included supervisors, auditors, trainers and engineers, among others.

“We were able to sit with people who we may or may not have had the opportunity to cross paths with,” said MBA graduate Kathy Patrick, who works in regional engineering.

The students received some additional perks besides not having to leave work to go to class. Their employer reimbursed 90 percent of their tuition as long as they got good grades. Alvernia offered an additional 10 percent discount, gave the Met-Ed students extra time to pay their tuition bills, and covered the cost of textbooks.

One less tangible benefit was the ability to integrate personalized, relevant FirstEnergy topics into discussions. “For certain courses, our faculty members were able to customize their textbooks and case studies based on the utility industry,” said Tiglioglu. Examples from the world of electric utilities were sprinkled into case studies examined in class. In one course students reviewed the company’s financial statements.

In another, FirstEnergy engineer Paul Thompson completed a research project on Act 129, a state law passed in 2008 to reduce energy use and add more state oversight for electricity providers.

Continued on page 54
Baseball basks in national rankings

Alvernia baseball’s rich tradition of winning continued this season, and many took notice. The Crusaders were ranked among the nation’s Top 25 teams by the American Baseball Coaches Association for much of the season, moving up to as high as 8 in May.

Five players were listed as “2011 Players to Watch Across the USA” by Division III baseball coaches in Collegiate Baseball News. Starting pitchers Chuck Nicholas and Andrew Kirk and closer Austin Rohrbach made the list with shortstop Reid Martin and last year’s Conference Rookie of the Year, Chris Ray.

The Crusaders season was highlighted by a 17-1 conference record, two separate win streaks of 10 and 17 games, Ray’s 17-game hit streak, and Kirk’s career high 16 strikeouts in a 9-1 playoff win over Widener University.

The Crusaders won the regular season Commonwealth Conference title and earned the #1 seed in the Commonwealth Playoffs. Ray was named Conference Player of the Year, with Kirk receiving top honors as Commonwealth Pitcher of the Year.

You can read all about the Crusaders’ amazing season by visiting:

[link]

Track & Field off and running

Freshman Dillon Emery launches an impressive toss in the hammer throw.

With a quick burst out of the blocks a year ago, Alvernia’s track and field program garnered two individual conference championships in just its first season of competition. Freshman Casey Osborne took gold in the indoor 400 meter dash, and senior Brennon Ferrizzi matched the feat by winning gold in the outdoor 400 meter.

First-year head coach Jason Kilgore used that early success as a building block for what has shaped into a marvelous 2011. Under artificial field house lights this winter the Crusaders set or broke 37 school records for the indoor season. Amanda Searle became the first female Crusader to score points at

Champs!

Men’s basketball senior captains Seth Cornell, left, and Tad Gillis, right, cut down the nets after winning the Commonwealth Conference Championship this winter. Alvernia returned to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2007, eventually losing their first-round matchup to Randolph-Macon.
400 and counting

This past January, women’s basketball Head Coach Kevin Calabria led his team to victory with a 73-53 win at Lycoming College, and in the process, earned his 400th career win.

Calabria arrived on the Alvernia University campus in 1989 with the assignment to start a women’s basketball program — from scratch. With a group of seven players, four of whom never played in high school, the Lady Crusaders were born. That first team finished 10-11, having lost at the buzzer by one point in its final game of the season. It would be the last losing season in Calabria’s now legendary 22-year history with the women’s basketball program.

After that season, he began recruiting and immediately landed future All-Americans Dawn Ermert and Nicole Brown. The duo went on to score nearly 4,000 points and led Alvernia to its first Pennsylvania Athletic Conference Championship in 1994. It would not be the last. In all, the program has won six conference titles, an ECAC title, and six berths in the NCAA Division III Tournament.

This year’s 400-win landmark puts Calabria into an elite category among his peers. He is only the 35th coach in all of Division III history to reach the milestone.

Although he has a career record of 404-203, many team titles, and four Coach of the Year awards under his belt, he firmly believes that “winning” in real life is much more important than winning on the court. He often talks to his players about real-life business experiences in order to demonstrate the value of hard work, priorities, and a good education. “There is no question about it: academic and athletic success go hand-in-hand,” he explains.

Calabria is very proud that his players go on to lead meaningful lives and become productive members of society. “I love receiving visits, or letters and emails from former players showing pictures of children,” he says.

But his real joy and passion continues to be animatedly prowling the hardwood sidelines — arms waving in the air — and generally using (almost) as much energy as his players in the key.

“I still love basketball. I love coaching and being around the game,” Calabria says. “More than anything, I still love being around my players. They keep me young and hip. I feel that I can still get through to them teaching them the game of basketball but most importantly, I can still be a positive influence in their lives. My players often come to me seeking career advice. That’s the best thing about my job. My girls know that I care about them as people much more than I care about them as players.”

the MAC Championships, finishing third in shot put. Searle, the First Team All-Conference freshman, also bettered her own throw record by almost two feet at the event. The women’s 4x200 meter relay team cut time off the school record in each of the last two weeks of the season and trimmed another two seconds at the MAC Championships.

On the men’s side, the Crusaders’ strength transitioned from the track to the throwing events for the 2010-11 indoor season, where freshman Dillon Emery set school records in each of the last three weeks of the season. He nearly eclipsed the 11-meter mark in the shot put at Dickinson with a record 10.98 meter toss, then pushed the weight throw record to 10.81 meters at the MAC Championships.

“We were pleased how the indoor season wrapped up,” said Kilgore. “Our women in the sprints, hurdles, and relays should contend for the podium, and I would expect our throwers to build on recent success and continue to set both school and personal marks as we move outdoors.”

Through the first four meets of the outdoor season the Crusaders have set 25 new school records, and every competitor has qualified for the MAC meet in their respective events. Junior Brian Nerney hit 6’4” in the high jump to qualify for the ECAC meet for the second straight year. Eight different teammates are seeded in the conference top 10, including Nerney in the top spot for the high jump and freshman Amanda Searle, who ranks fourth in the shot put.
Growing up in Pottstown, Pa., with four siblings, Michael Heimbach was the son of an interstate truck driver and a stay-at-home mother. He enrolled at Alvernia as a non-traditional student in 1986, attending mostly night classes. During the day, he served the Pottstown community as a police officer. Eventually, he would be the first of his family to obtain a bachelor's degree from an institution of higher learning.

As a beat cop, Heimbach was always driven to accomplish more. Little did he know that his initiative, kindled by his bent for public service and fostered by his Franciscan education at Alvernia, would take him far beyond his wildest dreams to successful careers with the FBI and ESPN.

“I always believed a person’s attitude equals their altitude in life, and a true judge of one’s character comes in the moments when people must handle adversity,” said Heimbach. These are the
Michael Heimbach ’88 has parlayed his criminal justice degree into not one but two successful careers in the national spotlight.

moments when doors will open for you if you have the drive to get there.”

Heimbach noted that Alvernia was one of the only schools to cater to non-traditional students in the 1980s. “Alvernia was very forward-thinking and gave me the opportunity to go to school at night, while at the same time working as a full-time police officer, father, and husband,” he said. He graduated in 1988 with a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice, with his eyes on a career in the FBI.

With little opportunity to move up through his local police force, Heimbach joined the FBI as a special agent. For the first 12 years of his career in the FBI, he lived in New Orleans with his wife and five children, focusing on criminal investigations and rising through the ranks of the Bureau. Many cases were high profile.

“I worked a 1965 murder of the first African-American deputy in L.A. and the wounding of his partner,” remembers Heimbach. “I reenacted the racially motivated murder on TV shows like “Unsolved Mysteries” and “48 Hours” to solicit new leads. The case is still being investigated by the FBI as we speak.”

Heimbach was also involved in the disruption of a major Colombian drug cartel, resulting in the conviction of more than 15 cartel members and the seizure of over $40 million in cocaine and cash.

After 9/11, terrorism became the FBI’s number-one priority. “I was asked to transfer to the national security side of the FBI because of my extensive experience in criminal investigations and my ability to lead a growing new division,” said Heimbach. “September 11 changed all of our lives. The FBI today is not the same FBI I came into — except the people. We went from a reactive organization to a proactive organization with a ton of emphasis on intelligence gathering.”

In 2003, while living in Washington, D.C., Heimbach was appointed to Assistant Section Chief of the International Terrorism Operations Section in the Counterterrorism Division. “Our main emphasis was, and still is, never to allow another 9/11 to occur,” he said. “The FBI has successfully thwarted numerous plots to kill Americans in the last 10 years.”

Eventually, he was charged to oversee all FBI domestic and international terrorism investigations related to al Qaeda and other extremist organizations. He received several awards throughout his career, including a Director’s Award for Excellence in Management and the Attorney General’s Award for Exceptional Service (in 2004) for his involvement in the major disruption of an international terrorist network. In 2008, Heimbach was named Deputy Director of Anti-Terrorism.

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1970s
Margaret Monahan ‘71 passed away on January 28, 2011.


Anthony Damore, Jr. ‘77 was featured in the Reading Eagle in the “Faces in the News” section. Anthony is the Chief Deputy of the Berks County Sheriff’s Department.

Dominic Murgido ‘79 has taken over ownership of the It’s All About The Bean Cafe in Bennington, Vermont. Dominic is planning on featuring in-house roasting and making his own signature-blend coffees.

1980s
Steve J. Kristovensky ‘80 is the Director of Safety and Security at the Hershey Lodge.

Mary Lou Kline ‘81 was named one of the 2010 alumni of the year for Oley Valley School District.

Warren A. Malick ‘83 passed away on December 22, 2010, at Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, Pa. Warren is survived by his wife, Dr. Judith Jones Malick.

Christopher P. Graul ‘83 is a Senior Investigator with Citi Investigative Services in Baltimore, MD. Prior to his current position, Christopher was a Baltimore City Police Detective for 25 years.

Mark Lerario ‘83 is a Commercial Account Executive for PenTeleData.

Mark A. Burns ‘84 is a Contract Specialist for Synthes in West Chester, Pa.

Stephen W. Cuchara ‘84 is a Certified Public Accountant for Jones Kunhaski and Company.

Dr. Lowell R. Fina ‘87 is the Medical Chief for Sky Flightcare in Coatesville, Pa.

1990s
Lori (McIntosh) DiGuardi ‘90 achieved Advanced Competent Bronze status in Toastmasters International.

Catherine Chila Weist ‘91 is a Tax Examiner for the City of Reading.

Renee Moyer ‘92 is a Physical Therapist Assistant at HealthSouth Reading Rehabilitation Hospital.

William J. O’Brien ‘92 was promoted to VP of the Claims Liability Line of Business at Selective Insurance Group, Inc.

Michael J. Lubas ‘93 passed away on Friday, October 15, 2010.

Terry L. Moyer ‘93 passed away on February 5, 2011.

Tim Trout ‘95 is the Controller for The Protection Bureau of Exton, Pa.

Meggan (Hannigan) Kerber ‘96, M’01 is now the Marketing Director for Viva Good Life and Toscani in Wyomissing, Pa.

Allison (Hurst) Shollenberger ‘97 is a Parole Agent for the Pa. Board of Probation and Parole.

Amy (McDonald) Tripple ‘97 and her husband Tom welcomed their second daughter into the world on November 9, 2010. Lily Claire Tripple weighed 7 pounds, 11 ounces, and was 20 inches long. She joins big sister Ava.
Amy Weber ’98 is engaged to marry Frank LoTorto.

Tom Minick ’98 received the Outstanding Fundraising Executive Award by the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Berks Regional Chapter on November 12, 2010. Tom received his Master’s in Business Administration degree from Alvernia University in December 2010. He is Director of Development at Alvernia.

Jennifer (Berg) Herman ’98 is the Director of Finance for Pharmaloz Mfg, Inc. in Lebanon, Pa.

Jo (Lanyon) Andre ’99, M’01 was named Senior Director of Customer Service and logistics at The Bachman Co., Wyomissing, Pa.

2000s
Wayne Holben ’00 is a Police Officer and K-9 Handler for the West Reading Police Department in West Reading, PA.

Michael E. Searfoss ’01 is engaged to marry Amanda E. Boyle ’04.

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Karen (Burns) Hinkle ’04 is the Victim/Witness Coordinator for the York County District Attorney’s Office.

Michael D. Kelley ’04 is a Novell Engineer for UGI Utilities, Inc.

Donald Rhoads ’05 was awarded the Army’s Achievement Medal for Civilian Service.

Kevin Sonon ’04 and Jamie (Danner) Sonon ’05, M’06 had a son, Jackson Miles Sonon on January 12, 2011, at 1:54 a.m. He was 8 pounds, 3.8 ounces, and 20.5 inches long.

Gloria Rodgers ’05, M’07 is the Program Manager/Supervisor for the Women’s Christian Alliance in Philadelphia.

Paulette Allen ’05, M’08 is a Social Work Service Manager for the Department of Human Services.

Jackson Miles Sonan was born January 12, 2011.

Kassie Biscoe ’05 and Paul Dumschat were married on October 9, 2010.

Heather (Hebb) Hahn ’05 and her husband Jeff had a baby boy named Mason Arthur Hahn on November 10, 2010, at 7:19 p.m. Mason weighed 9 pounds, 14 ounces, and was 21.5 inches long.

Danielle Conaway ’06 and Andrew Scherer were married on June 5, 2010.

2000s
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Elise Danh ’06 has accepted an associate sales representative position with PreEmptive Meds. She is calling on physicians offering alternative plant-based therapies for varying disease states. Elise has also taken the LSAT and has applied to law school.

Follow Alvernia alumni on twitter.com/Alvernia_Alumni
to law schools in the Philadelphia area. She and her husband Gregg had their kitchen renovated by the TV show Kitchen Impossible on DIY Network in November 2009. Re-runs of the episode are in syndication on DIY under the episode titled “Plate Glass Glamour” and the location is South Philadelphia.

Janelle (Loeb) Cole ’06 has joined Century 21 Advance Realty as a Realtor. She received her real estate license in August.

Jenna Fliszar ’06 graduated from Rutgers School of Law-Camden on May 24, 2010, and was admitted to the Bar of Pennsylvania on October 14, 2010.

Paul Sadaphal ’06 and his wife Sonia Topiarz ’07 are the proud parents of Nina Rose Sadaphal. Nina was born on Sunday, March 6, at 1:10 a.m. She weighed 7 pounds, 11 ounces, and was 20 1/4 inches long.

Amber (Schaeffer) Hogan ’07 is the Social Service Director at Lancaster Hall Nursing and Rehabilitation in Lancaster, Pa.

Aurora Hollabaugh ’07 is a Mental Health Probation/Parole Officer for the County of Adams, Gettysburg, Pa. She is engaged to marry Marc Bayles on May 5, 2012.

Brian Korecky ’07 is the Membership Director at Body Zone Sports and Wellness Complex in Wyomissing, Pa.

Edward E. Epps ’07 is the Coordinator of Athletic Facilities at Franklin and Marshall College.

Theresa Rowles ’07 is the Academic Support Specialist for Disabilities Services at Reading Area Community College.

Michael D. Vind ’07 is the Managing Director of Financial Solutions LLC. Michael was a featured presenter at the Pennsylvania Parking Association’s Annual Conference and Exhibition at State College, Pa.

Heather A. Gaul ’08 and Jonathan M. Deem were married on August 7, 2010 in Holy Rosary Roman Catholic Church during a double-ring ceremony officiated by Monsignor Felix A. Losito. The couple had a reception at the Inn at Reading, which was followed by a wedding trip to St. Lucia.

Jessica Fairchild ’08 has been promoted to Investigations Center Operations Leader at Target Corporation. Jessica is in charge of four states’ worth of intelligence sharing, investigations and providing support for safe and secure incidents.

Kyle Keller ’08 is engaged to marry Erin Hoffert ’10.

Jennifer LeBlanc ’08 and Brett Sneeeringer ’09 were married on October 30, 2010.

Steven Burdan ’08 was named the Executive Director of the Pottstown Police Athletic League.

Heather Leader ’08 is the Executive Director of the Pottstown Police Athletic League.

James Austerberry ’08 is a Financial Aid
Alumni Class Notes

Planner for Berks Technical Institute in Wyomissing, Pa.

Jean Marie Kercher ’08 is the Business Officer Supervisor at the Reading Muhlenberg Career and Technology Center, Reading, Pa.

Marianne Sharon ’08 recently started a Pet Loss Support Group, which meets on the first and second Mondays of each month at the Wyomissing Public Library, Community Room. The service is free and open to anyone who is grieving the loss of an animal companion.

Ann Coleman ’09 was named marketing officer at VIST Financial Corp., Spring Township. Ann is responsible for managing the VIST Financial website, coordinating advertising and promotional campaigns, and assisting in the development of marketing plans while budgeting, analyzing and reporting on the success of marketing actions.

Margot C. Allen ’09 is a social worker at Genesis HealthCare in Towson, MD, where she has long term care residents and a ventilator unit. She is working on her master’s degree at the University of Maryland.

Audrey Hoffman ’09 received her Master’s in Business Administration degree from Alvernia University in December 2010. She works in the marketing department at Alvernia.

Alison Dautrich ’10 and Ryan Johnson were married on July 17, 2010 in Stoudt’s Black Angus Restaurant and Pub in Adamstown, Pa.

Edward L. Millard ’10 was named administrative manager of St. Joseph Family and Women’s Care at St. Joseph Medical Center. Edward is responsible for the supervision of the billing department, referral department, special projects and provider credentialing.

Emily Elliott ’10 is engaged to marry Michael Herling ’10.

Leslie (McCraw) Fazio ’10 is a District Manager for Turkey Hill Mini Markets. Leslie scouts out talented managers for future employment with Turkey Hill.

Shannon McNeill ’10 and Thomas Sauppee were married on August 7, 2010, in St. Catharine of Siena Roman Catholic Church, Exeter Township.

Brett Berghardt ’10 is a Healthcare Recruiter for Maxim Healthcare Services.

Carissa Johnson ’10 is a Treatment Counselor for the Berks County Jail System.

Al Shore ’10 is the owner of GotDebate.com.

Save the Date
Homecoming — Oct. 14 & 15
Don’t miss the highlight of the fall that brings together alumni and students for an event to remember. Visit www.alumni.alvernia.edu for the latest news and event offerings.

Kathy Herbein and husband Carl with President Thomas F. Flynn at the dedication of the Herbein Technology Classroom in the Upland Center.

part of the plan. Rest assured, the historic elements of Francis Hall will be preserved so that future generations of students will have the opportunity to reflect on the “audacious daring” of our foundresses.

Evidence of the growth at Alvernia is apparent in every dimension of the University: from the physical campus, number of faculty members, expanding academic programming, and robust enrollment to the creation of the Holleran Center for Community Engagement and the Center for Ethics and Leadership. Yet what remains the same — and in fact is even stronger today — is the commitment to the Franciscan identity of Alvernia University.

The relational aspect of what it means to be Franciscan is woven throughout the work trustees do in the boardroom as we respectfully engage in discourse and dialogue about the current and future direction of Alvernia. With transparency, we confront current competitive challenges, execute our fiduciary responsibilities with diligence, and envision an Alvernia that is even stronger for future generations. As trustees, we are mindful to hold the sacred trust of the charism of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters front and center in our deliberations.

In spite of the growth and success at Alvernia in the past few years, more remains to be done in order to attract and retain students and faculty in an increasingly competitive market. Emerging needs are clear, and I trust that the future leadership will respond in a wise and prudent manner.

Increasing our philanthropic base will naturally be necessary if we are to meet the goals and expectations of our strategic plan, campus master plan, and comprehensive capital campaign. I remain committed to ensuring that we create and maintain a vibrant philanthropic culture among my fellow alumni and trustees, in our community and beyond.

As Board Chair, I have been supremely privileged to work with President Dr. Thomas F. Flynn and his highly professional administrative team, an engaged faculty, as well as my esteemed trustee colleagues. I will look back on my time here at Alvernia, both as a student and Chairman of the Board of Trustees, knowing that I have been graced in countless ways. Because of my volunteer work at Alvernia, friendships have been forged that will last for the rest of my days, and for that I am especially blessed.

As I think back to how much has changed since I was an Alvernia student 20 years ago, I am ever mindful that some things — such as what is expected of students — have not. Dr. Flynn gently reminds all students that they are expected to “do well and do good.” They are words that hold true for me, even today.

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and procreating, but most significantly, since when we started to bury our dead—all along, we Earthlings have needed the shamanic figure to inspire our attention to the possibilities of something else, namely, the sure existence and power of the intangible soul.

Jack Kerouac’s writing has done just that for me in such a strange sure way for years. I hear it all in there, so varied and human, singing Catholic, chanting Buddhist, humming in shameless confessional, sacred and profane, raw zenith, raw nadir, something “both/and” in every facet, but always predicated on the soul, which is the shaman’s métier. It’s something I wasn’t used to in writing. It fascinated me. So I’ve been compelled to study him, and live with his books, each many times, for years really, and work out what I started to savvy there. Took major time with the books, no doubt, but most recently, I wrote one of my own about the style and meaning of Jack Kerouac as a modern shamanic figure in 20th century America. Called Kerouac in Ecstasy (McFarland Press), it becomes, I hope, a case study of the predicament of the shaman’s reception over time, and, hence a critique of the attention we pay to the soul of man. That’s all.

Not as weird as it sounds. Jack is “safe in heaven dead” and speaking still because

There is a blessedness surely to be believed
And that is that everything abides in
Eternal ecstasy, now and forever.
(Kerouac, Scripture of the Golden Eternity 30)

We can handle that. The Beat goes on!

Dr. Bierowski published Kerouac in Ecstasy: Shamanic Expression in the Writings. The book explores the content and ecstatic technique of Jack Kerouac’s novels.

While keeping in mind that, as U.S. Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius reminds us, the cheapest and cleanest form of energy is energy we don’t use in the first place. Recycling plays a monumental role in helping cope with a society addicted to plastic, and recycling programs give specific information about the plastics they accept. Most recycling companies are only interested in plastics stamped with #1 PETE or #2 HDPE.

“But all plastic can be recycled somewhere,” says Dr. Greenawald. “You use curbside recycling for what it accepts and save the rest to take to another location.”

Recycling can turn used plastic into polar fleece, fiber, tote bags, furniture, carpet, paneling, straps, and occasionally new containers. “Addicted to Plastic” even showed a wedding dress made from recycled plastic.

Greenwald says a good activity that can dramatically illustrate the impact plastic is having on our personal lives is to save the plastic you use for a week. Collect the bottles, containers, bags and packaging. Look at the pile and imagine it in a landfill for hundreds of years or more.

Long after your grandchildren’s great-grandchildren are living on earth, parts of the plastic will still be here. “Now multiply your pile by the millions of other people who aren’t reusing, reducing, or recycling and you get a staggering mental picture of the plastics problem,” Greenawald says.

However, Connacher is encouraged by some “big picture” solutions he has discovered in his round-the-globe search. They include manufacturing solutions, landfill efforts, and even mobile recycling units that visit remote areas.

Says Greenwald, “Part of the reason we’re addicted to plastic is that we live in a throwaway society. But it’s all about using facts to change opinions and attitudes, to raise the consciousness about the three Rs: reuse, reduce, recycle.”

Jane Schreier Jones is a freelance writer whose articles have appeared in hundreds of newspapers, magazines and other publications. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.
Francis Hall is not only the iconic face of Alvernia, it is the foundation on which the university was built. But now that stately structure is in need of renovation and upgrading to remain a vibrant academic facility for the 21st Century.

Already underway, the restoration of Francis Hall is a critical piece of the Values & Vision Campaign, the university’s largest fundraising initiative in history. The $27 million effort has had a profound impact on every facet of Alvernia. Deanna Reuben ’79 has made a generous gift to move the Francis Hall project along. Why? “First of all,” she says, “that is where the Sisters lived and where Sr. Pacelli and others had their offices.”

“The walls of the building spoke of holiness to me, and I am proud that Franciscan values still run through the entire campus,” said Deanna, who is a member of the Board of Trustees. “In addition, I am committed to seeing the arts thrive at Alvernia, and since the theater was less than ideal when I was a student, I am thrilled with its renovation into a state-of-the-art performance venue.”

What better way to participate in the Values & Vision Campaign than by joining Deanna and making a gift to breathe new life into our most historic structure? For information on naming opportunities or to make a gift, please contact the Advancement Office at 610-796-2862.
POWER OF 2 | Cont. from page 43

But the program’s benefits went beyond the financial challenges and real-world examples. Going through a graduate program with two dozen coworkers provided a positive sort of peer pressure. Classmates could meet during lunch to work on assignments. And there was a feeling that the cohort was working toward their degrees together, not as 24 individuals.

“We pushed each other,” Parmer said. “We motivated each other. We cried on each other’s shoulders.”

That sense of fellowship was especially helpful given the personal sacrifices each student had to make. Thompson’s wife gave birth to the couple’s first child while he was pursuing his degree. Patrick had two daughters serving in Iraq with the U.S. Army. Another student left his mother’s funeral to give a presentation in class.

But their hard work yielded rewards as well. Thompson, who now holds a supervisory position in FirstEnergy’s protection engineering department, was one of several students who received promotions while completing the program.

For now, other graduates from Met-Ed are simply taking the time to enjoy their newfound free time and sense of personal accomplishment that comes with a fresh diploma.

“My family’s very proud of me,” Patrick said. “I’m proud of me. I’m proud of my classmates.”

Rebecca VanderMeulen is a freelance writer based in Downingtown, Pa. Her work has appeared in Keystone Edge, Berks County Living, The Philadelphia Inquirer and various higher-education publications.

ESPN | Continued from page 47

But after almost 22 years in the FBI, Heimbach started to consider the next step in his life.

“In the FBI there is mandatory retirement at 57. No one waits until you are 56. So most agents have second careers,” said Heimbach. He left the FBI to pursue a career as Senior Director of Global Security at ESPN in 2009.

So how does a law enforcement pro who played a significant role in the conviction of the former owner of the San Francisco 49ers work in the sports field? With a huge smile.

After all, he gets to work among professional athletes and sports analysts that he idolized as a child. “I still have days where I have to pinch myself. As a big sports fan, knowing that I am on a first-name basis with some of these guys is unreal,” said Heimbach.

While he gets to witness some of the largest and most important games in sports, his favorite memory thus far has been being on the Tampa Bay field to watch the Saints win the 2009 Super Bowl.

“I lived in New Orleans for 12 years, and it was just a great moment to be on the field with my family and watch the Saints win. It was a victory not only for them, but also for the whole city of New Orleans,” he recalled.

Based in ESPN headquarters in Bristol, Connecticut, Heimbach is in charge of everything that deals with security, including anchors, crews and remote studio equipment. He also oversees offices in Los Angeles and Charlotte, North Carolina. Other locations include ESPN Brazil, ESPN Argentina, the men’s and women’s World Cup, the ESPYs, and remote events like the Super Bowl, Pro Bowl, and the top BCS bowl.

“We do a ton of work with NFL and NCAA college football,” said Heimbach. “Being on a first-name basis with the Monday Night Football crew of Mike Tirico, Ron Jaworski, and John Gruden is priceless. I can list someone from every sport we cover who was a feeling that the cohort was working toward their degrees together, not as 24 individuals.

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As Kathy Herbein completes her term as chair of Alvernia’s Board of Trustees, she reflects on the university’s progress during the past three years.

As a non-traditional transfer student, I first stepped foot on the small campus of Alvernia College almost 20 years ago. Immediately I felt at home in a welcoming and nurturing environment. Without realizing it at the time, I was experiencing the living nature of the Franciscan Mission. From the registrar’s office to the classroom, I was the recipient of “knowledge joined with love,” the core of our mission here at Alvernia University.

Since my student days, the transformation of the campus has been monumental. Remarkable changes include: achievement of University status, the beautiful campus commons (once the parking lot I used), the O’Pake Science Center, new residence halls, a track and turf field, and renovated learning spaces that feature technology hardly imagined when I was a student. These changes are testaments to the visionary leadership of the administration, an ongoing dedication to excellent student experiences by the faculty and staff, and the generous commitment of treasured time and wisdom by my fellow trustees.

Beloved on campus because it so clearly represents the courageous determination of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters, iconic Francis Hall will become home to our burgeoning arts center. Soon, we will enter Francis Hall and be welcomed into an art gallery that will also function as an elegant gathering space as we await a performance in the newly renovated theater and recital hall. Improvements to student learning spaces are also

Continued on page 51
Plastics have become a symbol of 21st-century convenience, but are the benefits really worth the costs?

Read the full story on page 20