from the executive director

Building and Learning

Governing magazine’s editor speaks about urban revitalization. The Virginia Poverty Law Center’s director narrates the problems the poor face as a result of limited access to financial credit. A panel of local experts discusses how housing can become affordable for the working poor in Richmond.

These are some of the educational programs the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement has arranged to complement the Highland Park house build. We seek to integrate this exciting, collaborative building project—which will make owning a house possible for a low-income family—into the University’s educational work.

Dr. Jennifer Erkulwater, in political science, is connecting her course on the “Politics of Social Welfare” to UR’s Build It initiative in Highland Park, of which the house build is the most recent part. Students will learn how social policies relate to the well-being of children and senior citizens in the neighborhood. Erkulwater and her students are following upon other courses that in recent semesters have added an academic component to UR’s engagement in Highland Park.

We at the CCE, our Chaplaincy colleagues and others at UR express our gratitude to our three community partners in the house build: Boaz and Ruth, Richmond Metropolitan Habitat for Humanity and the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

Richmond undergraduates have already worked with these organizations through academic internships and service learning. UR alums have been employed on the staffs of at least two of these partners as well. We value such sustained partnerships that weave together, over time, education and community change.

I invite my faculty colleagues to keep imagining ways in which we can connect UR’s community-engagement projects to the teaching and learning in our classrooms. I encourage students, faculty and staff to help us continue building sustained community partnerships that allow us to share the University’s intellectual capital with the metro Richmond area. We have a good deal to contribute, and we also have, in the best sense, a lot to learn.

Dr. Doug Hicks is the executive director of the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement.

Build a House, Build a Community

The overgrown vacant lot at 1205 Highland View Avenue goes largely unnoticed by passersby in the north Richmond neighborhood of Highland Park. Soon that will change.

The lot will become a hub of activity in late February when volunteers converge on it to raise an affordable house for a low-income family. Members of the University of Richmond community will comprise many of those volunteers.

This build represents a collaboration between the University and three community partners, according to Doug Hicks, executive director of the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement (CCE).

The Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) donated the land for the build. Boaz and Ruth (a nonprofit based in Highland Park and dedicated to successful prisoner re-entry, community revitalization and cross-cultural dialogue) will provide construction volunteers as well as some of the food for volunteers. The Richmond Metropolitan Habitat for Humanity will offer logistical support and a construction manager to oversee the build.

The New Face—Or Faces—of the Bonner Scholars Program

The Bonner Scholars Program (BSP) has undergone some significant changes during the past year, not the least of which involved moving the oversight of the program from the Chaplaincy to the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement (CCE).

The move made sense given that the Bonner Foundation provides funding for both the BSP and the CCE. The volunteer and educational components of the BSP also align well with the CCE’s mission of community engagement and civic education.

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Volunteer Coach and Youth Baseball Team Hit a Home Run

An irreparably torn elbow ligament ended pitcher Chris Lucas’ baseball career during his senior year in high school—or so he thought. But then Lucas met Anthony Allen, director of north Richmond’s Hotchkiss Community Center, during a scheduled stop on a CCE-sponsored city bus tour at the beginning of his first year.

As a result of that brief meeting, Lucas started volunteering at Hotchkiss several days a week through the Build It civic-engagement initiative coordinated by the CCE in collaboration with several Highland Park neighborhood partners, including Hotchkiss.

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(BUILD, from page 1)

As the organizational sponsor for the build, the University will contribute funding toward the build and will recruit students, faculty and staff to supply much of the necessary labor, estimated at 15 volunteers daily from Wednesday through Saturday, beginning February 27 and running through April 19.

Undertaking a house build in Highland Park serves as an exciting next step to the ongoing efforts at neighborhood revitalization and community engagement in which so many students have been involved through their participation in the CCE-coordinated Build It initiative, said Amy Howard, CCE director.

“Our students have already established ongoing relationships with the Highland Park schools, nonprofits and community center by volunteering in classrooms, after-school programs and doctors’ offices and on renovation projects,” Howard said.

“Students benefit greatly when their on-site experiences provide valuable insights into topics discussed in their courses. This collaborative home build can only enrich our students’ education and strengthen the existing ties the University has to the Highland Park community.”

In addition to participating in the actual build, Howard encouraged students to attend some of the upcoming educational programs the CCE has planned to coincide with the home build. For example, one Brown Bag discussion in March will focus on credit challenges faced by the working poor and another will explore affordable housing.

Howard predicted faculty, staff and students will support the build with great enthusiasm. Members of the University community have a long history of embracing such opportunities. In fact, University of Richmond students volunteered on the city of Richmond’s first Habitat for Humanity home completed in 1989.

Tim Holtz, ’91, president of the University chapter of Habitat for Humanity during that first build, applauded the students’ volunteerism at the time, saying, “It is crucial in helping to establish a new image of the UR student—one who is involved and concerned.”

BUILD AN AFFORDABLE HOUSE IN HIGHLAND PARK

February 27—April 19
Wednesdays through Saturdays
7:30am—4:00pm

To register and learn about related educational programs, visit http://buildit.richmond.edu or stop by the CCE, 201 Tyler Haynes Commons.

(BONNER SCHOLARS, from page 1)

Walker and administrative assistant Debbie Collins— are driving much of the change and account for the new face of Bonner literally and figuratively.

Students participating in the University’s BSP receive scholarships in exchange for their commitment to devote 10 hours a week to community-engagement activities, including direct community service and related educational programming. With 100 Bonner Scholars, the University hosts the largest of 27 programs nationwide. Dean and Walker aim to make the Richmond program a leader in quality as well as size.

To that end, they have increased efforts to tie educational programming and reflection to the Bonner Scholars’ direct service in the community. “We have started to emphasize the fact that our students are Bonner Scholars, not just Bonners,” Dean said.

Bonner Scholars can count attendance at educational programs, including on-campus events such as the Jepson Leadership Forum and the CCE Brown Bag discussion series, toward their weekly 10-hour requirement, providing they write a reflective paper describing how the program relates to the six common commitments of the BSP: social justice, civic engagement, community building, spiritual exploration, international perspective and diversity.

Dean and Walker hope to add a course requirement for Bonner Scholars, beginning with the class of 2012. The course would focus on social justice and social change.

“The class would promote the holistic development of the students by helping them to think about their service in a broad context,” Dean said.

In addition to expanding the academic component of the BSP, Dean and Walker are tightening policies and procedures, including enforcing deadlines. “We’re working to create a culture of accountability,” Dean said.

Dean and Walker have also revamped the service component to correlate more closely with the Bonner Foundation’s student-development model based on the five E’s: expectation (preparation before entering college), exploration (first year), experience (sophomore year), example (junior year) and expertise (senior year).

First-year Bonner Scholars, for example, now shadow upperclassmen at four different service sites during their exploration phase. At the end of their first year, they choose one site where they will volunteer with ever-increasing levels of responsibility throughout their remaining three years in college.

These sentiments are shared by Bobby O’Brien, ’08, current president of the University chapter of Habitat for Humanity. O’Brien has been working closely with student members of the Build It Action Group to coordinate recruitment and fund-raising for the upcoming build. Soon those efforts will pay off.

“I can’t wait to get started!” he said with a big smile, echoing the sentiments of many.

Dean and Walker have encouraged Bonner Scholars to express their opinions about all the changes during one-on-one meetings as well as in group meetings.

Ultimately, most students have come to understand and appreciate the value of the increased structure in the BSP, according to Dean.

“Bonner was more focused on service,” said fourth-year Bonner Scholar Erica Coleman. “Now it’s more focused on service learning. By taking the time to reflect, we’re forcing ourselves to learn about the issues our sites address and we’re adding value to our overall education in the process.”

But it’s not all work. Dean and Walker tout the fun side of Bonner as well. Take for example the weekly dinners in D-Hall where students lead discussions on their service experiences and get to know one another.

“The Bonner experience is bigger than going to a service site,” Dean said. “Bonner Scholars are starting to build a community and educate themselves about what the BSP really is.” Walker agreed. “The BSP provides a very powerful connective strand. Ultimately, a love for helping the community brings Bonner Scholars together.”
When Allen approached Lucas about coaching a baseball team of nine- and ten-year-olds for the spring 2007 season, Lucas eagerly agreed and recruited then-sophomore Zachary Dreyer as his assistant coach.

“The first day of practice was not pretty,” Lucas said. “The kids needed a lot of work. Our greatest challenge was getting the kids to come to practice.”

Lucas took to calling parents to remind them to send their children to practice, and attendance began to improve. “By our first game, all 20 kids were there and we had a solid team,” Lucas said.

So solid that the team won its first game 8-1. And went on to win every subsequent game until losing to another undefeated team in the citywide semifinals.

Unfortunately for Lucas, his coaching season ended abruptly due to injuries suffered in a car accident just a few days before the May playoffs. But his commitment to his players remained as strong as ever, as evidenced by the plan he hatched to reward them for their hard work.

After exchanging numerous calls, faxes and emails, Lucas secured 50 complimentary tickets for his players and their parents to attend a Washington Nationals game on Sunday, June 3. He even convinced stadium vendors to throw in free hot dogs and sodas for the group.

“During practices a lot of the kids kept saying that they had never been to a professional baseball game,” Lucas said. “I thought this experience would help them understand more about the game and how to be a team.”

The outing proved an unqualified success, and Allen couldn’t be happier with Lucas’ decision to coach baseball at Hotchkiss again this spring. “The kids love him to death,” Allen said.

Lucas has already been hard at work securing some new baseball equipment for Hotchkiss, according to Allen. He’s also approached Winning Beyond Winning, a nonprofit dedicated to helping young athletes, about the possibility of sending a professional baseball player to conduct a clinic for the children at Hotchkiss this spring.

And he’ll be taking several busloads of Hotchkiss baseball players and their parents to another professional ball game, thanks to a wonderful deal he negotiated with the Baltimore Orioles. The Orioles have promised him 150 complimentary tickets, free bus transportation and coverage of the Hotchkiss group on the jumbo-screen television during the game.

But most of all, Lucas said he is looking forward to the opportunity to coach again. “I enjoy coaching more than playing,” Lucas said. “You can learn a lot from little kids.

“And this year we’re going to win the whole thing,” he added with a tug on his baseball cap.

**Wanted: Families for All Virginia’s Children**

**Anne Holton Discusses Foster Care**

Imagine turning eighteen without a caring family to offer you guidance and support. Without a place to live. Without the means to afford higher education or vocational training. If you can imagine this, you can imagine the reality facing so many young people as they age out of foster care, Virginia First Lady Anne Holton told an audience of faculty, staff, students and community members at the Jepson Alumni Center on Thursday, January 24, during an evening lecture sponsored by the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement.

Small wonder that some of these young people fall into homelessness or crime when they leave Virginia’s foster care system.

But Holton aims to change that with For Keeps, her initiative to help older children in the state’s foster care system become successful, independent adults by providing them with permanent, stable family connections and the community support to sustain them.

Holton became aware of the challenges facing older children in foster care when she served as a juvenile and domestic relations court judge prior to becoming first lady.
**BONNER CENTER FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

University of Richmond, VA 23173
28 Westhampton Way
Tyler Haynes Commons, 201
Bonner Center for Civic Engagement

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**cce brown bag discussion series**

*Fridays, 12:30-1:25 p.m. in the Think Tank, 2nd Floor Commons*

1/18 **Birmingham Child: Growing Up African American in the Civil Rights Struggle**
   Dr. Gill Hickman, Leadership Studies
   Part of the Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration

1/25 **Value Chain Responsibility: Ethics in the Network Economy**
   Dr. Robert Phillips, Management

2/1 **Urban Revival: How Downtowns and Inner Cities Are Coming Back**
   Alan Ehrenhalt, Executive Editor, Governing magazine

2/8 **Politics Matter: How Do We Make Democracy Work?**
   Dr. Daniel Palazzolo, Political Science

2/15 **Taking on the Big Boys: Or Why Feminism Is Good for Families, Business, and the Nation**
   Dr. Gill Hickman, Leadership Studies
   Co-sponsored by One Book, One Campus
   A One Book, One Campus discussion

2/22 **Gender and Social Development in South Asia**
   Jennifer Solotaroff, Social Development Specialist, World Bank

2/29 **Politics and Poetics: A Conversation**
   Kelly Zen-Yie Tsai, Spoken-Word Artist
   Co-sponsored by WILL

3/21 **Payday Lending: How to Maximize Profits from the Working Poor**
   Jay Speer, Virginia Poverty Law Center
   Co-sponsored by the Alliance for Civic Engagement and Build It

3/28 **Affordable Housing in Richmond**
   A panel of local experts
   Co-sponsored by the Alliance for Civic Engagement and Build It

4/4 **Find Your Voice: Students Discuss Social Change**
   Co-sponsored by the Alliance for Civic Engagement

4/18 **Child Abuse: Why Does It Matter and What Can We Do to Stop It?**
   Angela Merritt Verdery, Greater Richmond SCAN
   Co-sponsored by the Richmond Families Initiative, a partnership with the CCE and the University of Richmond Law School

Information about additional spring semester programs is available at engage.richmond.edu