from the director

On Building Build It

My hat goes off to the student leadership team of Build It for the fine work it has accomplished. The literature for the effort describes it as a student-initiated, student-led project. Indeed, it is.

The student leaders have transcended a “simply service” model of community engagement. The students — along with their faculty/staff supporters from Student Activities, the Chaplaincy, the President’s Office, and the Center for Civic Engagement — have met with and learned from many community leaders in eastern Henrico County.

The very able school principals of Baker Elementary, Rolfe Middle, and Varina High have taught us all a great deal about the acute and ongoing needs of their students and their families. Leaders of Richmond Metro Habitat for Humanity have worked closely with the students to design a home that will be of use to the selected family — and also be efficient in terms of heating and cooling.

Andrew Ryan, RC ’06, coordinated a stellar educational effort that culminated in “Community Awareness Week,” a series of four programs in mid-March on issues of importance for understanding social needs in the Varina area. There was strong overall attendance at the events on education, poverty, housing, and environmental justice. The caliber of presenters, drawn from U of R faculty and community experts, was exceptional.

Thanks to the invaluable input from the principals and teachers at the three schools, the school enhancements will include many lasting educational improvements. International students from the University of Richmond will share their knowledge of their home cultures and countries with elementary school students at the “International Field Day.” In the middle school, university students will work with teachers and the principal to build a new display case on the history of the school. And many hands will work together to refurbish the nature trail — and write a trail guide — on the elementary school grounds.

These are just some of the ways that U of R leaders have built Build It to educate themselves and Henrico County Public School students. I applaud them for that good work.

Dr. Doug Hicks is Associate Professor of Leadership Studies & Religion and Director of the Center for Civic Engagement.

Build It Lays Foundation for Civic Involvement

Andrew Ryan loves his regular service work at a Richmond retirement home. But in Build It, the junior Bonner Scholar saw an opportunity to make an impact on an entirely different scale.

“I wanted to get on board because Build It has the potential to have a transformative effect on the university,” Ryan said. Not to mention the Edgelawn neighborhood family and eastern Henrico County public schools this year’s more than 500 Build It volunteers plan to serve.

Build It developed from the week-long Merriewood Miracle, a 2003 effort by a group of University of Richmond students who felt the need to combine their academics with substantive hands-on learning and service. Build It 2005 has turned that idea into a semester-long community service effort that seeks to unite the greater University of Richmond community through both the funding and construction of a Habitat for Humanity home and a variety of school enhancement projects — landscaping, painting — at Baker Elementary School, John Rolfe Middle School and Varina High School, as well as an array of educational programs.

Ryan said the scope of educational offerings sets Build It apart from its precursors. In March, Build It sponsored Community Awareness week, a series of discussions on education, poverty, housing and the environment. These topics were selected to provide context for students working within a new community.

“It’s not possible to fully engage a community unless you understand a community. Most people on this campus don’t understand the issues that lower socio-economic and minority communities deal with,” Ryan said. “Even if someone had to be (at Awareness Week) for a class, they were there and heard about these things, and were becoming aware of a problem that is out there, thinking ‘Maybe there is something I can do about this.’”

In addition to Awareness Week, several professors have aligned their courses with Build It. In Dr. Libby Gruner’s Introduction to Children’s Literature, for example, students tutor and read to children at Baker Elementary.

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CCE Fellowships Support Community-Based Internships and Research

Seven students have been named to the Center’s first class of summer Fellows. Amy Bradshaw, Joyce Bennett, Emily Gates and Kerry Hutchinson were awarded the David D. Burhans Civic Fellowship, a competitive grant worth up to $3,750 to students who complete academically grounded internships in organizations that serve the community. Research Fellows Dani Amarant, Anh Bao Nguyen, and Lauren Skiles will receive similar grants for their original investigations into factors and dynamics contributing to social and civic problems and/or to efforts to address those problems.

For more information on each fellow’s summer project, please turn to page 3.

Community focused ... A academically grounded ... T together engaged
Q & A: Scott Erwin

In the past year, honors from USA Today's All-USA College Academic Team and the U.S. Department of Defense, among others, have embellished senior Scott Erwin's already impressive resume and made his name familiar to most on the University of Richmond campus. A former intern in Vice President Dick Cheney's office, Erwin was recruited last September to go to Baghdad as a policy adviser in the Coalition Provisional Authority's Ministry of the Interior. While in Iraq, the Kansas City native established a program called Ambassadors for Democracy, which trained local university students to teach the basics tenets of democracy to school children. He also sustained serious gunshot injuries in a Baghdad ambush. We talked to Erwin, a double major in political science and classical civilization and a member of the Center's advisory board, about his college career, his experience in Iraq, and why he sees his future in public service.

Why is public service an important aspect of your life?

My grandfathers are both veterans of World War II. They instilled in me the importance of service and sacrifice at a young age.

What was the most difficult part of teaching democracy in Iraq?

Just organizing and implementing the program in the very challenging political and security environment. Attempting to establish a program of any magnitude is very difficult, even in the United States. It took about four to five months of dedicated work and preparation before the program was really launched. Once it was started, all the work was done by the Iraqi students and the Iraqi NGO (the Iraqi Prospects Organization) with which I worked.

What was the response?

The program was well attended, despite many of the students being threatened by bodily harm. These students were dedicated because of the opportunities it provided and what it symbolized.

You could have been killed in the Baghdad ambush. Did anything change for you as a result of that experience?

The recovery process taught me the important of friendship and family over individual career or academic pursuits. I'm much more thankful for those close to me. I'm also keen on fostering more relationships though community service projects, or being a better friend, if you will. In a hospital bed, the number of activities on your resume doesn't seem the most important thing.

Why did you choose to come to the University of Richmond?

I was interested in government, and being from Missouri I needed to come farther east to be closer to that arena. I also wanted to have what I thought was the ideal college experience, a picturesque campus and a nurturing community. Richmond seemed like the perfect fit.

Is there anything you would like to change about the campus?

I would urge more students to get involved in the community.

What are your plans for the immediate future?

I'm pursuing a couple of fellowships (currently Erwin is one of twelve finalists for the Intercollegiate Studies Institute's William E. Simon Fellowship for Noble Purpose). I'll have one more year of work and fellowship time and then I'm off to law school to get serious.

How do you define civic responsibility?

It entails involving oneself in a cause not for personal or self interest but in the interest of the greater community.

"It is the responsibility of those who are in positions of privilege to help those who aren't." - Andrew Ryan

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Pecuniary. On-going tutoring efforts by campus groups such as the Pi Beta Phi sorority, the “International Field Day” teaching elementary students about other countries, and a successful book drive on behalf of the schools further extend the reach of the Build It initiative.

Another focus of the Build It organizers has been to connect the various aspects of the university community: the five schools, alumni, staff and community partners. Ryan said he hopes the energy generated through the project will create a more cohesive campus – and a sustained commitment to involvement in the community.

“I honestly believe it is the responsibility of those who are in positions of privilege to help those who aren’t,” Ryan said. “And instead of just going in somewhere for a day or a week, the school is trying to do something longer term.”

So far, the initiative has raised approximately $60,000 – most of which pays for the construction of the Habitat for Humanity home - from major

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2005 summer fellowship winners

David D. Burhans Civic Fellows

Sophomore Joyce Bennett, a double major in American Studies and Music, will intern at the City of Richmond Hispanic Liaison Office. Bennett will work directly with members of the Hispanic community to provide information and coordinate social services. Advisor: Ted Peebles

Amy Bradshaw, a sophomore majoring in Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies and Studio Art, will work at the Appalachian Women’s Alliance’s Clinchco County Center. Bradshaw will assist with technological needs and help develop a visual arts project exploring the history and culture of the Clinchco community. Advisor: Holly Blake

Freshman Emily Gates, a Psychology major, will serve adolescents with emotional and behavioral challenges at Epworth Children and Family Services in Saint Louis, Mo. Gates will work with youth one-on-one and in group settings, answer helpline calls, and create a recreation plan for youth living in Epworth’s crisis center. Advisor: Catherine Bagwell

Law student Kerry Hutcherson was awarded his fellowship for work with the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society, which provides free legal service to the indigent community in the greater Richmond area. As an assistant to the CVLAS housing attorneys, Hutcherson will research landlord-tenant cases and interview clients. Advisor: Margaret Bacigal

Research Fellows

Sophomore Leadership Studies major Dani Amarant’s research will focus on the development and current redevelopment of the historic Highland Park district, located on Richmond’s north side. Her project, titled “Aligning the Intents for Change: Urban Policy and Community Engagement,” will examine the various public policies implemented in the neighborhood since the 1950s, exploring, through interviews and historical research, the ways those policies shaped the social, cultural, political and economic dynamics of the community then and now. Amarant hopes her research will inform the ongoing changes in the neighborhood, giving residents and developers a sense of history and a broader understanding of the community’s current needs. Advisor: Amy Howard

Psychology graduate student Anh Bao Nguyen will study “Factors Influencing Utilization of Community-Based Services Among Vietnamese Immigrants” in Richmond. In particular, Nguyen plans to use interviews and questionnaires to examine the types of healthcare these immigrants need, what types are available to them, and the barriers they face in accessing health care. She also hopes to develop model methods for educating Richmond’s Vietnamese community about the healthcare system. Advisor: Barbara Sholley

Lauren Skiles, a junior double major in Urban Practice and Policy and Political Science, will research “Gentrification, Displacement and Historic Preservation in Richmond Neighborhoods” this summer. Through historic and statistical research and personal interviews, Skiles hopes to determine whether historic preservation efforts – and the typical subsequent rise in property values – play a significant role in the displacement of working class families. Lauren intends to use her findings to explain the positive and negative effects of gentrification on communities and the sustainability of working class neighborhoods. Advisor: Stuart Wheeler

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donors Gilbert and Fannie Rosenthal and Ryan Homes, as well as a number of individual and group donations, said Build It co-chair Jill Fasching.

Build It continues to accept volunteers through the week of April 4 – 10. For more information or to register, go to: http://www.student.richmond.edu/~buildit/
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<td>March 25</td>
<td><strong>What’s Happening in Richmond’s Downtown?</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Everything</strong> — Mr. Jack Berry, Executive Director, Richmond Renaissance (Co-sponsored by the Richmond Research Institute)</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 1</td>
<td><strong>Staying Civically Involved After Graduation</strong> — Ms. Lauren Fields, Greater Richmond Corporate Volunteer Partnership, and Mr. Timothy Weathers, University of Richmond alum</td>
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**Brown Bag**

**Knowing Richmond**

April 2 Knowing Richmond celebrates the University’s 175th anniversary by connecting the University and the greater Richmond community through a campus-wide open house and speakers panel that includes a variety of local experts: University President Dr. William Cooper; Ms. Cindy Patterson, Baker Elementary School; Ms. Tanya Gonzalez, Richmond Hispanic Liaison Office; Ms. Mary Moore, Cross Over Ministry; Dr. Gill Hickman, Professor of Leadership Studies; Dr. Rick Mayes, Professor of Political Science; Ms. Kimberly Bowers, Class of 2005; Cigna Scholar.

**Build it! 2005**

April 4—10 This student-led initiative partners University of Richmond students, faculty, staff and alumni with three schools in eastern Henrico County – Baker Elementary, Rolfe Middle and Varina High School – as well as Habitat for Humanity and Ryan Homes to plan, fund and execute a series of service projects in the Richmond community. During community service week (April 4—10), volunteers will build a Habitat house in Edgelawn and enhance the grounds at all three public schools. For more information about Build It 2005 or to find out how you can volunteer, please visit http://www.student.richmond.edu/-buildit.