

Inside RBC

FEATURED

RBC DEALER INSTITUTE

Richard Bland College provides specialized training for aspiring professionals in the casino dealing industry.

MILLIONS IN GRANTS & VIEWS

RBC receives \$10 million in grants and eclipses 8 million in YouTube views.

ESPORTS WINS CHAMPIONSHIP

Bringing home the title marks a significant achievement for the college's first-year Esports program.

THE BUS STOPS AT RBC

This paramount partnership connects RBC and the Greater Petersburg region.

 Richard Bland College

Meet Omni

WORLD'S MOST ADVANCED HUMANOID COMES TO RBC

Achieving Independence

A NEW ERA FOR RICHARD BLAND COLLEGE

After more than a decade of relentless advocacy led by President Debbie L. Sydow, Richard Bland College achieves its long-sought independence from William & Mary.





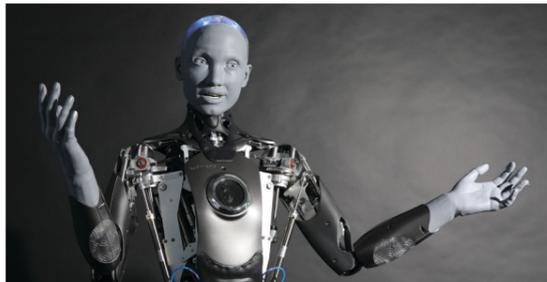
**NURTURED BY NATURE
DRIVEN BY PURPOSE**

At Richard Bland College, students find space to grow—academically and personally—surrounded by the quiet beauty of nature. Set within a grove of over 1,000 pecan trees, the campus offers a serene environment that encourages reflection, focus, and discovery. In this serene setting, students build confidence, deepen their curiosity and prepare for the next chapter of their journey with clarity and purpose.

FEATURED CONTENT



06 ACHIEVING INDEPENDENCE
Richard Bland College solidifies its status as a stand-alone institution.



14 MEET OMNI
RBC owns a next-generation humanoid robot driven by cutting-edge AI.



24 RBC \$3.9 MILLION IN SCHEV GRANTS
RBC owns a next-generation humanoid robot driven by cutting-edge AI.

20 RICHARD BLAND COLLEGE AND LIVE! CASINO LAUNCH WORKFORCE TRAINING IN PETERSBURG

23 STUDENTS GET A FREE RIDE AT RBC
This paramount partnership connects RBC and the Greater Petersburg region.

26 ESPORTS
In its first year, the College's Esports program garnered an impressive national championship title in "Fortnite."

30 GRANTS AND MARKETING HELP ADVANCE VIRGINIA'S ONLY JUNIOR COLLEGE
Richard Bland College receives \$10 million in grants and amasses more than 8 million YouTube views.

34 JAVAID SIDDIQI, PH.D.: WORKING IN THE MIDDLE
This RBC alumnus' life work is to reform education for our leaders of tomorrow.

38 AN RBC LOVE STORY
Over 45 summers ago, this couple met at RBC, fell for each other and have remained in love ever since.

44 ABBIGAYLE POIRIER: ARTFUL STORYTELLER
This RBC art professor illuminates the importance of light and color for captivating storytelling.

56 THE FIRST RBC NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP: 10 YEARS LATER
Former men's basketball head coach Chuck Moore and his team reminisce on their historic run.

Message from President Debbie L. Sydow

It is with great pride and optimism that I welcome you to the fourth edition of Inside RBC Magazine—a truly historic issue, dedicated to celebrating a bold new chapter in the life of Richard Bland College.

As of July 1, 2025, Richard Bland College has officially gained its independence from William & Mary and will now be governed by its own nine-member Board of Visitors. This monumental step honors Bland's legacy while positioning us to build a dynamic future rooted in innovation, strategic opportunity and student success.

This issue of *Inside RBC* explores the significance of independence—not only for our students, but also for our faculty, alumni and the broader community we serve. The transition empowers us to shape programs and partnerships that respond directly to the evolving needs of the Petersburg region and beyond.

The Independence Edition highlights inspiring student and alumni profiles that reflect the College's enduring impact and growing potential. You'll also meet Omni, a cutting-edge humanoid robot, unveiled as a part of the opening of a new \$17 million Academic Innovation Center—a symbol of our commitment to next-generation learning.

Together, we are writing the next chapter in the College's proud history, one defined by excellence, entrepreneurship and engagement. Thank you for joining us on this journey and for being a part of the Richard Bland College story.

Here's to an exciting and bold future!



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Richard Bland College

Achieving Independence

A NEW ERA FOR RICHARD BLAND COLLEGE

History will likely reflect that the hallmark of President Debbie L. Sydow's tenure at Richard Bland College (RBC) is her pivotal role in securing the College's independence from William & Mary (W&M) after more than 60 years of shared governance.

"This is historic," Dr. Sydow said. "This is a pivotal point for the College as we contemplate ways Bland can continue to have an impact not only on its students, but also on the broader Petersburg and the Commonwealth community."



Prior to RBC, between 2000 to 2012, Dr. Sydow served as president (now president emerita) at Onondaga Community College—one of the largest community colleges in the State University of New York SUNY system. Additionally, she served as President of the New York Community College Association of Presidents, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Institute for Community College Development at Cornell University, and Chair of the American Council on Education's Commission on Leadership and Institutional Effectiveness. In addition, Sydow is an author and senior editor for a book series focused on the future of two-year colleges published by Bloomsbury.

"Bringing more than 25 years of experience working with governing and executive boards, I was confident the College's independence advances Bland's ambitious goals," Dr. Sydow said.

So began her quest for the institution's independence.

"Dedicated board governance was the missing link for accelerating RBC's evolution as a new model for higher education in Virginia," she said.

Even as she led an extensive revitalization of campus facilities, grew private and auxiliary revenue, invested in student success scaffolding, as well as expanded corporate and transfer partnerships, Dr. Sydow engaged key RBC stakeholders in blue-sky discussions about board governance. She discovered alumni, community leaders, employees and even W&M board members believed a shake-up of the status quo was long overdue.

"I remember my first briefing on RBC in 2016 when I was appointed to the W&M Board of Visitors, I wondered why RBC was not already independent," said Brian Woolfolk, who was also a member of the strategy group that advocated for the College's independence. "Having proven its enormous value to the Commonwealth over the last decade, RBC has earned the independence necessary to flourish and to fully realize its potential."

The independent governance decision was met



John Rathbone - new Richard Bland College Board of Visitors Rector

with ambivalence by some. Those who were in opposition couldn't comprehend why Bland would separate from W&M—the nation's second oldest university, preceded only by Harvard—and its prestigious legacy after more than five decades of partnership.

RBC's connection to W&M had long been a source of confusion. Both institutions shared the same board; however, they were accredited, funded and operated separately. This further validated the urgency of Dr. Sydow's decision to pursue independence from W&M.

"For some, it came down to brand affinity," Dr. Sydow said. "William & Mary is such a powerful brand."

"There were those who just couldn't imagine Richard Bland without the W&M affiliation, no matter how misunderstood that affiliation actually was and has been for decades."

Dr. Sydow was inspired by the Christopher Newport, Virginia Commonwealth and Old Dominion Universities, who were also once governed by the W&M Board of Visitors. Dr. Sydow consulted with the presidents of the former branch campuses and was told time and time

again that their move to independent board governance was "the single most important catalyst for institutional change."

Rewinding back to 1962, The Virginia General Assembly dissolved the Colleges of William and Mary system. Shortly thereafter, in 1966, the Virginia Community College System was established. This resulted in W&M's branch colleges—except Richard Bland College—separating from the institution.

Fast forward to 2020, Dr. Sydow employed the Huron Consulting Group to conduct an in-depth, data-informed study with the goal of illuminating Richard Bland's future state. The research made a compelling case for RBC's independence. The following year, Dr. Sydow launched a strategy group consisting of alumni, board members, advocacy professionals and community leaders to help secure approval of legislation to establish a Richard Bland College Board of Visitors.

Every year from 2022 through 2024, the W&M Board of Visitors affirmed its support for Richard Bland College's transition to an independent governance structure. Each resolution emphasized that "as Virginia's only junior college, Richard Bland College has responded to General Assembly directives in place to model collaborative, innovative approaches to education that would yield improved attainment of higher education—and attendant credentials—for Virginia citizens and robust economic development for the Commonwealth."

The W&M Board's formal acknowledgement of Richard Bland's unique status as "an innovative model for higher education" and its support for the College's independent governance was critical in the legislative campaign strategy.

"Marshaled by President Sydow's energy and vision, Richard Bland College has undergone extensive transformation and capacity-building in recent years," W&M Rector Charles Poston said. "The W&M Board is confident that RBC will continue to thrive as an institution of higher education that adapts and responds to the needs of the Commonwealth."

After several months of deliberation, the strategy group formulated legislation, which would eventually become Senate Bill 1077, to introduce during the 2023 Virginia General Assembly session. The bill, patroned by the late Senator Frank Ruff, proposed to remove authority of the W&M Board of Visitors to supervise, manage and control Richard Bland College and to establish a 12-member Board of Visitors dedicated solely to RBC. The



legislation advanced through the Senate, but not the House of Delegates.

Dr. Sydow and all who passionately advocated for Richard Bland's independence were disappointed, but not discouraged. The setback ignited the strategy group's determination and helped prepare them for another independence campaign during the 2025 session.

"You can be disappointed, but you don't allow setbacks to devastate you," said Victor Branch ('82), President of Bank of America, Richmond Region; as well as Chair of the RBC Committee on the W&M BOV. "You harness the Statesman spirit and you get back in the game and keep driving for the desired outcome."

In the months leading up to the 2025 session, the City of Petersburg, Colonial Heights, Dinwiddie and Prince George supervisory boards all approved resolutions of support for Richard Bland's independence.

"As a lifelong Virginian and a leader in local government, I have seen the direct impact that strong, independent institutions like RBC have on our workforce, economy and community growth," Dinwiddie County Administrator Kevin Massengill ('95) said.

For the 2025 session, Senator Mamie Locke (D-District 23) and Delegate Betsy Carr (D-District 78) patroned legislation to establish an independent governing board for Richard Bland College.

"The most important message to deliver was that both the College of William and Mary and Richard Bland wanted this and it was in the collective interests of all involved," Locke said.

The bills moved through the House and Senate without a hitch. On April 2, the General Assembly accepted Governor Youngkin's amendment to activate the new Richard Bland College Board of Visitors on July 1.

"For more than a decade, the College has readied itself for a future state that prioritizes innovative partnerships and technology-enhanced programs to prepare students for the 21st century workforce," Dr. Sydow said. "The long-awaited Board of Visitors will be a full partner in charting an ambitious future for Richard Bland College."

The board consists of the following: The Honorable James W. Dyke, Jr., Senior Advisor, State Government Relations, McGuireWoods Consulting LLC and Former Virginia Secretary of Education; The Honorable Samuel D. Parham ('96), Mayor, City of Petersburg; Charles Patton, Managing Member, Patton Holdings, LLC; Albert Poole, Of Counsel, Poole Brooke Plumlee, PC; John Rathbone, Retired Chief Financial Officer, Norfolk Southern Corporation; Vickie Schray, Founder and Principal, Vanguard Coaching and Consulting Services, LLC; and Bouwien Smits, Site Vice President and General Manager, Civica Rx. Rathbone, Poole and Schray serve as rector, vice rector and secretary, respectively.

The RBC Board of Visitors is responsible for general oversight, strategic direction and the fiduciary soundness of the College. As stewards of the institution's mission, the board plays a vital role in shaping policies that support financial sustainability, academic excellence and student success.

"It is a distinct honor to continue serving Richard Bland College—this time as a member of its first-ever Board of Visitors," Rathbone said. "I feel I can speak for the rest of the board that we are deeply committed to supporting the College's mission and advancing its strategic vision during this pivotal time in its history."

After an arduous journey that began in the first year of her presidency, Dr. Sydow is overjoyed to reach the light at the end of the tunnel.

"This has been one of the most meaningful achievements of my career," Dr. Sydow said. "It's been an honor to lead this extraordinary institution through such a transformative chapter in its history."



Innovation

Is on the Move at RBC

THIS MOBILE UNIT GIVES LEARNERS A FRONT-ROW SEAT TO INNOVATION.

By Sterling Giles

Over the last few years, Richard Bland College (RBC) has evolved into one of the region's top institutions for innovative STEM-H (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math and Health Sciences) education. Most recently, its Mobile Marketing Engagement Unit, acquired this spring, is as an unorthodox, yet effective career discovery and exploration learning model. The vehicle, which was funded by a \$1 million grant funded by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), primarily serves first generation, rural and non-traditional adult learners.

"The mantra of this initiative is 'We come to you,'" said Dr. Kimberly Boyd, Vice President and Chief Research & Innovation Officer. "We're meeting learners where they are so they can have engaging and insightful sessions with state-of-the-art technology and resources."

Dr. Boyd, RBC Chief Communications & Marketing Officer Jesse Vaughan and RBC Chief Enrollment Management Officer Justin

May manage the unit via three pillars: artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) education, marketing, as well as admissions and enrollment, respectively.

Dr. Boyd and the Office of Research & Innovation lead VR, aviation and drone demonstrations, as well as mindfulness activities. The vehicle houses a desktop model of Ameca—the world's most advanced humanoid robot—equipped with interactive AI. To bridge the admissions and enrollment pillar, prospective students interact with the robot to ask questions about RBC and its resources. Additionally, to complement the technology, May's admissions team have guides on-hand that cover pertinent admissions and enrollment information.

"By combining advanced technology with personalized support, we're making the student journey more approachable and interactive," May said. "Whether it's interacting with our STEM-H technology or connecting with our admissions team, prospective students will leave with a clearer understanding of what Richard Bland College has to offer and how to take the next step."

The VR technology will give students the ability to traverse an immersive, virtual environment of the RBC campus, as well as the College's study abroad destinations such as England, Madagascar and domestically as well.

"This program is a uniquely powerful way to spark curiosity, expand horizons and show learners these experiences are truly within their reach," Dr. Boyd said.

Lastly, Vaughan and his team have crafted multi-faceted recruitment campaigns to reach students and residents, particularly in rural communities. RBC is in proximity to these areas, which historically face significant digital disparity. According to LISC Virginia, in Petersburg alone, about one in four households in Petersburg lack access to a computer, and one in three are without internet. The campaign messaging empowers learners by assuring that both advanced technology and quality education aren't out of reach.

"Our campaign is designed to bridge the technology gap by bringing state-of-the-art STEM-H tools directly to communities that need them most," Vaughan said. "It's about more than awareness—it's about empowerment and showing students innovation is accessible."

Currently, the College is collaborating with community and workforce development partners to support this initiative and to foster a pipeline of STEM-H professionals.



OMNI

AMECA, DEVELOPED BY ENGINEERED ARTS, IS A HUMANOID ROBOT KNOWN FOR ITS LIFELIKE EXPRESSIONS AND FLUID MOVEMENTS. DESIGNED TO ADVANCE HUMAN-ROBOT INTERACTION, IT CAN HOLD SIMPLE CONVERSATIONS, RESPOND TO EMOTIONS AND IMITATE HUMAN GESTURES WITH STRIKING REALISM.



World's Most Advanced Robot Comes to RBC

RBC OWNS A NEXT-GENERATION HUMANOID ROBOT DRIVEN BY CUTTING-EDGE AI.

By Sterling Giles

Richard Bland College (RBC) is one of the few institutions of higher learning nationwide with not only one, but two Ameca robots equipped with interactive artificial intelligence (AI). Ameca, the world's most advanced humanoid robot, is designed to engage with humans in remarkably lifelike and captivating ways. There are only 10 robots plotted worldwide.

Meet:

AI-TECH

RBC IS USING ROBOTS AND AI TOOLS TO EXPAND STEM ACCESS AND INNOVATION, BRINGING WORLD-CLASS TECHNOLOGY TO STUDENTS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES.

“Presently, artificial intelligence is ubiquitous in all aspects of life,” said Dr. Kimberly Boyd, RBC Vice President and Chief Research & Innovation Officer. “However, many students have limited access or exposure to this transformative technology.”

Located in a rural community with minimal access to advanced technologies, RBC serves an area with a significant digital disparity. According to LISC Virginia, about one in four households in Petersburg lack access to a computer and one in three are without internet. In response, RBC has committed to expanding STEM-H (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, and Health Sciences) resources and opportunities for the community.

In the summer of 2024, representatives from the College traveled to London to deepen their understanding of AI and establish a partnership with Engineered Arts—one of the world’s leading humanoid robot manufacturers. Founded in 2004, the company has created and installed more than 100 robots worldwide. Ameca, the latest creation in the Engineered Arts roster, was unveiled in 2021.

“The special sauce of Ameca and a lot of Engineered Arts robots is that sense of human connection that we bring to the



table,” said Leo Chen, Engineered Arts Director of U.S. Operations.

Ameca features a powerful Tritium operating system that can be operated remotely and can read virtually all programming languages and software, as well as a host of other cutting-edge features.

The mission and values of the RBC Office of Research & Innovation (ORI) fostered the perfect marriage with Engineered Arts. The ORI is passionate about empowering and equipping learners with tools to help enhance their STEM-H education experiences and workforce opportunities. The robots will facilitate new innovative ways to use AI technology in and out of the classroom.

“The reverberating impact of the College’s partnership with Engineered Arts will be extraordinary,” RBC President Debbie L. Sydow said. “This world-class technology is available to only a handful of universities across the globe, and we believe it will be a differentiator for our students and community.”

RBC received two robots—one stationary, six-foot tall, full-body model and a desktop model. OMNI (Operational Machine Neural Intelligence), the name of the full-body robot, was crowdsourced by the RBC community. The desktop model has the same functionality features as the full-body but doesn’t have arms or legs.

To extend its reach, the ORI also operates a Mobile Career Exploration Unit that travels statewide, bringing the desktop robot, drones and virtual reality (VR) tools to rural areas. The VR technology supports study abroad awareness and prospective student engagement through interactive Marketing and Admissions content.

The robots are also integral to RBC’s new Academic Innovation Center (AIC)—a 24,000-square-foot facility connected to the newly renovated library. The AIC offers advanced classrooms, collaborative space and serves as a hub for STEM-H education and research.

Courtney Boyd, RBC Instructor of Computer Science, envisions pushing the technology even further by integrating the robots with the ORI’s newly acquired AI-powered robotic dogs. She’s working on programming the humanoids to train the robotic canines—an innovative use case rarely seen in higher education.

“I can envision robotic dogs walking through campus while OMNI is telling them what to do,” Courtney said. “There are applications for AI-controlled robotic dogs in agriculture, data center management, rescue support and more.”

Courtney also plans to train ORI interns in programming unique robot personas using Python and is developing custom VR learning experiences tailored for individual students and faculty.

“This world-class technology IS AVAILABLE TO ONLY A HANDFUL OF UNIVERSITIES ACROSS THE GLOBE, AND WE BELIEVE IT WILL BE A DIFFERENTIATOR FOR OUR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY.”



“We’re creating smarter pathways

TO STUDENT SUCCESS,
SETTING A NEW STANDARD FOR WHAT
MODERN LEARNING CAN ACHIEVE.”

Dr. Dave Morgan, RBC Academic Professor of Physics, has plans to utilize the humanoids for personalized tutoring, language translation, accessibility services and research on the social aspects of human-robot interaction.

“As we integrate the robots into our curriculum, I foresee tremendous potential in how they can enhance our students’ learning experiences,” Dr. Morgan said. “Our goal is to create a more inclusive, accessible and engaging learning experience for all.”

Understanding the need for cultural sensitivity, RBC collaborated closely with Engineered Arts to ensure the robots’ software properly reflects and respects the diversity of the Crater Region. This attention to detail follows concerns about AI systems failing to recognize or represent diverse communities accurately.

“Artificial intelligence right now, or at least large language models, are trained on existing data sets, and unfortunately, these data sets already have inherent bias,” Chen explained. “There’s no getting around it.”

“It’s up to the people who utilize the technology to test it and be mindful about this inherent bias, to make sure that we can account for it and that it doesn’t continue to be a self-fulfilling, feedback loop.”

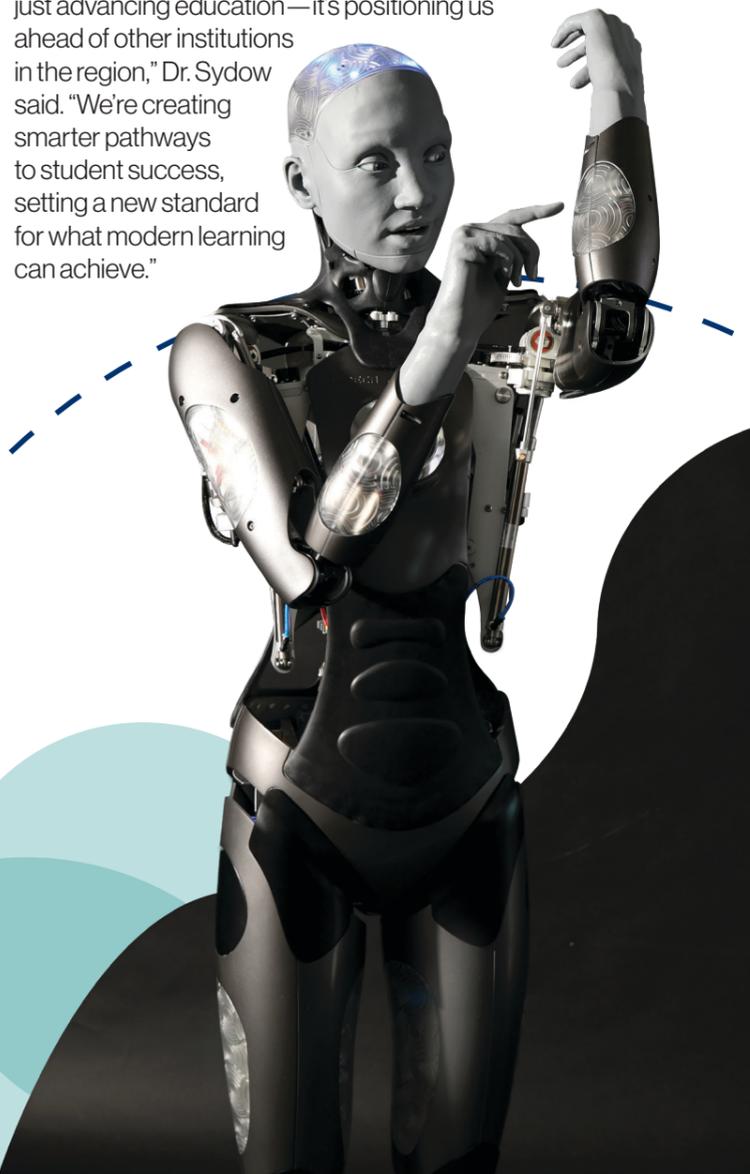
Naomi Hart, Market Development Lead at Engineered Arts, added, “Knowledge is power. “When people get first-hand exposure to the technology, they grow comfortable after just a couple of seconds.”

Recently, the ORI hosted a Sneaker Ball fundraiser to introduce OMNI to the public and support student scholarships. Attendees were amazed by the robot’s human-like interaction.

“There are many people that can’t even fathom something like OMNI or virtual reality,” Dr. Boyd said. “Awareness and education are my goal with the robots.”

With its bold investment in AI and robotics, Richard Bland College is emerging as a statewide leader in STEM-H education. The presence of the humanoids not only enriches the learning environment but also expands access and opportunity for students and the broader community.

“Our investment in world-class AI technology is not just advancing education—it’s positioning us ahead of other institutions in the region,” Dr. Sydow said. “We’re creating smarter pathways to student success, setting a new standard for what modern learning can achieve.”



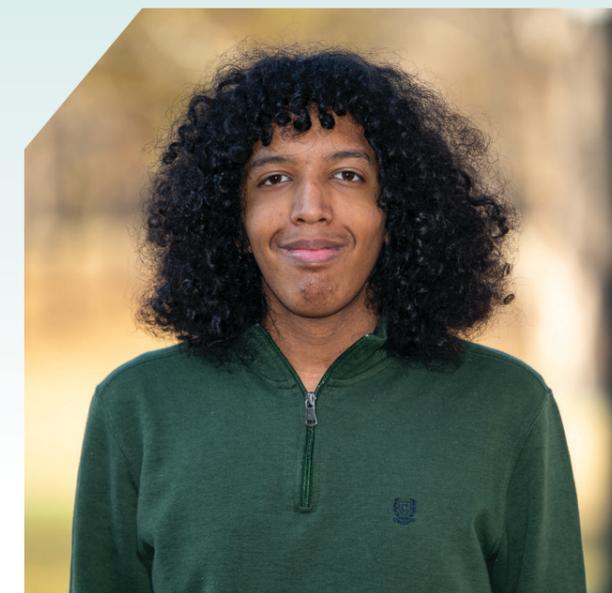
STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

DeAndre Taylor

In-Game Leader

THIS FORMER RBC STUDENT IS A GIFTED GAMER WHO HELPED RAISE THE PROFILE OF THE COLLEGE’S ESPORTS TEAM.

By Sterling Giles



Richard Bland College was once home to one of the best video gamers in the country. His name is DeAndre Taylor. At his peak, he was ranked among the nation’s top 85 players in “Overwatch 2,” a popular first-person shooter video game.

During the 2024-25 academic year, RBC Esports’ inaugural season, Taylor served as President and Captain of the College’s Overwatch team. He thrived as the squad’s vocal bedrock—calling out defensive and offensive tactics for his teammates to follow.

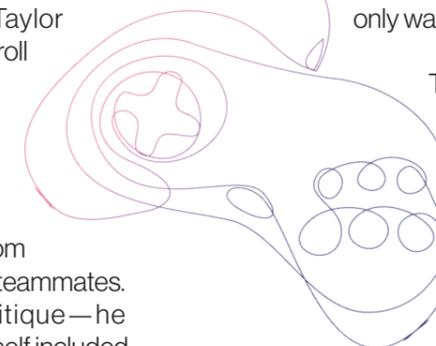
“It’s kind of like playing chess,” Taylor said. “You’ve got to do the work to roll as a team.”

Like a traditional sports club, the team reviews game film to see the pros and cons of their play. Taylor admitted he didn’t shy away from giving constructive criticism to his teammates. However, he’s wasn’t above critique—he wanted everyone to get better, himself included.

“You have to have that competitive drive and willingness to win.”

“You have to have that competitive drive and willingness to win,” he said. “And a willingness to look back on your plays because that’s the only way you can improve.”

This fall, Taylor returned to RBC as Assistant Head Coach of the Esports Program. Additionally, made possible through RBC’s University College program, he is currently enrolled at Virginia Wesleyan University pursuing a Business degree.



Richard Bland College and Live! Casino



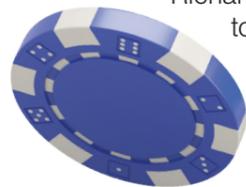
Launch Workforce Training

Richard Bland College (RBC), in partnership with the City of Petersburg and Live! Casino & Hotel Virginia, is launching the RBC Dealer Institute at the College's Workforce & Career Readiness Center on Crater Road in Petersburg. The Institute will prepare approximately 200 trainees to conduct table games beginning with Blackjack, with future plans of introducing Roulette and Baccarat. Over the course of the 12-week program, students will be immersed in a curriculum focused on customer service, game integrity and industry regulations. Additionally, the Institute will emphasize responsible gaming practices to ensure learners are fully prepared for the ethical challenges they may encounter in the field.



This initiative aligns with Richard Bland College's commitment to workforce development in Petersburg, the Tri-Cities area and throughout the Commonwealth. RBC President Dr. Debbie L. Sydow emphasized the importance of the Institute.

"As Petersburg's economy continues to evolve, Richard Bland College is proud to contribute to workforce development, preparing the next generation of professionals for high-paying jobs in one of the most dynamic industries in the country."



in Petersburg

Dr. Kimberly Boyd, Vice President and Chief Research and Innovation Officer at RBC, said the imminent impact of the partnership between RBC, the City of Petersburg and Live! Casino is a perfect match for a community focused on expanding economic development.

"Launching a program of this scale requires more than vision—it demands strong, strategic partnerships," Dr. Boyd said. "Collaborating with the City of Petersburg and Live! Casino & Hotel Virginia allows us to share the workload and leverage each other's strengths."

"It's a true partnership that ensures our adult students receive industry-relevant training, while also helping us scale our impact across the region."

Upon completing the program, students are eligible to apply for jobs at Live! Casino & Hotel Virginia and other regional gaming establishments. Through this training initiative, local residents will be ready to take advantage of the wealth of job opportunities created when the casino opens.



Tax Incentives & Community Investment

The Cordish Companies' \$1.4 billion investment in Petersburg is set to deliver major benefits, including \$240 million in tax revenue for the City. Once Live! Casino & Hotel Virginia opens, the project is expected to generate approximately \$201 million in annual economic impact and create more than 7,500 construction and permanent jobs. The City intends to use these funds to support public safety, upgrade infrastructure, enhance schools, promote health initiatives and improve quality of life for future generations.

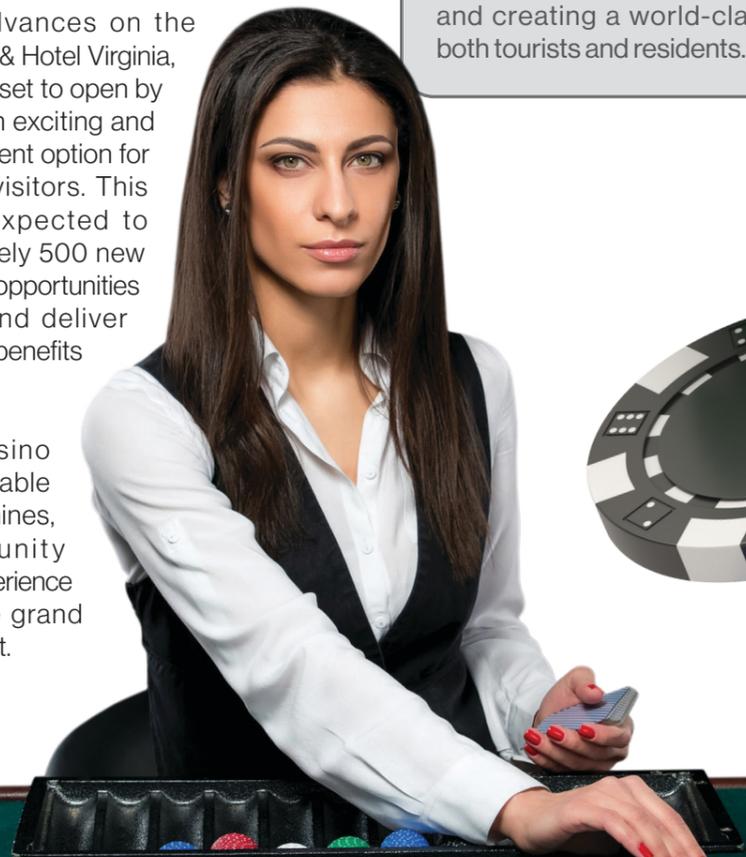
"This is the largest tourism and economic development project in Petersburg's history," said The Honorable Sam Parham, Mayor of the City of Petersburg. "This opportunity has the potential to help transform our City."

"We are committed to creating better jobs for Petersburg residents and attracting visitors from around the world to discover what makes our City a special place."

The Temporary and Main Casino

As construction advances on the full-scale Live! Casino & Hotel Virginia, a temporary casino is set to open by year's end, offering an exciting and accessible entertainment option for both residents and visitors. This interim facility is expected to generate approximately 500 new jobs, create additional opportunities for local vendors and deliver meaningful economic benefits to the City.

The temporary casino will offer a range of table games and slot machines, giving the community a taste of the casino experience while they await the grand opening of the full resort.



Live! Casino & Hotel Virginia is slated to open in 2027.

Its destination will feature:

- More than 450,000 square feet of first-class gaming, hotel and dining space
- 75,000 square feet of meeting, convention and entertainment space including a state-of-the-art venue for concerts and special events from top talent from across Virginia and the greater region
- An upscale 200-room hotel featuring 20 suites, resort pool and fitness center
- 1,600 state-of-the-art slot machines
- 65 live action table games, including a 22-table poker room
- High limit slot and table areas
- Sportsbook
- 10 best-in-class food and entertainment options, including local partners
- Free parking

These amenities will elevate Petersburg into a major entertainment hub, attracting visitors and creating a world-class destination for both tourists and residents.

New Hotels and Business Development

The expansion of Live! Casino & Hotel Virginia will spark significant growth in the Crater Road area. The development will bring new hotels, restaurants, retail outlets and other businesses, all of which will cater to the influx of visitors coming for the casino experience. Thousands of new jobs will be created in construction, hospitality, retail and entertainment, providing a wealth of opportunities for the local workforce.

The casino complex will occupy 92 acres near the intersection of Wagner Road and Brasfield Parkway. As Crater Road transforms into a bustling commercial district, it's expected to have a ripple effect across surrounding areas, encouraging further investment and providing Petersburg with the infrastructure it needs to support its growing population and tourism industry.

Penny Parayo, Senior Vice President and General Manager of Live! Casino & Hotel Virginia, emphasized the importance of fostering local partnerships and regional collaboration.



"Our goal is to build strong connections within the community," Parayo said. "This casino is not just about entertainment—it's about creating a sustainable, thriving economy that benefits everyone in the region."

"By partnering with the City of Petersburg and Richard Bland College, we're working together to ensure the economic benefits of this project are felt for years to come."



RBC President Dr. Debbie L. Sydow at the groundbreaking ceremony.

Students Get A Free Ride At RBC

THIS PARAMOUNT PARTNERSHIP CONNECTS RBC AND THE GREATER PETERSBURG REGION.

By Sterling Giles

In the fall of 2023, Richard Bland College (RBC) and the City of Petersburg initiated a partnership to facilitate the commute for RBC students into the city. The initiative designated a bus, the SCR (South Crater Road)/RBC Express, to RBC's campus. From there, the bus travels to various locations along South Crater Road and eventually returns to campus. RBC students ride free of charge and there are connecting buses in the city that can take commuters as far as Colonial Heights and Richmond.

"Students have the freedom to get to where they need to be and also have a way to connect to their surrounding community," said Terelle Robinson, RBC Associate Director of Government Relations & Student Life.

Robinson, who is also an RBC alum, was thrilled about the initiative and empathizes with students who don't have access to transportation.

"I was a student here from 2013 to 2015 and I struggled finding rides—I didn't have reliable transportation," Robinson said. "So I felt like this partnership was everything because I wanted to be on the side where the staff was making a difference in the lives of our students."

"So I felt so deeply about moving on this partnership because I wanted current RBC students to have reliable transportation and be connected to the city and beyond."

Along the route, are a host of restaurants, grocery stores, pharmacies and department stores for students to access. The bus route is user-friendly, so the language barrier amongst RBC's international students is a non-issue.

Shortly after the initiative launched, the RBC Foundation donated gift cards to a handful of iRBC (iRBC International Student Success

Program) students to do a trial run of the bus route. The students stopped at the Walmart on South Crater Road to get groceries and afterward dined at a local restaurant for dinner.

The students raved about the convenience of the bus, which allowed them to have access to things they needed and, in some cases, hadn't experienced before.

"It's pretty convenient and necessary for us since most international students don't have a car," said Ruokun Wu ('23). "I've been exposed to more diverse food up here that I've ever experienced in my hometown in Beijing."

The bus partnership isn't just a mode of transportation. It's a vehicle to foster community between RBC and the Greater Petersburg region.

"It creates that connectivity," Petersburg Mayor Samuel Parham said. "So much of Petersburg is connected with Richard Bland College—this only builds on our relationship and our partnership."



RBC \$3.9 Million In SCHEV Grants

Richard Bland College (RBC) is the recipient of a State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) Impact Grant, which totals more than \$3.9 million. This initiative, made possible by the Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership (V-TOP) and the Commonwealth Innovative Internship Fund, will create more paid internship and work-based learning opportunities for Virginia students to bolster their career readiness and academic growth.

“RBC is honored to be a recipient of V-TOP funding,” said Dr. Kimberly Boyd, RBC Vice President and Chief Research & Innovation Officer. “It will help expedite the growth and increase the impact of our career readiness initiatives.”

Richard Bland College, which was named a Capacity-Building Grant Awardee, will receive upward of \$150,000 to enhance its program infrastructure and institutional tracking mechanisms. It will also provide RBC students the opportunity to “learn and earn” through structured internship opportunities.

“Internships are the bridge between education and the workforce,” RBC Chief Enrollment Management Officer Justin May said. “Here at Richard Bland College, our career development programs help students develop their soft skills, build professional connections and feel empowered to excel in the competitive, workforce marketplace.”

The funds will support two additional Awardee categories, Vision and Scaling. The purpose of the Impact Grants is to facilitate stronger collaborations between higher education institutions and Virginia employers to encourage innovative approaches to workforce development.

“Internships and work-based learning provide students with the confidence and practical skills to thrive in a competitive workforce,” SCHEV Director Scott Fleming said. “The Impact Grants reinforce our commitment to supporting Virginia’s higher education institutions by integrating internships into their strategic priorities and fostering meaningful partnerships with employers across the Commonwealth.”



Leveling Up to

WORLD CHAMPION

WITH GRIT, STRATEGY AND TEAMWORK, THE RBC'S ESPORTS PROGRAM CAPPED ITS INAUGURAL SEASON WITH A NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP WIN.

By Sterling Giles

11 years after its athletics program was reinstated, Richard Bland College added another team into the fold—Esports. And in its first year, the team—led by Head Coach Cameron Mewhirter—notched its first-ever national championship trophy.

"With this being our first season ever, I am super proud of our team," Mewhirter said.

The coalition's first year was noteworthy, with several teams making impressive postseason runs in popular titles such as "Fortnite," "Marvel Rivals" and "Valorant." Namely, the "Fortnite" Zero Build team—consisting of now former Esports President Deandre Taylor and second-year student Jayden Robbins—went undefeated all season.

"We were an unstoppable force," Robbins said.

Despite this, the Statesman weren't favored to make

it far into the NJCAA (National Junior College Athletic Association) postseason tournament—let alone take home the championship trophy.

The tournament featured 18 factions from across the country in a single-elimination bracket. During their postseason run, RBC faced the top 10 teams in the country. The grand final against No. 6 Marshalltown Community College was their toughest test of the season. But RBC managed to edge out a hard-fought 3-2 series win.

"They definitely made us put our game faces on," Taylor reminisced.

The former Esports President is the vocal bedrock of the team. He specializes in calling out tactics for his teammates to execute during play. At his peak, he was ranked among North America's top 85 players in "Overwatch 2," a popular first-person shooter video game.

Regarding Taylor's leadership, Mewhirter said, "He supports my coaching style by having his teammates try to figure out for themselves what it is they can improve on, instead of me telling them. They need that knowledge base if they want to succeed as competitive players."

The journey to the "Fortnite" championship win was a culmination of the group's fastidious approach to improving their gameplay and communication all season long. Instilled by Mewhirter, he challenged his team to uphold championship-level habits from the beginning of the season. Studying game matches, giving constructive criticism to one another and tightening team communications are foundational tenets of the team.

"I chose to come to RBC because this program was being built from the ground up, so I get a lot of say in what stays and what goes," Mewhirter said.

Mewhirter, a 2022 alumnus of Coastal Carolina University, was introduced to Esports as a potential career route his junior year at the university. Like most people, originally, he thought video games were relegated as a hobby—not as the backbone of a competitive, multimillion dollar industry. Over his last two years at the university, he served as Treasurer, Vice-President and President of the college's Esports club and gained first-hand experience coordinating gaming tournaments in both North Carolina and Virginia.

Much like a traditional sports team, each player on RBC's current roster had to try out for a spot. From there, players were designated to play various titles including "Tekken 8," "Marvel Rivals," "Valorant" and "Fortnite."



The Esports team's arena—which features more than 20 exceptional gaming computers equipped with streaming technology—immerses players in a similar environment professionals play in.

“In the arena, we have a ton of top-of-the-line stuff,” said second-year student Makayla Chapman. “We have 4090 graphic cards (top gaming processors), so we can play virtually any game that we want.”

“The computers run about 240 frames a second and you get really good response time and gameplay from them,” Robbins added.

Chapman—the sole woman on the team—feels empowered by Mewhirter’s leadership, despite the collective’s lopsided representation.

“He’s always there for us,” Chapman said. “He plays the games, so he’s also very knowledgeable about what’s going on and he gives us tips on how to improve ourselves so we can do better in our games.”

The Head Coach has cultivated a culture of collaboration and accountability and most importantly, fun.

“I love playing on this team because I’m able to use my talents, connect with a bunch of different people and bond over games,” Robbins said.

In the coming seasons, Mewhirter plans to expand the scope of the program, including playing more game titles and exploring the production side of Esports.

“This team is a community of like-minded players who want to compete at the highest level,” Mewhirter said. “If you also want to learn how to grow in the space with commentary, casting and broadcast production, then this team is for you.”

“**We were an unstoppable force**”
- Jayden Robbins



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Ryleigh Ingraham Vision-Minded

DESPITE HAVING A RARE EYE CONDITION, THIS RBC STUDENT HAS EXCELLED IN HER SKATES AND IN HER BOOKS.

By Sterling Giles

Ryleigh Ingraham, a second-year student at Richard Bland College (RBC), is one the nation’s top roller skaters. Her father, an avid skater himself, encouraged her to pursue the sport.



“I fell in love with it and kept coming to the skating rink more and more,” Ingraham said. “And over 10 years later, here we are.”

Despite her love for skating, Ingraham’s path to becoming the talented athlete she is today came with its fair share of challenges.

In a sport predicated on precision and balance, Ingraham has had to work twice as hard because of her rare condition, ocular albinism. The genetic disorder effects the eyes, making her extremely sensitive to light and subject to frequent migraines. But despite her ailment, she’s excelled in skating, even competing on national stages.

“I’ve never been natural at it,” Ingraham said. “I’ve had to work through the balance issues and everything else.”

“To be where I am today, I’m definitely proud of myself.”

Prior to attending RBC, Ingraham had been home schooled since the seventh grade. The College’s intimately sized classrooms principally

attracted her to the institution. Since she’s been here, Ingraham is very appreciative of how accommodating her professors have been of her needs. They provide her with presentations ahead of her classes, as well as write larger and more legibly, among other accessibility requests.

Upon graduation from RBC, Ingraham plans to study anesthesiology or genetics. With the latter, she hopes to help people like her get answers to their rare disorders and diseases.

“**To be where I am today, I’m definitely proud of myself.**”

Grants and Marketing Help Advance Virginia's Only Junior College

RICHARD BLAND COLLEGE RECEIVES \$10 MILLION IN GRANTS AND ECLIPSES EIGHT MILLION IN YOUTUBE VIEWS

By Sterling Giles



Since 2022, the year the RBC Office of Research & Innovation (ORI) was established, the College has secured more than \$10 million in grants. Also of note, the College's YouTube page is the top-viewed two-year school in the Commonwealth, amassing more than eight million views.

Grants Awarded to RBC ORI

Dr. Kimberly Boyd, who serves as the College's Vice President and Chief Research & Innovation Officer, sits at the helm of the ORI. The office has garnered millions in funding from state and federal agencies such as the SCHEV (State Council of Higher Education in Virginia) and USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture).

"With this funding, we can delve deeper into student success initiatives that drive innovation in educational outcomes," Dr. Boyd said.

The ORI's projects range from holistic support for students impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to distance learning for rural communities via the RBC Mobile Unit equipped with artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) technology. Additionally, RBC is one of the few institutions of higher learning with not

only one, but two Ameca robots. The humanoid is the most advanced in the world and there are only 10 plotted across the globe.

"Presently, artificial intelligence is ubiquitous in all aspects of life," Dr. Boyd said. "However, there are students who aren't exposed to it on a frequent basis.

"By way of the SCHEV grant funding, the College's Office of Research & Innovation will help close this accessibility gap for middle and high school students across the region, as well as RBC students. AI technology is pivotal to enhancing students' educational experiences."

Last September, the College unveiled its Academic Innovation Center (AIC). The 24,000 square foot

center features a host of modern classrooms, offices and collaboration spaces. The AIC serves as a hub for STEM-H (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math and Health Sciences) research and education for RBC students, faculty, staff and the local community.

Uniquely positioned in proximity to rural communities, Richard Bland College is intentional about exposing students and residents to state-of-the-art technology. Dr. Barry W. Simmons Sr., Financial Aid Associate and Program Administrator for the Pell Initiative at SCHEV, applauded the College's reverberating impact.

"RBC's approach echoes portions of the K-12 Invitational Education Movement," he said.

The movement is a recent phenomenon that advocates for student holistic wellness and empowerment — specifically aligning with the College's REACH4 project. The initiative provides grants and scholarships, paid student internships, work study and experiential learning opportunities to Pell-eligible and low-income students. It also incorporates mental health support and resources, which was often overlooked in higher education until recently, according to Simmons.

RBC President Debbie L. Sydow projects enormous growth opportunity for the ORI and the compounded impact its research and projects will have on the campus and surrounding community.

"Since its inception three years ago, the Office of Research & Innovation has been leading paramount research and community development initiatives financially backed by several prominent state and federal organizations," Dr. Sydow said. "The work not only elevates the College's value proposition, but also lifts up the surrounding community, especially our rural neighbors."

RBC Marketing & Communications Surpasses 8.4 Million YouTube Views

The RBC Marketing & Communications team also has cause for celebration as the College's YouTube page eclipsed eight million views. This is a testament to the team's tireless efforts to revamp RBC's multimedia presence and its partnerships with local media stakeholders to grow public knowledge of the College and its value proposition.

"Our team at RBC's Creative Services Group (CSG) has worked diligently to ensure and sustain the growth of our multimedia footprint," RBC Chief Marketing & Communications Officer Jesse Vaughan said. "It's rewarding to see the fruits of our labor in real-time.

"CSG is an internal advertising and production unit inside Richard



Bland College created to make our own commercials, documentaries and graphic designs to sustain the College on an independent creative basis.”

Prior to Vaughan's tenure as head of the Marketing & Communications team, the College's multimedia work was largely outsourced, which wasn't sustainable due to rising video production costs. But once he came on board, Vaughan and his team looked for ways to work more efficiently and cost-effectively.

“Self-sufficiency saves Richard Bland College money and it also gives us a chance to highlight the talent of the RBC Creative Services Group,” Vaughan said.

CSG is an in-house advertising agency and production support company that consists of Vaughan, who serves as Creative Director and Producer; RBC Senior Videographer/Producer, Derek Wright; RBC Associate Director of Communications, Sterling Giles; Graphic Designer, LeeAnn Wilson; freelance News Host, Amy Lacey, and ancillary partners from all over the globe.

“We build brand awareness by creating immersive multimedia content,” Vaughan said. “We don't outsource any of our advertising or production services—it's all created right here on campus.”

To date, the College has garnered nearly a dozen Capital Emmy Award nominations from the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. It notched its first-ever win in June of last year for the second

installment of its “Inside RBC-TV” program.

The accolades and success were a byproduct of the invaluable partnerships the College established with Richmond, VA-based media conglomerates, Lewis Media Partners and WTVR-TV CBS 6.

In fact, the College's latest awareness campaign allotted more than three million YouTube views and more than 20 million social media impressions—by far, RBC's most successful multimedia campaign to date. Of note, all the campaign assets were produced in-house and distributed via Lewis Media Partners' marketing channels.

“There's a great trust between Jesse, the team and us,” said Aurelia Lewis, Founder and President at Lewis Media Partners. “We keep them up to date with all the changes that are happening in the industry.

“We've invested in all the tools and technology to make sure that our clients are reaching the pertinent target audiences.”

To facilitate its marketing services, Lewis Media uses several applications such as Domo, a business intelligence and visualization tool; Skai, a data driven marketing platform and Resonate, an AI-powered consumer data and insights research program.

From the onset, the Marketing & Communications team has sustained an impressive content output,

which translated to the surge in the College's social media followers and YouTube views. Currently, RBC and its affiliate pages have more than 20,000 followers across all social media platforms and more than 270 videos on its YouTube page.

By leveraging RBC's content, Lewis Media optimizes multimedia channels to target prospective students and their families, as well as the general public. The return on investment has been fruitful. Namely, Richard Bland College saw a significant year-over-year increase in student enrollment.

With WTVR-TV CBS 6, the College partnered with the station's “Virginia This Morning” program to conduct interviews with several RBC faculty and staff about the newsworthy happenings on campus. The station has also run a slew of RBC content ranging from awareness commercials aired during the Super Bowl to the Capital Emmy Award-winning “Inside RBC-TV” show.

“The team at Richard Bland College represents best-in-class ability to think outside the box in reaching

potential students and their families,” WTVR-TV CBS 6 General Manager Stephen Hayes said. “From Emmy Award-winning, long-form programming to linear content integration, it's refreshing to witness how RBC connects and engages with the Central Virginia community.”

With both Lewis Media and CBS 6, the Marketing & Communications team has been able to expand its reach in traditional and digital media spaces. The marketing campaigns have been resounding successes due to the synergy of the Marketing & Communication team's high-quality content and the media partners' intentionality and expertise in audience marketing.

“We are eternally grateful to work with partners who are equally invested and aligned in raising awareness about Richard Bland College,” Vaughan said. “I believe the College is one of the most unique and invaluable educational institutions in the country and it deserves to be marketed as such.”

RBC Workforce & Career Readiness Center Opens

The grand opening of the RBC (Richard Bland College) Workforce and Career Readiness Center in Petersburg welcomed attendees from all across the region. Dignitaries from Richard Bland College, Live! Casino & Hotel, The City of Petersburg, among others convened at the facility located off Crater Road.

“The RBC Workforce and Career Readiness Center represents our commitment to preparing residents for meaningful careers in high-demand fields,” RBC President Debbie Sydow said. “Together with our partners, we are building a stronger workforce and a brighter future for the Tri-Cities region.”

The center will provide curricula and training for residents seeking to find careers in the health care, aviation and drone, and casino industries, among others. Currently underway within the center, the RBC Dealer Institute—which equips aspiring casino dealers with the skills to conduct table games—launched earlier this week. This initiative ladders up to the 450,000 square-foot Live! Casino Hotel in Petersburg set to open its doors

in 2027. RBC Dealer Institute graduates will receive priority consideration for interviews with the casino.

“This direct pathway from training to employment reflects our mission to connect education with real workforce opportunities,” said Dr. Kimberly Boyd, Vice President and Chief Research and Innovation Officer at RBC.



Javaid Siddiqi, Ph.D.:

Working In The Middle

By Sterling Giles

The trajectory of Dr. Javaid Siddiqi's ('98) life calling is the furthest thing from linear. A native of Chesterfield, VA, Siddiqi went into his undergraduate studies wanting to pursue a career as a doctor. Today, he sits at the helm of The Hunt Institute, a nonpartisan leader in K-12 education policy and political leadership.

Siddiqi admittedly had a subpar first semester as a Longwood University freshman. Rather than continuing his tenure there and shelling out thousands of tuition dollars, he decided to attend Richard Bland College (RBC) to reset.

"I was able to live at home and was able to get back on track," Siddiqi said. "At Richard Bland College, the professors knew my name and they knew my struggles.

"They knew when I was late or didn't show up for class. And they made you feel a certain way when you didn't come because they cared in a way that big universities don't."

Siddiqi also spoke highly of RBC's Dual Enrollment program, which he has spent more than 15 years advocating for first as a part of former Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell's administration and now at The Hunt Institute.

"It has become a personal passion for me," he said. "I advocate for dual enrollment more so than AP (Advanced Placement) or IB (International Baccalaureate) courses because there's more transferability."

Upon graduation from RBC, Siddiqi matriculated at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). He remained in the Biology/Pre-Med track his first year there. But in his final year there, he decided he wanted to pursue a career in education.

However, Siddiqi stayed the course and earned his bachelor's degree in Biology. But since he wasn't a licensed teacher, his first stop post-grad was serving as a probationary teacher (a teacher being evaluated for suitability at an institution) in Chesterfield, VA.

He would later earn a master's degree in Educational Leadership at Virginia State University where his father was a professor for many years. To round out his educational journey, Siddiqi returned to VCU and earned his Ph.D. in General Educational Leadership and Administration.

In 2004, Robious Elementary School was the first school in the state to implement Expeditionary Learning, a revolutionary, inquiry-based approach that improves school culture by making curriculum more relevant to students.

Siddiqi—who was the principal of Robious Middle School at the time—and his teaching staff were convinced the middle school curriculum needed an overhaul. So they decided to partner with Robious Elementary's educators to adopt its Expeditionary Learning program. The middle school officially implemented the initiative in 2006, making it the first secondary school in the Commonwealth to do so.

"We found that phonics was the way that kids learn best to read," Siddiqi said. "I didn't realize this, but we were about five years ahead of the game and 10 years ahead of most of the Commonwealth of Virginia."

Research shows strong literacy correlates with high school graduation rates, college enrollment rates and lifetime earning potential.

After serving as principal of Robious Middle School for roughly four years, Siddiqi was appointed Deputy Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Virginia in the fall of 2011. Two years later, he was promoted to Secretary of Education.

After leaving his post as Secretary of Education, Siddiqi served on several boards, including Voices for Virginia's Children, Chesterfield County School Board and the Radford University Board of Visitors, among others. Additionally, he was handpicked as an honoree of the inaugural RBC Foundation Notable Alumni class in 2017.

Siddiqi was hired by The Hunt Institute in 2014 and three years later, he was named President & CEO. Founded by former North Carolina Gov. Jim Hunt, the longest-serving governor in the state's history, the nonpartisan Institute works to design strategy, shape policy and drive educational improvements at the national and state levels.

"Dr. Siddiqi's work at The Hunt Institute profoundly influences education policy, strategy and improvement," said RBC President Debbie L. Sydow, Ph.D. "Javaid and his team are committed to lifting up individuals and communities by improving education at its core.

"So in my mind, this is sacred work."

One of The Hunt Institute's seminal initiatives, One Million Teachers of Color, is aptly titled. Within a decade, the Institute, in collaboration with several education reform partners, are campaigning to add one million teachers of color, as well as 30 million leaders of color, to U.S. schools. According to the initiative's website, 80 percent of teachers are white and 40 percent of schools don't have a single teacher of color.

According to Education Northwest, students of color who have at least one teacher of color tend to perform better

in the classroom and are less likely to have disciplinary issues. Research also shows white students show improved problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity when they have diverse teachers.

The nonpartisan nature of Siddiqi's work is an extension of his frame of mind.

"I've learned so much about how to navigate the nuance of the middle," he said.

He pointed out compromise is necessary in every facet of life, especially in policy work. He cautioned against operating in polarity because it impedes progress.

"It speaks to the diversity of thought that we need to have as a country because we are divided," Siddiqi said. "We're not willing to consider somebody else's perspectives or shared experiences or life experiences."

However, in the same breath, Siddiqi acknowledges being outspoken about what you believe in and advocate for is paramount as well.

"Your voice matters, your experiences matter. But if you don't share them, they will never matter."

Police Receives Wellness Grant

In May, the Richard Bland College Department of Campus Safety and Police was awarded a grant totaling more than \$23,000 through the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. The funding is supporting RBC's Officer Therapy and Wellness Program.

"I am happy we were able to receive this support as it will significantly enhance our wellness resources for both the department and the broader campus community," said Thomas J. Travis, RBC Director of Campus Safety & Chief of Police.

In response to the eyebrow-raising statistics surrounding mental health illness, Travis deemed it necessary to invest in wellness resources for both his officers and the campus community.

"Mental health issues are definitely on the incline, especially among the collegiate student body all over the country," Travis said.

According to Best Colleges, one in every five students experience serious psychological distress. Thereby, the department acquired a therapy dog and its essential accessories, as well

as stress relief equipment for the officers.

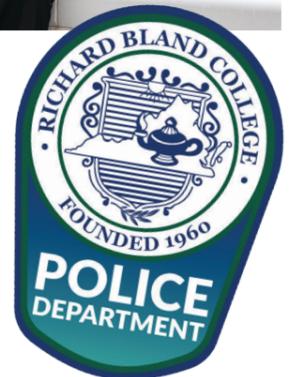
"There's a lot of research that talks about therapy dogs helping calm people and even helping them open up in traumatic situations," Travis added. "And who doesn't like a cute, little dog?"

Indy—the canine's name, which was crowdsourced from the RBC community—is a Havanese breed.

"We even got him a mini badge," Travis said with a smile.

To prepare for service at RBC, the dog went through extensive training for nearly four months through the K-9 Caring Angels of Northern Virginia. Indy is now nationally certified as a therapy dog.

"This breed is very intelligent," Travis said. "He did a great job during the training."



In the near future, the department plans to collaborate with the Office of Research & Innovation and Counseling Services to institute the therapy dog and its wellness resources in the offices' initiatives and sessions.

Travis believes the grant funding will strengthen officer performance and support the mental well-being of the RBC community.

"These resources give us the opportunity to interact with the community like we never have before," Travis said.



Inside RBC NEWS Richard Bland College

Meet Brennah Davis

Brennah Davis has recently joined the RBC Department of Campus Safety & Police, taking on a unique and heartwarming role as the primary handler for Indy, the College's new therapy dog. Indy, a lovable Havanese puppy, is already becoming a cherished presence on campus, offering stress relief and emotional comfort to students, faculty, and staff. The duo will be making appearances at various campus events throughout the year, including the much-anticipated Pecan Festival. With Brennah's guidance and Indy's calming presence, the College community can look forward to a more supportive and comforting environment.

Welcome to the team, Brennah!



Scott and Lindsey Vincent: An RBC Love Story

**45 SUMMERS AGO,
THIS COUPLE MET AT RBC,
FELL FOR EACH OTHER AND HAVE
REMAINED IN LOVE EVER SINCE.**

By Amy Lacey

Scott Vincent vividly remembers her son's expression every time they drove past Richard Bland College (RBC) in the 1990s.

"He would say, 'That's where mom and dad fell in love,'" Vincent said. "We made sure the kids knew our story."

"Had I not gone to take classes there, I wouldn't have met my husband Lindsey. You can call it fate or who God picked for us, but it was definitely meant to be."

During the summer of 1977, Scott was a rising senior enrolled in summer school at what is now Longwood University. Her two-hour daily commute from her parents' tobacco farm in Rawlings, VA to Longwood's campus in Farmville became a challenge—so she reconsidered her options. She decided to switch her four courses to RBC where her two brothers were also pursuing degrees.

"I didn't start until the Friday of that first week of summer school at RBC," Scott recalled. "My very first day in professor Joel Whitten's psychology class, I felt awkward because the students were already days ahead of me."

Lindsey was in my class. He had gone to Chowan College after high school but dropped out. He was then 22 when he went back to school at RBC. We became really good friends and started dating."

Despite the summer heat, the couple would sit in the car and talk for hours in between the two classes they had together.



"That's how you know you really like someone," Scott commented. "Neither of us was looking to meet someone."

"We just wanted an education. One day after we met, Lindsey and I went to see his friend Susan Basile, who worked at RBC in finance for many years. Fast forward to the next time Susan saw Lindsey, she told him, 'You are going to marry that girl. I just know it.'"

The two eventually got married in June 1980. Scott later earned her bachelor's degree at Longwood University and became a teacher. Lindsey graduated from RBC in 1978 and continued his education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

"Lindsey had a different career path, but from the time I met him he wanted to go into the peanut business," Scott said. "He had grown up on a peanut farm in Skippers, Virginia and would cook peanuts every night on our kitchen stove using his grandmother's recipe."

"This was while he was working another job and I taught school."

In 1989, their business, Good Earth Peanut Company, officially became a reality in Lindsey's hometown.

Since they met, RBC has held a special place in the Vincents' hearts.

"We quit our jobs, had three kids and had no money," Scott remembered. "I was scared to death, but Lindsey would always say we had to crawl before we could walk."

"He had a business plan and would stay up until 2 a.m. to figure out how much money we had to make to keep going."

For the past 34 years, the Vincents make frequent commutes to Good Earth Peanut Company, which is about 40 miles from their home. Despite the long travel, an RBC lesson has stuck with them along the way.

"We had a marketing class together and we watched the film, 'Eye of the Beholder,' which was all about what people see depending on their vantage point," Scott explained. "Five people can look at the same thing and see something different."

"I have thought of that so many times in my career."

Since they met, RBC has held a special place in the Vincents' hearts. When their children were young, they would take them for walks on the RBC campus. The couple attended dances in the gym for date nights with friends as well. Their daughter, Claire, credits two classes she took with RBC professor Barbara Morgan as the reason why she chose psychology as her major.

Since the beginning, the couple has had a role in the annual RBC Pecan Festival, most recently serving as a supplier for the event. Additionally, in 2024, Lindsey decided to step down from the RBC Foundation Board where he has served since 2018.

But the Vincents' relationship with RBC will continue into the future.

"We just love it there," Scott said. "It is our story and I know it is a great story."





'74 Alumnus

Ed Hatch

Finding Extraordinary in the Ordinary

By Sterling Giles

It's the summer of 1972. Ed Hatch just graduated from Hopewell High School and landed a job at a local plant unloading liquid fertilizer from train cars. But whenever there was a lull in the day, Hatch whipped out his pen and pad and got to sketching.

Hatch's boss caught wind of this, but his response wasn't what you'd expect.

"He literally picked the phone up and said 'Call Richard Bland College and take art classes, will ya?'" Hatch reminisced with a chuckle.

He obliged—and the decision changed his life forever.

Hatch grew up in Spring Grove, VA, a sleepy town nestled in Prince George County. A stone's throw from his childhood home was his family's general store founded by his great-grandfather in 1912.

As a toddler, he would spend hours upon hours in the store sketching from his treasured bird book. Decades later, Hatch still sketches in the same space. But it's no longer a store. It's home to his art studio, Ed Hatch Fine Art.

Along the interior walls of the century-old building hang dozens of Hatch's creations. He's a disciple of the late Andrew Wyeth, a legendary realist painter who lifted from nature surrounding his home as inspiration for his paintings.

"I remember seeing his wonderful paintings that showed the ordinary things in life," Hatch said. "I saw beauty in that. Nothing grandiose caught my attention—it was just the simple things."

Hatch, much like Wyeth, doesn't venture far from home for his muses. The nearby creeks, mountains and countryside are all he needs. From there, his fastidious, delicate strokes craft breath-taking, picturesque snapshots of nature.

You can hear the stream gently trickling over elephant-gray rocks. The faint chirping of plump, petite birds in the autumn sky. The soothing ocean waves crashing on the sandy shore.

Richard Bland College (RBC) is a little under 45 minutes away from Spring Grove. But it might as well have been worlds away because the culture there—particularly within the art department—was nothing like Hatch had ever experienced before. The program featured a motley crew of gifted artists of diverse orientations, races and ethnicities.

"It was just a lot of variety of people, which was really good for me," Hatch said. "It really exposed me to a lot of different things I wasn't used to."

Susan Brown, associate professor emerita of Art, left an indelible mark on Hatch and helped him become a more disciplined artist.

"She was fantastic," he reminisced. "She'd make you work and she didn't put up with any foolishness."

The seeds planted by Brown and Hatch's classmates inspired him to bet on himself and work toward his dream of becoming a full-time artist.

"I didn't know how I was going to make a living at it, but I felt it in my heart."

In 1974, Hatch received his associate's degree in Art and transferred to Old Dominion University. There, he worked under Charles Sibley, the founder and first chair of the university's art department. Three years later, Hatch received his bachelor's in Fine Art with a concentration in Printmaking.

Hatch was finally out of the nest and ready to take flight. But it wasn't smooth sailing out the gate. On one occasion, he presented his portfolio to a museum in Virginia Beach and within three seconds he was told "come back in about five years."

CLASS OF 1974

Over the years, the rejection was harsh and at times, the financial strain was harsher. But Hatch refused to quit and stayed the course.

"Never give up on following something that is very rewarding to your heart and soul," he affirmed.

But with the valleys also came the peaks. A memory etched in his mind is when Robert Bateman, one of the most celebrated naturalist painters of all-time, complimented his Big Tumbling Creek painting.

"He said, 'Gosh, I wish I'd done that,'" Hatch recalled, smiling cheek to cheek. "I could have exploded. It doesn't get any better than that for me."

Over the course of his decades-long career, Hatch has received countless regional, state, and national awards and honors. He's also been

featured in private and corporate collections around the world, as well as produced hundreds of commissioned paintings.

When pondering his legacy, Hatch wants it to mirror what his art embodies.

"I try to put a small amount of beauty in people's lives," he said. "It's subtle work. But if it's done right, it really hits you."

In 2023, the "5 & Dime" trail—a historic, meandering route along Routes 5 and 10 that carves through Hopewell, Prince George, Charles City, Surry and James City—was established. Ed's studio is listed as one of the trail's official landmarks.

EdHatchFineArt is located in Spring Grove and is open by appointment only.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Usra Jabri

Culturally Rooted

THIS RBC STUDENT CHAMPIONS HER ARABIC HERITAGE IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.

By Sterling Giles



Usra Jabri, a second-year student at Richard Bland College (RBC), uses her paintbrush to tell authentic stories of her Arabic heritage. But due to life's circumstances, she has had to learn about her identity and culture in isolation.

A few months after her birth in Prince George, VA, Jabri and her family moved to their homeland, Syria. The move was intended to be permanent, but the family was forced to move back to the U.S. a few years later due to worsening civil tensions.

5,900 miles away back stateside, Jabri longed for her extended family's warm, intergenerational community. But instead of letting her roots wither away, she immersed herself in her culture.

Over the years, she has matured into a gifted artist. Cognizant of the sweeping generalizations of Arabic people in the media, she uses her medium to paint holistic pictures of her people.

"We're always seeing the politics of war in the news," Jabri said. "But we're a colorful people."

"We're a hospitable people. We love to share. We love family. We love community. I try to show that through my art."

I choose a lot of warm colors, like reds, oranges and browns and I always add tessellations and geometric patterns in my work."

In a similar vein of advocacy, Jabri serves as Historian of the RBC Student Assembly. The organization is dedicated to uplifting and representing student voices at the College.

After RBC, she hopes to utilize the academic pathway to William & Mary (W&M). She hopes W&M's notable international relations and study abroad programs will cultivate her desire to pursue a career in international law.

But instead of letting her roots wither away, she immersed herself in her culture.



Abbigayle Poirier

Artful Storyteller

THIS RBC ART PROFESSOR ILLUMINATES THE IMPORTANCE OF LIGHT AND COLOR FOR CAPTIVATING STORYTELLING.

By Sterling Giles

Abbigayle Poirier, Art Professor at Richard Bland College and gifted oil painter, is a lover of the art of paint—not only what it represents.

“I’m not a painter because I want to paint narratives,” she said. “I’m a painter because I’m interested in paint.”

Poirier defines herself as “a figurative landscape painter inspired by folklore, personal narratives and dreams.” However, how she creates her art is a bit unorthodox—she combines printmaking and painting techniques by using a gelli plate to create mono prints on wood panels. She blends realistic and fantastical elements in her work, often incorporating borders inspired by medieval manuscripts. Her paintings focus on capturing light, color and personal interpretations of scenes, rather than strictly adhering to hyperrealistic representations.

Poirier’s talent has taken her places near and far. Next January, she will be attending the Green Olive Arts residency in Morocco, which welcomes top artistic talent from around the world.

“I think about all the designs and colors in Morocco,” she said. “I feel like it will be really influential to my work.”

“It could push things that I don’t have the answers to right now.”

Recently, Poirier had a solo exhibition in the Thyen-Clark Gallery at Jasper Community Arts in Jasper, Indiana. The gallery is roughly 70 miles southwest of Poirier’s graduate alma mater, Indiana University (IU). The school is heralded for its figurative art programs, which Poirier sought to master. She learned under esteemed artists Eve Mansdorf and

Tim Kennedy, who together have taught at IU for more than a half-century.



FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Poirier developed an affinity for art around 12 years of age. She spent hours every day perfecting her drawing technique to “get as close to the photograph as possible.”

Today, she has largely abandoned this style and philosophy and opted for a more imaginative and figurative approach. This shift can be traced back to John Lee, one of her art professors at William & Mary, who opened her eyes to see the world in color, not just the black and white confines of hyperrealistic drawing.

Poirier scoured the landscape for inspiration and stumbled upon French impressionist painter Pierre Bonnard. She was drawn to how skillfully he used light and colors.

“I think ultimately, for me, painting is also about pursuing light,” Poirier said. “If you look at Bonnard’s work, he’s pursuing light and capturing its fleeting moments.”

Circling back to her time at Indiana University, one of her favorite memories was participating in the IU Prison Arts Initiative, which immersed incarcerated people in art.

“I was able to teach drawing and watercolor courses,” she said glowingly. “It was an incredible experience getting to teach the students and getting to know them.”

“We also did exhibitions of their work in the local community. One of my students made comic strips and got published. For me, that was my proudest moment because it was awesome to watch him grow and build his passion for art.”

After graduating from IU, Poirier wanted her next move to be somewhere she could make a lasting impact. She wanted to teach at a modestly sized institution because she felt her teaching style would thrive the most in that setting. When Richard Bland College came across her radar, she seized the opportunity.

“I wanted to be in a student body where I felt like I could truly help students start to make some choices or start to feel like they have an understanding of what they want to pursue next,” Poirier said.

Her teaching philosophy centers self-discovery for her students.

“I come from the background of being taught art from observation,” she said. “How do you take a 3D world and then put it onto a 2D surface?”

“I’m not looking at a student’s work and saying, ‘Oh, this good or this bad.’ It’s more ‘Are you grasping these bigger ideas about art?’ I want them to learn how they personally see the world—not an idea of the world, but truly seeing what is around them.”

Poirier, who has been teaching at RBC since the fall of last year and was recently hired as full-time faculty, has enjoyed working with the faculty and staff at the College.

“Since day one, I have been met with a smile,” she said. “There’s a strong community here, which can be difficult to find at some colleges.”

“I have made good friendships here with colleagues, such as Dr. Kalota Stewart and Dr. Adam Zucconi, who I know I can count on for endless support and advice.”

Over the course of her artistic journey, Poirier has learned the importance of being malleable. She cautions against having preconceived ideas about art because it stifles growth. She imparts this same wisdom on her students.

“You have to be willing to let go of your ideas and what you think is correct, or what you think is best, and just be a sponge—soak everything up,” Poirier said.

Over the last decade, the international population at Richard Bland College (RBC) has steadily increased. Dr. Kimberly Boyd, RBC Vice President and Chief Research & Innovation Officer, as well as RBC Chief Communications & Marketing Officer Jesse Vaughan saw this as a prime opportunity to develop a program to enhance how the college supports its international students. From there, the iRBC International Student Success Program was born.

In a span of seven months, Dr. Boyd and Vaughan rallied a diverse team of international educational consultants for advisory support and developed a comprehensive website and programming. Dr. Boyd also led the charge to create a committee of RBC faculty to formulate a course of action to kickstart and sustain iRBC.

“Our international students are betting on themselves to make the most of their college tenures here at RBC,” Dr. Boyd said. “We established iRBC as a safe place to land for our students so they feel supported from admission to graduation.”

The initiative integrates global perspectives into its curriculum by providing a multicultural learning environment that enhances both academic and personal growth. Through individualized academic advising, class preparation, educational tutoring, mental health support and career counseling, iRBC holistically nurtures its international students as they navigate a new educational system and culture.

Additionally, RBC’s guaranteed admissions program—which upon

iRBC

A Beacon for World-Class Students

A PIVOTAL PROGRAM THAT MAKES INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FEEL AT HOME AWAY FROM HOME.

By Sterling Giles



graduation, grants RBC students entry to more than 35 top Virginia four-year colleges and universities—alleviates stress surrounding students’ post-graduate plans. They can simply focus on performing the best of their ability in the classroom.

A week before non-international (or domestic) students return to campus in the fall, iRBC students are invited to participate in their own welcome week to get acclimated with the campus and its resources, as well as American life in general.

“RBC sits in a unique spot in that we give international students the ability to come to a campus that is small and allows them to join a family where they can increase their confidence,” RBC Chief Enrollment Management Officer Justin May said. “Many who come to us are a little shy and bashful because they don’t feel their English is where it

needs to be to be able to integrate.

“But we provide the resources to help expand on that and immerse them into an English-speaking community.”

In regards to housing, international students can choose whether or not they’d like to be paired with domestic ones. For those who decide to pair with domestic students, this allows for the sharing of cultures and other invaluable experiences these students likely wouldn’t be exposed to otherwise.

“Now, they can cook together and develop a personal perspective that’s more well-rounded,” Boyd said. “iRBC is bringing international students in, but it’s also adding paths for our domestic students to gain global perspectives.”

The physical distance between international students and their families back home makes campus safety a prime concern. But rest assured, the college’s Department of Campus Safety & Police is staffed with certified police officers and operates 24/7 to provide a safe and secure living, learning and working environment.

iRBC is currently in the works of establishing learning opportunities and programs across the globe. In an effort to restructure iRBC’s Global Pathway to Success—a rigorous program that prepares high performing international students for four-year institutions—Dr. Boyd initiated an execution plan to develop a leadership committee of international educational consultants. Today, iRBC has partnered with educational consultants from



Asia, Europe, Central and South America and Australia.

Last spring, the College invited roughly 10 educational consultants from across the globe to the campus to learn more about iRBC. After learning about what the program had to offer, they were tasked with marketing on the college's behalf in their respective countries and beyond. Several of the consultants spoke highly of what iRBC has to offer.

"You study in a friendly environment where you get to learn with your professors," said Sachin Vahil, an educational consultant representing Australia and India. "You can make a lot of local friends, you can get associated with the cultural things at the College and you can also become a part of sports if you really want to go in that direction.

"There is also a lot of assistance available in terms of university pathways for student success. For students who are looking to study in the U.S., Richard Bland College is one of the best options you have."

"The domestic students are very friendly, the professors are cared for and the administration cares about the students," said Mengchen Han, an educational consultant from China.

In the near future, iRBC plans to partner with additional consultants in Africa, namely Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria. Domestically, RBC has sent research groups to Florida, New York, North Carolina, Washington, D.C. and Utah to research initiatives ranging from nursing training to dinosaur excavations. The program will also



implement a new awareness campaign incorporating testimonials from the consultants to grow international enrollment.

On the athletics side, the College is growing into a beacon for international recruits. The department boasts 15 varsity sports, two NJCAA (National Junior College Athletic Association) Division II National Championship titles, as well as several National Championship Runner-Up honors and Region 10 Championships.

On and off the field, student-athletes are able to learn, work and play in modest, intimate settings that help them blossom into their full potential before transferring to four-year institutions. Outside of the cost benefits of attending RBC over a four-year college of university, student athletes feel empowered and prioritized by the college's staff, faculty and coaches.



Dr. Damien Westfield, RBC Associate Professor of Communication & Leadership Studies and Men's Soccer Coach, has experienced a notable iRBC success story firsthand.

"This is a player who had several four-year options before enrolling at RBC, but he was drawn to the small family-oriented team environment, our campus and the ability to further develop as a player before transitioning to a four-year institution," Dr. Westfield said about his former star player and Portugal native Edgar Martins ('24). "He was captain during his freshman and sophomore years, leading his team to back-to-back conference championships, while being a scholar student-athlete."

Martins is currently attending Thomas Moore University, an NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) Division II school.

iRBC is still in its infancy stages but Dr. Boyd is ecstatic about its lasting potential. She understands Rome wasn't built in a day—or as she calls it "cathedral thinking."

"Cathedral thinking says, 'Make it global and build the cathedral, even if you can't be the one to see it to the end,'" she said. "But what you can be is someone to help with the foundation that allows others to move everything forward."



Glin Casey Monuments Relocated After 40 Years

Richard Bland College (RBC) has relocated two Glin D. Casey monuments to prominent locations near its newly renovated library as a part of a plan to increase public art across campus. The sculptures had been tucked away in obscurity for nearly 40 years.

“Richard Bland College is committed to making art accessible to its diverse student body, both inside buildings and on campus

grounds,” RBC President Debbie L. Sydow said. “The College is privileged to own multiple pieces of local artist Glin Casey’s artwork and it is high time these sculptures be displayed in a central location where they can be seen and appreciated by the campus community.”

In the 1980s, Casey—an artist, sculptor and educator from Colonial Heights—donated two of his abstract monuments to the College, along with paintings and small sculptures. The striking

monument-sized sculptures are made of metal, which was Casey’s preferred medium because of the high level of detail he could attain with his pieces and because of its durability.

“Mr. Casey’s singular art pieces are in a perfect location,” RBC Head Librarian Tim Hurley said. “His artwork and the addition of other outdoor pieces in the near future will continue to embellish Richard Bland College’s picturesque campus.”

Casey, who passed away in the fall of 2004, served in the U.S. Navy. He also taught at RPI (Richmond Professional Institute), which is now Virginia Commonwealth University, and served as craft director at Fort Lee. In addition to Virginia, his work, which consists of paintings and metal sculptures, has been displayed in Texas, New Mexico and New Jersey. Casey described his art as a combination of semi-modern and pre-Columbian content expression.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Kateryna Pakliachenko Steadfast Faith

THIS FORMER UKRAINIAN-BORN RBC STUDENT HAS MADE LEMONADE OUT OF LIFE’S LEMONS.

By Sterling Giles

Over the last decade, the Russia-Ukraine war has ravaged thousands of lives. Kateryna Pakliachenko and her family were among those displaced by the conflict.

“You’re sitting in the basement, and you hear missiles that are near you and you understand that it can be your last minute,” Pakliachenko said.

Around the time she graduated from high school in 2022, the war escalated in intensity after Russia invaded Ukraine, which prompted Pakliachenko, her mother and her sister to seek refuge in Austria for several months. Her father couldn’t join them because all able-bodied men were required by law to stay in case they were needed to enlist in Ukraine’s armed forces.

Amid all the despair, eventually a glimmer of hope peeked through. An American family that helped with the planting of Pakliachenko’s church in Ukraine agreed to take her in so she could go to college in the U.S. She chose Richard Bland College (RBC) because of its unique iRBC International Student Success Program—which supports and empowers its global students—as well as its proximity to her host family’s home in Chesterfield, VA.

Initially, the transition was rough for Pakliachenko. Prior to this summer, she hadn’t seen her family since



she originally left Ukraine in December 2022. But RBC’s modest size, personable professors, supportive friends and church family encouraged her to come out of her shell.

“As time goes on, everything gets better, I’ve started to open up and I feel free.”

“As time went on, everything got better,” she said. “I started opening up and felt free.”

Currently, Pakliachenko is enrolled in the prestigious University of Virginia McIntire School of Commerce—one of the top business schools in the country.



What's Next for You?



Richard Bland College Honors students are held to high academic and community standards to maintain their status in the program. They must complete at least 15 credit hours per semester, maintain a minimum 3.25 GPA, enroll in Honors courses and actively participate in program meetings, presentations and service activities. Beyond academics, the Honors Program offers unique benefits that enrich the student experience, including exclusive trips to major cities like New York and Washington, D.C., monthly social events, personalized mentoring, Honors housing in apartment-style suites, and the opportunity to receive a \$500 scholarship each semester.

To learn more, email honors@rbc.edu



Richard Bland College offers innovative pathways for students to earn their four-year degrees without leaving the RBC campus, thanks to partnerships with Virginia State University and Virginia Wesleyan University. Through these collaborations, students can complete their associate degree at RBC and then continue their education on campus—one additional year with VWU or two years with VSU—to earn a baccalaureate degree. Current major pathways include Psychology, Business and Education, with more options on the way.

For more information contact Dr. Ann Ifekwunigwe at aifekwunigwe@rbc.edu or (804) 862-6100 x6246.



Promise Scholars at Richard Bland are also a part of the Honors Program, giving them access to the same benefits and opportunities as other Honors students, such as exclusive trips, social events, mentoring and Honors housing. In addition, Promise Scholars receive enhanced support, including a significantly higher financial aid package, guaranteed admission to William & Mary and the opportunity to take W&M courses while at RBC. To maintain their status, Promise Scholars must fulfill all Honors Program requirements: complete 15 credit hours each semester, maintain a 3.25 GPA (with one semester allowed to recover if it falls below) and actively participate in all required meetings, presentations and service activities.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Janiya Nabinett Deferred Not Deterred

WITH RBC'S HELP, THIS RBC STUDENT IS BACK ON TRACK WITH HER ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL GOALS.

By Sterling Giles



Like most of us, Janiya Nabinett's life was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the absence of facetime with her peers and other complications caused by the virus, Nabinett's grades began to slip. Because of this, she could no longer go to her top college choices. But that didn't deter her from pursuing higher education altogether.

The Prince George's County, Maryland native learned about Richard Bland College's Back On Track program. The federally funded initiative equips high school and college students with additional academic support and workforce skills. It also funds college classes, training courses, job placement support and mental health resources.

"The classes here are smaller, the teachers are really friendly and they guide you," the second-year RBC student said. "So, if you feel like you need more assistance than others, know you can get that here."

Ever since Nabinett has set foot on campus, she has thrived.

Last fall, she was elected to the Student Assembly as the Commuter Representative by a sizable margin. A commuter student herself, Nabinett believes there's room for opportunity to get non-residential students

"...if you feel like you need more assistance than others, know you can get that here."

more involved on campus. She is advocating for more event programming during school hours so more commuters can attend and not have to come back to campus later in the evening to participate.

One day, Nabinett hopes to create her own business in the psychology sector. The work she's currently doing with the College's Office of Research & Innovation (ORI) aligns with her mission for holistic wellness for all. She's been very appreciative of the experiences she's had with the ORI.

"It's been amazing," she said. "I got the opportunity to go to a psychology conference in California."

"An opportunity like that helped me figure out what path I want to go on."

Nabinett has also been instrumental in helping with the office's Meditation Lab in the Academic Innovation Center.

"The goal was to make the space really calming and inviting for students to be able to decompress and be fully immersed into the virtual reality headsets," Nabinett said.

RBC ATHLETICS

15 TEAMS BUILT TO WIN, DRIVEN TO LEAD



The First RBC National Championship: 10 Years Later

FORMER RBC'S MEN'S BASKETBALL HEAD COACH CHUCK MOORE AND HIS TEAM REMINISCE ON THEIR HISTORIC RUN.

By Sterling Giles



Before the confetti. Before the hoisting of the trophy. Before the accolades. Richard Bland College (RBC) men's basketball—and the entire athletics program for that matter—had been obsolete for about two decades.

Soon after her arrival in 2012 as president of Richard Bland College, Debbie L. Sydow, Ph.D., resurrected the College's intercollegiate athletics. She hired Hampton, VA native Chuck Moore, a well-respected basketball coach, to stand up the program. Moore served as both the College's athletic director and men's basketball head coach from 2013-2018.

"The addition of athletics, particularly for a small, residential college like Richard Bland, brings new energy and spirit to campus life," Dr. Sydow said. "My goal was to reinvigorate the campus, but I couldn't have imagined that in a few short years Richard Bland would become a school of choice for top junior college athletes around the country.

"Chuck was pivotal in making this plan come to life."

Dr. Sydow's vision built the foundation of what RBC athletics is today, which has 15 intercollegiate teams and roughly 200 student-athletes.

"Chuck's accomplishments during his time here at RBC were remarkable," Dr. Sydow said. "He and his dedicated staff provided a supportive environment for our student-athletes to excel in both their sport of choice and in the classroom."



In Moore's first season as basketball coach, the team took off without a hitch going 27-4. Unfortunately, they were eliminated in the NJCAA (National Junior College Athletic Association) Region 10 Tournament. But the team wasn't chagrined for long because the roster remained relatively intact the following season.

"We had weapons everywhere," Moore said.

With their early exit in the rearview mirror, the team had championship aspirations for the 2014-15 season. They wouldn't be deferred and their hunger proved it.

Although the team had a plethora of raw talent, Moore was able to rally his players to buy into his fundamental, smash-mouth style of play. He ruled with an iron fist, while his assistant coaches, Dominic Parker, Brian Henderson and Allen Harris, operated more as player-coaches. But despite the contrast in coaching styles, Moore stressed how emboldened he was and is to his staff.

"I can't say enough about their character and knowledge of the game," Moore said. "Every day I learned from them."

The team's standard was excellence. All the coaches held the players accountable, conditioned them into tip-top shape and empowered them to reach their full potential.

The team was so gifted and balanced their starting five rotated practically every game.

"We went so deep into the bench," Moore said. "We didn't have fall offs."

Most games this was the lineup: guards LeQuan Thomas and Brian Adkins, forwards Melvin Gregory and Averyl Ugba, and forward/center Tavon Mealy. Height-wise, the team was relatively small—Gregory, the tallest player on the team, stood at 6-foot-eight. But where they lacked in size, they overcompensated in tenacity and grit.

"I said, 'Guys, look at their bench. Look how cocky and confident they are. They don't know what's about to punch them in the face.'"

The team redeemed themselves in the conference tournament by making it to the championship. A win would punch their ticket to the national tournament. But first they had to endure a heavyweight bout with their feisty conference rival, Louisburg College.

"Louisburg College was always tough," former RBC guard Pedro Berrios said. "It's a small gym—a hostile environment."

The game was tightly contested, but the Statesman eventually came out on top, winning 80-77. This was the team's first conference title since 1990.

The win did wonders for the team's morale and confidence and gave them their first taste of championship pedigree.

"I'll never forget when we got in that locker room after the win—we were dancing and screaming," Moore said. "But our guys said, 'This is amazing, but we're not done yet.

We're going to win a national championship."

With the battery in their backs, they were ready to make history.

Unfortunately, during the preliminary rounds, Ugba received news that his brother had been killed. He had doubts about whether he wanted to compete in the tournament.

But somehow, in the days to follow, Ugba was able to compartmentalize his grief and go on to have “one of the best tournaments I’ve ever seen a player have,” according to Parker.

“He played out of his mind in the tournament,” Mealy seconded.

RBC powered through the tournament and eventually made it to the semi-finals against Phoenix College, the reigning national champions. The team, led by All-American guard Brandon Brown whose elite play was lauded by both RBC’s coaches and players, was a formidable opponent in the grueling, back-and-forth game that went the distance.

Moore reminisced on the contest, which he declared as the game of his, his staff and players’ RBC careers. It showcased the team’s competitiveness, resilience and grit.

“We were down by 13 points with roughly 10 minutes to go,” Moore said. “I said, ‘Guys, look at their bench. Look how cocky and confident they are. They don’t know what’s about to punch them in the face.’”

The Statesman led a gutsy comeback capped off by a clutch shot by guard Evan Bates — which borderline put Moore and the assistant coaches into cardiac arrest—to send the contest into overtime.

“I’ve always had ice in my veins,” Bates said. “It was a bottom-of-the-net type of shot—it didn’t touch the rim.”

The game eventually went to double overtime with RBC narrowly escaping with an 87-85 victory.

“That was actually the championship game,” former RBC guard Jhamir White chuckled.

In the actual championship against John Wood Community College, Berrios caught fire from behind the arc in the early going, which catalyzed the team to a dominant 64–53 win.

The prophecy was fulfilled. The first-ever national championship for Richard Bland College.

“I used to sit in church and just dream about it—dream about what that feeling would be like,” Moore said. “It was powerful because these group of guys believed in themselves and they put the work in.”

“AND THROUGH THAT WORK, WE GOT THE ULTIMATE PRIZE.”
- CHUCK MOORE

2015 CHAMPIONS

PLAYERS

Avery Ugba
Tavon Mealy
Pedro Berrios
Reginald Moses
Evan Bates
LeQuan Thomas
Brian Adkins
Melvin Gregory
Troy Gibson
Jhamir White
Joshua Marshall
De’Andre Kellam
Trey Brown
Khaliq Fletcher
Isreal Stith

COACHES

Chuck Moore – Head Coach
Dominic Parker – Assistant Coach
Brian Henderson – Assistant Coach
Allen Harris – Assistant Coach

“And through that work, we got the ultimate prize.”

Moore and Ugba were named the tournament’s Most Outstanding Coach and Most Outstanding Player, respectively. The forward’s impressive performance garnered him more than 30 NCAA (National Collegiate Athletics Association) Division I offers. Mealy and Thomas were named to the All-Tournament Team. Mealy was also named an NJCAA All-American and NJCAA Region 10 Conference Player of the Year.

Since RBC is a junior college, the conclusion of the season meant all second-year players had to part ways with the team. It was a difficult realization because the players and coaches knew they had captured lightning in a bottle.



“The guys were asking ‘There’s no way that we can make RBC a four-year school?’” Parker said with a laugh. “It was a true family.”

Moore and Parker both agreed the team was one of the best they’d ever coached. They are immortalized in the RBC history books forever.

Mealy can’t wait to share the historic feat with his son.

“Once he gets old enough, he’ll be able to go back to RBC, and say, ‘Oh, that’s my dad,’” he said with a big smile.



An RBC Triple Success Story

THESE RBC STUDENTS ARE
THE EPITOME OF STELLAR
STUDENT-ATHLETES.

By Sterling Giles



Despite the rainy weather, there were several bright spots in this year's Commencement ceremony. One in particular, a set of triplets receiving their associate degrees—they became the first in their family to do so. The innate drive and discipline of Jazmyn, Jaydyn and Jeremiah Mackin made this remarkable feat possible.

The siblings were among the record number of 2,062 RBC dual enrollment (DE) students during the 2024-25 academic year.

"We are incredibly proud to celebrate a record number of dual enrollment students at Richard Bland College this year," said Christie Clarke, RBC Director of Dual Enrollment and High School Programs. "This achievement is a testament to the dedication and teamwork of our faculty, staff and partners who work tirelessly to recruit and empower these outstanding students."

The Mackin siblings are consummate student-athletes. Jeremiah received All-Region honors in both soccer and football. He also has the most PATs [(Point(s) After Touchdown] in Hopewell High history. Jazmyn was an All-District soccer player and holds the school's indoor track and field 1,000-meter record. Last but not least, Jaydyn owns Hopewell's indoor 1,600-meter record and earned All-District honors in soccer. Despite facing demanding schedules on a daily basis, the trio, who also have an older brother and sister, are each other's biggest cheerleader.

"I'm glad that we have a big support system," Jaydyn said. "Unfortunately, some people don't have siblings who support them the way we do for each other."

The triplets pinpoint their success to the advice and affirmations they've received from Hopewell DE staff, their coaches and their mother.

"The Mackins embody the very best of Hopewell High School's Dual Enrollment program," said Malik Wheat, Director of Dual Enrollment at Hopewell High School. "They are not only outstanding students but also dedicated athletes who have shown remarkable discipline and drive."

The siblings echoed their coaches "encouraged us to get better by

one percent each day" and "helped us get through the hard days."

Sheila, the mother of the triplets, didn't pressure them to pursue the rigorous DE program—the students did so willingly. They wanted to take advantage of the program's pros. At the conclusion of the program, they'd receive their associate's degree and if they decided to attend a four-year institution, they would enroll as juniors.

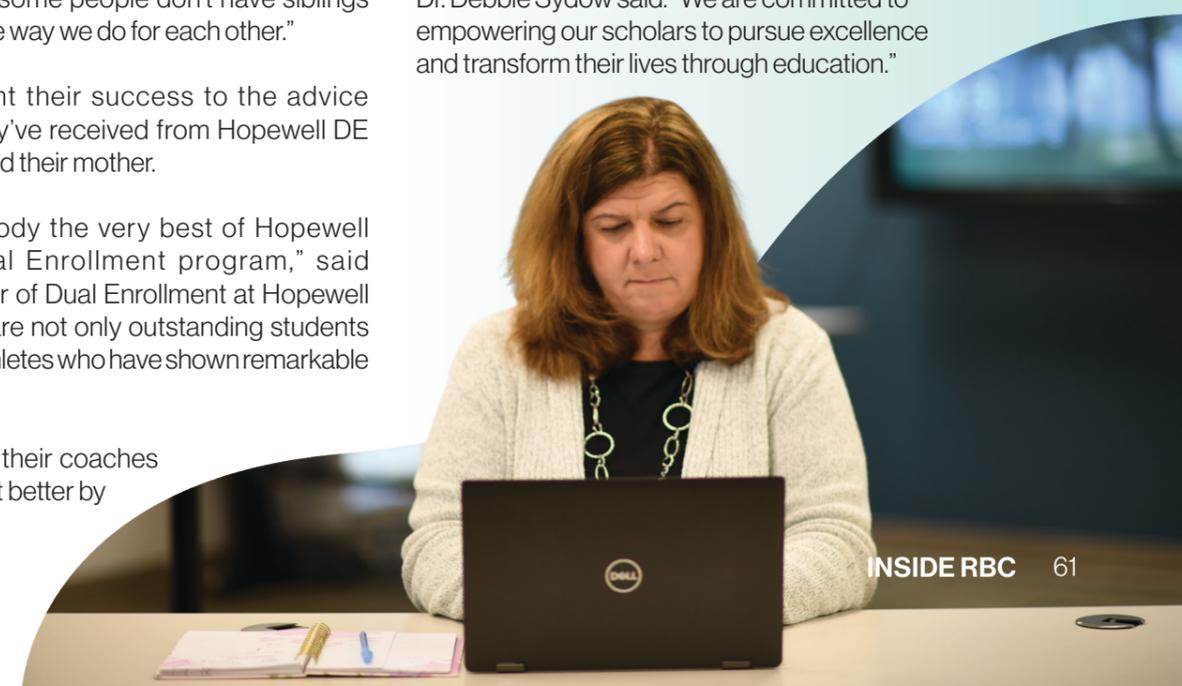
The go-get-it mentality of her children inspires Sheila. She is immensely proud of all they've accomplished in just 17 years.

"Although I'm their parent, they're my role models," Sheila said. "I've told them they don't need to go to college to succeed, but you've got to do something—a trade or the military for example.

"But I think the opportunity to be first-generation students fueled them. This is a big milestone for our family."

Currently, Jaydyn and Jeremiah both attend Virginia State University and play soccer. They're pursuing degrees in Social Work and Sports Management, respectively. Jazmyn is enrolled at the Virginia Military Institute and is majoring in Psychology. Instead of playing a sport, she will enroll in the institution's nationally renowned ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) program.

"The Mackins' incredible story highlights the success of our Dual Enrollment program," RBC President Dr. Debbie Sydow said. "We are committed to empowering our scholars to pursue excellence and transform their lives through education."



- 10th Anniversary -

Pecan Festival From Soup to Nuts

A PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN OF RBC'S MOST ANTICIPATED EVENT OF THE YEAR.

By Sterling Giles



Richard Bland College (RBC) is home to the oldest and largest collection of pecan trees in the state. It makes sense why the College's most popular event of the year, the Pecan Festival, was named after its most ubiquitous export.

The inaugural festival was in October 2015 and it was a hit.

"Since its inception, it's been well organized, it's been well managed

and it continues to be successful," said Vicki Humphreys ('92), who currently sits at the helm of the College's Development office. "I'm looking forward to upholding the festival's storied tradition."

Her team consists of Associate Directors of Development Katelinn Davis and Carolyn Day Pruet, as well as Terelle Robinson, Associate Director of Government Relations & Student Life. For festival logistics, the team works closely with Events Manager Kerstin Winston

and Chief Operating Officer Eric Kondzielawa.

The process of putting on a highly anticipated event on an annual basis is multi-faceted and arduous.

The first order of business is to seek out and identify vendors and sponsors. Humphreys and her team attend events in the Greater Petersburg Region to scout prospective vendors and sponsors that align with the Pecan Festival. From there, the team sends out communications inviting recurring and new partners to participate in the festival.

Next, the team handles layout planning for the space, which is typically the most complicated part of the process.

"We try to make sure that there's not two of the same businesses next to each other," Davis said.

The festival's reputation of being well organized and managed has allowed it to retain sponsors and vendors year after year. Good Earth Peanut Company, owned by RBC alumni and recurring festival partners Scott and Lindsey Vincent, sources from the College's pecan trees to create goodies and products for the festival.





To wrap planning, Humphreys' team works with Winston, Kondzielawa and the Campus Police Department to address logistics and safety concerns such as signage, medical staff, security, as well as electrical and A/V equipment.

Merchants on-site have products ranging from fine soaps to jewelry and food offerings from barbeque to baked goods. There is also a designated area for kids to partake in craft activities, face painting and games. Lastly, local performers and musicians always put on a great show.

"There's something for everyone," Davis said.

According to Winston, in the last few years alone, the festival has averaged between 12,000 to 15,000 attendees. Despite the great turnout, Winston refuses to be complacent.

"I think it should be the most talked about event in the Tri-Cities area," she said. "I think it's an amazing event to host and I hope everyone continues to talk about it and it just grows and grows and grows."

The festival is also a conduit for networking amongst the College's Development team and community partners, organizations and businesses.

"The festival allows us to make these great connections," Humphreys said. "It's a friend-raiser—it helps us to generate support for the College in so many ways."

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

James Revere Jr.

Tell us about yourself—where you're from, family life, hobbies and interests that inspired you to major in what you're currently studying.

My name is James E. Revere Jr. I was born in Richmond, Virginia. My family and I later moved out to Prince George after I finished 6th grade. A few hobbies of mine include playing video games, going out to have fun and spending time with family.

In 2024, I graduated from Prince George High School with a 4.0 GPA. Upon graduation, I also completed the Rowanty D/E Criminal Justice course through Brightpoint Community College. I've wanted to be a police officer ever since I was a kid. I stuck with that dream and further explored my options as I got older. I've considered joining the FBI or other federal law enforcement agencies, going into forensics, or becoming a lawyer. I'm currently majoring in Sociology, with plans to attend William & Mary after I graduate from RBC to pursue a concentration in Criminology, Law and Society.

Are you a residential or commuter student? Whichever pertains to you, tell us about your experience.

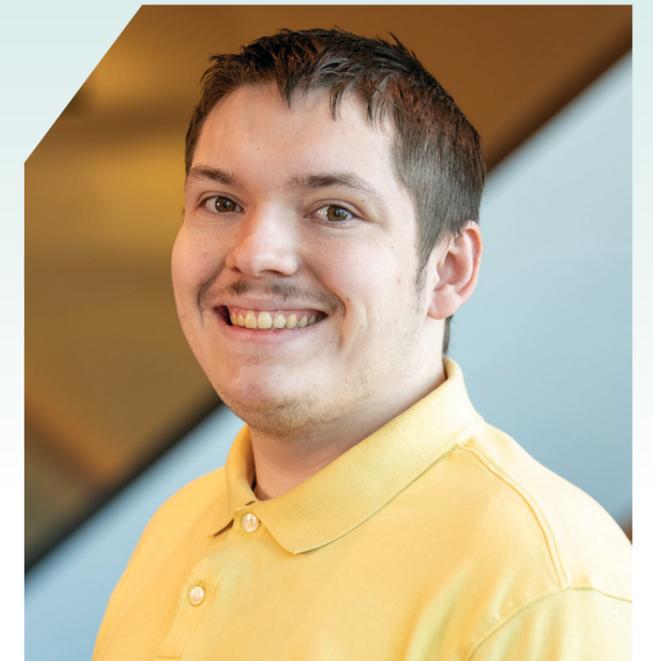
I am a commuter student. I really enjoy being a commuter student because I have a good balance to spend time at home, as well as on campus. I am very much supported by my family and friends. I'm a first-generation college student—my parents tell me all the time that they are so proud of me.

Why did you decide to attend RBC?

I decided to attend RBC because it fit better with my academic path. In high school, however, I had no idea RBC was a junior college and the many opportunities available there. Today, I'm glad to be a Statesman! My family is very supportive of me as I continue to work very hard to fulfill my academic success.

What do you like most about the college? How have you been supported by the faculty and staff since you've been here?

I like the limitless opportunities RBC has to offer. I have gained so much leadership experience and opportunities



during my time here. The RBC community is wonderful and I am well supported by faculty and staff. As a member of the Honors Program and serving on the Student Assembly as the Campus Relations Intern, these are just a few of the many great ways to become a student leader here at RBC.

If you're involved in one or more extracurricular activity, what's your title or how are you involved? How has your experience been?

As I mentioned before, I am the Student Assembly Campus Relations Intern. I help organize events with Richard Bland College departments and neighboring communities. Lastly, I help manage administrative tasks that arise. I love supporting RBC and I plan to serve on the Assembly again this year. My biggest accomplishment to date is organizing the campus blood drive a few months ago. It was a successful event!

Recently, I joined the Rotaract Club. Through the club, I get to help people in the community and have fun! Lastly, I'm a part of the Student Conduct Board and a Promise Scholar.

Have you received scholarships through RBC?

I will be receiving an RBC Endowment Scholarship, as well as the Promise Scholars and Honors Program Scholarships.



Meagan Haire Abbey

A FIERY SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE

IS THE INTRINSIC MAKE-UP OF THIS HISTORY-MAKING RBC ALUMNA.

By Sterling Giles

For most of her life, Meagan Haire Abbey felt her calling in life was to lead a classroom—not an entire town.

Abbey resides in McKenney [located roughly 30 miles southwest of Richard Bland College (RBC), a town that spans about one square mile with a population of 480.

After teaching for roughly 10 years in Dinwiddie County Public Schools, Abbey decided to establish her own childcare center, Stepping Stone Academy. This inspired her to be a more active participant in Dinwiddie’s local government. She served on the county’s Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

After several years of service, Abbey was empowered to invoke change in her own backyard. She struck up a conversation with a friend about her frustrations with McKenney’s government. She felt it wasn’t adequately representing its constituents—so she decided to do something about it.

On Sept. 10, 2020, Abbey put in her bid for mayor—roughly a month before election day. The community and her loved ones rallied behind her campaign because she promised to dismantle the old guard and breathe new life into the town.

33 days later, Abbey made history. She became the town’s first woman mayor. Since then, she’s since been re-elected for two consecutive terms.

“The older generation of women of McKenney are extremely supportive of the things that I’ve accomplished,” she said. “I think it makes them feel proud that a woman has accomplished these things in their lifetime because these were things they wouldn’t have considered possible when they were young girls.”

But as for Abbey’s three daughters, her feat was essentially an expectation.

“At first, it kind of hurt my feelings

that they weren’t more impressed with me,” Abbey admitted. “But then I realized that if I reframe that and think about it, that’s a good thing, because they think it’s normal.”

“And they should because it should be normal. So having my daughters think this is completely normal for a woman to accomplish means a lot to me.”

Among Abbey’s top objectives as mayor is to improve daily operation services for residents, as well as the town’s technology and web capabilities—such as giving residents the ability to pay their utility bills online. She’s also been intentional about empowering her underrepresented constituents.

“I push for all the things that our residents need or deserve that bigger towns or cities have,” she said.

Abbey was born and raised in Dewitt, roughly six miles northeast of McKenney. Her father, Charles

Haire Jr., an RBC alumnus and first-generation college student, strongly encouraged her to attend the college.

“I thought it would suit her better to experience college life there instead of a big, four-year college,” Haire Jr. said. “It’s a lot more economical.

“You’re paying twice as much at a four-year university for the same classes you can take at Richard Bland College.”

Abbey begrudgingly conceded but she was envious of her friends attending four-year universities.

“I felt like I was being left behind,” she said.

However, Abbey’s disposition quickly changed, largely because of her experiences in Spanish professor Dr. Rachel Finney’s class.

Abbey’s class took a trip to Costa Rica—her first international trip—which birthed her travel bug.

“We actually didn’t use English while we were there,” she said. “We were so in tune with the culture.”

Dr. Finney vividly recalled a special moment with Meagan during the class trip.

“I remember standing next to Meagan when she called her mom from the hotel’s front desk,” Dr. Finney said. “Her mom asked what time it was there, so Meagan turned to the desk clerk and asked in Spanish, ‘Que hora es?’

“The desk clerk answered in Spanish and Meagan relayed the time to her mom. Meagan told me later that her mom was so

excited to overhear her asking for information in Spanish. My heart swelled too. Those little moments with students when you see them empowered by the germination of seeds of knowledge that were planted in the classroom are about as good as it gets for a teacher.”

Abbey graduated with her associate’s degree in Arts in 2005 then transferred to Longwood University. She would later receive her bachelor’s from the university and her Pre-K to sixth grade teaching license shortly after.

Stepping Stone Academy, which was in business for more than 11 years, was a godsend to underserved families in the area. Namely, during the early years of the COVID-19 outbreak, Abbey helped families secure state funding to cover their child’s tuition.

RBC wholly believes in preparing its students for a lifetime of endless potential. Since leaving the college, Abbey has impacted the lives of hundreds of people—young and old alike. She’s a beacon of hope and lover of community. She has traversed several unexpected avenues in her life. But with her North Star grounded in hope, community and service, she landed right where she needed to be. In her wake, she’s always left spaces better than she found them.

“If you want to see something happen, then do it,” Abbey said. “Be the one who makes the change.”

Haire Jr. couldn’t be prouder as a father and respects how resolute Abbey is in everything she does.

“Don’t tell her she can’t do it because she will do it,” he said.

CLASS OF
2005



Thomas H. Solenberger, M.D.

Investor in RBC's Future

THIS ALUMNUS AND HIS FAMILY HAVE USED THEIR RESOURCES TO GROW RBC.

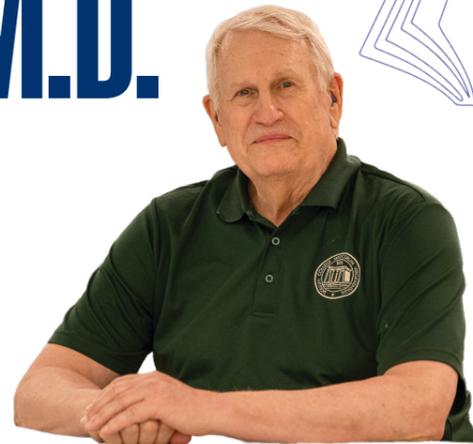
By Amy Lacey

For the first time in over a decade, Thomas H. Solenberger, M.D. visited Richard Bland College (RBC). He was impressed by everything he experienced.

"This place is just like watching a flower blossoming," Solenberger said with a smile. "There's a go, go, go attitude here and it is just a wonderful environment for students to learn in."

Solenberger is the son of the late Capt. Earl "Gus" Solenberger, a professor of Math and Business at RBC from 1967-1971. His mother, Marjorie Solenberger, served as a public relations specialist at the institution for 28 years and was an RBC Foundation board member from 1997-2002.

"She was a community activist with many eclectic interests," Solenberger said about his late mother, who passed away in 2003. "She liked herbs, and fossils and history and she was very gregarious and got along with many, many people."



"She got initiatives going that no one else had. She just liked doing things in a fashion that didn't offend other people. It wasn't threatening to anyone."

In addition to promoting RBC's students and programs in local newspapers, Marjorie established a series of nature walks and lectures around the Tri-Cities, as well as a cleanup of an abandoned African American cemetery.

Majorie even served as a liaison for the House of Sabah, Kuwait's ruling family.

"Members of the Kuwait royal family were looking to get to the U.S. and transfer to more advanced schools," Solenberger recalled. "We had someone who became the foreign minister of Kuwait here at RBC and he lived at our house."

In 2016, the Solenberger family received the inaugural Richard Bland Award, which

recognizes a member of the RBC family for exemplary service to the college.

"It's quite an honor, no question," Solenberger said. "We weren't expecting it and we are pleased to see how RBC has matured over the years."

"So many superb kids are coming out of here."

The Solenberger family contributed a number of items to the RBC collections, including books about the Civil War and Virginia's tobacco industry. However, Solenberger said some of the greatest gifts are yet to come.



"It's no longer about what we can leave, but what we can fund," Solenberger explained. "We want there to be scholarships to allow the institution to have great wisdom and help the next generations of students with what they want to achieve."

The family endowment is set up so a portion of the Solenberger estates will move to the RBC Foundation. While it may be some time

before it is fully funded, Solenberger hopes the endowment will provide full tuition for as many as five students.

Solenberger, who is currently an obstetrician-gynecologist in Kodiak, Alaska, credits his parents for instilling the value of pursuing advanced degrees.

"Mother and Dad were always talking about getting ahead through academics," Solenberger said.

Thomas' parents, natives of Oregon and North Dakota, came from humble beginnings. But that didn't deter them from pursuing higher education.

Walking on RBC's campus, Solenberger appreciated seeing the growth and affirmed his family's investment in the school.

"We are strongly committed to RBC and the future and the students who come through here," he said.

RBC Receives Truist Foundation Grant

Dr. Eric Miller, an Associate Professor of Biology at Richard Bland College, in partnership with the RBC Foundation, was awarded a \$45,000 grant from the Truist Foundation for a new van to facilitate travel for RBC students. The vehicle will be used to transport students participating in clubs and activities, as well as out-of-the-classroom experiences.

Dr. Miller has lead dozens of trips for his students, namely his Alternative Spring Breaks, which immerse learners in activities ranging from studying oceanic wildlife in Georgia to dinosaur excavating in Utah. Despite the success of his programs, travel to nearby sites has become increasingly difficult because of the demand for the campus vans.

“With the growing number of dual enrollment students using shuttle services and the increased travel by sports teams, campus vans have become a scarce resource,” Dr. Miller said. “I believe that having easy access to transportation will inspire other faculty members to organize similar out-of-the-classroom learning experiences for their students.”



He accredits RBC Associate Director of Development Katelinn Davis for facilitating the process of obtaining the Truist Foundation grant.

“Her expertise, knowledge and administrative skills have been instrumental in securing the Truist Foundation Grant,” Dr. Miller said. “I’m excited about the continued possibilities this grant will open up.”

Dr. Miller is also grateful for the RBC Foundation’s support of his programming in and out of the classroom. Most recently, Anne-Leigh Kerr, a former William & Mary board member, donated funds to support this year’s Alternative Spring Break.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Jordyn Brown Powered by Virtual Reality

THIS RBC SECOND-YEAR STUDENT TURNS TO VIRTUAL REALITY TO BRING HIS EDUCATION TO LIFE.

By Sterling Giles



Chesterfield, VA native Jordyn Brown has had a proclivity for computer science and technology for most of his life. Prior to RBC, he attended CODE RVA, a Richmond, VA-based computer science magnet school, to immerse himself in STEM. There, he learned about computer engineering and programming, as well as hardware networking among many other STEM subjects. He thrived off the creative energy in his classrooms.

“You could definitely tell, ‘Oh, this person is about to do something big,’” Brown said. “You had people designing websites in the 10th grade.”

After graduating from CODE RVA and looking ahead to higher education, Brown wanted to learn in comparable class sizes to the ones he experienced in high school, which capped at around 20 students. He didn’t just want to be a warm body in a seat. Brown wanted his professors to know him on a first name basis. After sifting through different options to see what best aligned with his learning preferences, he decided RBC was the best fit.

Brown ingratiated himself within the campus community and eventually connected with the College’s Office of Research & Innovation (ORI). He and his fellow ORI interns are

currently thinking through innovative ways to use VR technology in the classroom, including incorporating it with the College’s Ameca robots—the world’s most advanced humanoid machines.

The second-year student is enjoying his time so far at RBC and encourages others to make the most of all the College has to offer.

“You get a lot of experience in the two years that you’re here,” he said. “You get to meet people, interact with great professors and the facilities are really nice.”

“**You’re going to be comfortable while you’re here.**”



A photograph of a lush green grove of trees. Sunlight filters through the dense canopy, creating a soft, hazy atmosphere with visible rays of light. The ground is covered in vibrant green grass, and the overall scene is peaceful and inviting.

GROWTH BY THE GROVE

Richard Bland College offers a peaceful place to learn and grow, tucked beside the serene beauty of its water garden. Here, students find space to think deeply, explore new ideas and build lasting friendships. The gentle flow of water inspires reflection and focus—an ideal backdrop for personal and academic growth. At RBC, you don't just attend college—you find your path forward.



Richard Bland College



Richard Bland College

Growing With Purpose

