VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

INSTITUTE REPORT

Volume 54, Number 2, October 2025

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First Football Game and Parade, Class of 2015 Reunion Gift

The Keydets won their first home football game of the season 42-7 against the Ferrum College Panthers Sept. 6 in Foster Stadium. The game was preceded by the first parade of the year with reunions for the classes of 2010, 2015, and 2020. The Class of 2015 presented its 10th reunion gift of $159,160.15 to the Institute during the game.—*VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin and courtesy of VMI Alumni Agencies.*

Institute Report

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The Institute Report, VMI's news magazine, publishes eight issues during each academic year. Inquiries, suggestions, news items, and address changes should be directed to Editor, Institute Report, VMI Communications and Marketing, Lexington, VA 24450-0304; 540-464-7207; or **VMIReport@vmi.edu**.

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On the cover: Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 inspects the rats before entering Memorial Hall to speak with them.—*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

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DECA Winners Visit Econ and Business Class

By Marianne Hause

Cadets enrolled in the economics and business analytics class taught by Col. Barry Cobb, professor in the Department of Economics and Business, heard an award winning presentation by two juniors from Roanoke County's Hidden Valley High School (HVHS).

Madison Salinas and Alishba Sofi are both members of the Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) at HVHS. DECA is an international association that prepares high school students for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management through hands-on activities, competitions, and educational programs. The club holds three competitions during the academic year: district, state, and international. For the state event held in Richmond, Salinas and Sofi were tasked to find a way to incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) into a business. Because the girls had heard many stories of long wait times in some emergency rooms, they decided to write a proposal to shorten wait times and improve patient outcomes. They collaborated with Carilion Memorial Hospital Emergency Department (CMHED) to create a machine learning model. They researched health care departments nationwide and found AI self-check-in kiosks increase efficiency. Salinas and Sofi proposed installing self-check-in kiosks at CMHED for patients who enter with minor medical problems. In addition, the CMHED triage nurse would enter the patient's vital signs into the AI system to corroborate the diagnosis. Salinas and Sofi also found that the AI system would help reduce human mental fatigue, reduce triage repetition and errors, and save money after the initial investment. At the state competition, the girls earned second place, and went on to present their project at the international competition in Orlando, Florida.

Alishba Sofi and Madison Salinas share a light moment with cadets in the economics and business analytics class taught by Col. Barry Cobb.—*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

Col. Barry Cobb leads his class in discussing the machine learning model of AI self-check-in kiosks proposed by two Hidden Valley High School students.—*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

Cobb was impressed by the girls' presentation. "Madi and Alishba's project with Carilion Clinic went through a very detailed model planning and discovery process to identify a specific problem where decision-making could be improved with machine learning models: the classification of emergency room patients into triage levels. I wanted the cadets to see a realistic example of the process an organization goes through

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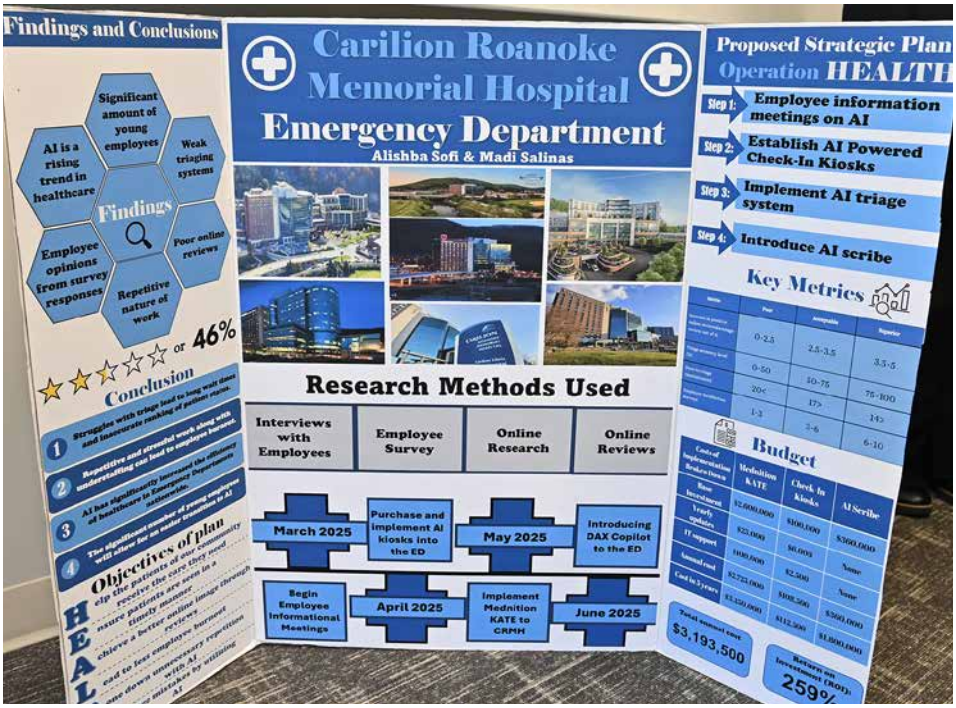
to identify a problem where a data analytics model can improve customer service and financial outcomes. My class will now work on a case study where they take example data from a hospital and create a model that classifies hypothetical patients into severity levels based on vital signs, demographic information, and medical history," Cobb explained.

Andrew Jones '26, an economics and business major, said the girls' presentation applied to what Cobb has been teaching the cadets in class. "The scaled 1-5 triage matrix they used is a categorical variable that is similar to what we are learning, where we sort data into categories to analyze it further. The girls were using predictors like ER waiting room times, online reviews, and general health care provider mental well-being to figure out how to reach certain levels of target variables, which is what we use the Python coding language to do." Following graduation, Jones plans for a career in financial advising.



The display board Sofi and Salinas took to the DECA competitions describes their research methodology and business model.—*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

VMI Maintains Strong Rankings in U.S. News Best Colleges List

Engineering Program Moves Up

By VMI Staff

VMI maintained its reputation as one of the nation's best colleges, according to the 2026 Best Colleges rankings released Sept. 23 by U.S. News and World Report.

Cadets head to class on the first day of the fall semester, Aug. 26.—*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

Among public liberal arts colleges, the Institute ranked fourth behind only the United States Naval Academy, the United States Air Force Academy, and the United States Military Academy. VMI ranked No. 65 among more than 200 national liberal arts colleges.

Unlike many other publications that issue college rankings, U.S. News also ranks certain programs found at numerous colleges and universities. This year, VMI moved up to No. 29 out of more than 280 institutions nationwide that have an accredited engineering program but do not offer a doctorate degree. The Institute's economics program was also recognized in this year's rankings.

More than 97% of VMI graduates are employed or enrolled in a graduate program within five months of commencement. U.S. News reports the median salary of a VMI alumnus is $63,545 six years after graduation.

U.S. News analysts work to enable students and their families to identify colleges that meet their needs, using a wide variety of data sources.

Former Special Forces Horse Soldier Visits Post

By Marianne Hause

U.S. Army Special Forces Master Sgt. Christopher C. Spence—part of the first wave of American forces on the ground in Afghanistan following the 9/11 terrorist attacks 24 years ago—spoke Sept. 10 as the first speaker of the Center for Leadership and Ethics' (CLE) 2025-26 Courageous Leadership series, "American Values."

Spence took the first photographs of American Special Forces on horseback in Afghanistan, which former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld used to show the world, proving U.S. presence there. One close-up photograph Spence took of a "horse soldier" is currently on display in the Smithsonian Institution and served as the template for America's Response Monument, the bronze statue in Liberty Park overlooking the 9/11 Memorial & Museum in New York City.

Before introducing Spence to the near capacity crowd of cadets, faculty, staff, and community members in Gillis Theater, Col. David Gray, executive director of the CLE, asked the audience, "Do you remember?" Gray acknowledged many had not yet been born, or were too young to remember where they were when they first heard the news of the terror attacks. "For those who do, Spence underscores the American values displayed on 9/11 and the response that quickly followed. We're fortunate Master Sgt. Spence is with us to give some insight into the planning and execution by our special forces on the ground in Afghanistan during that crucial time."

Master Sgt. Christopher C. Spence displays the iconic photograph he took of a "horse soldier" during his speech in Gillis Theater Sept. 10.—*VMI Photo by Jake Falcone '27.*

While displaying slides, Spence walked the audience through of the enormity of what affected his colleagues and him on 9/11. He stated it was a sentinel moment for his generation. "For my parents' generation, it was the JFK assassination. For their parents, it was when Pearl Harbor was attacked. After the 9/11 terrorist attack, America was not going to lay down quietly, it would rebuild and stand back up. It's what the American spirit does."

Within a month of 9/11, Spence and his team were headed to Karshi-Khanabad, a former Soviet air base in Uzbekistan. They later flew by helicopter to Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan where their mission was to advise the Afghan commanders. Spence relayed the story of how he took the first photograph of the "horse soldiers."

"The Afghan general wanted to show our battalion commander, and several others, where his front line troops were positioned. I had ridden ahead of them on a John Deere Gator, which we brought with us into the military theater, because there was a transportation problem. I told the driver, 'stop the Gator. I've got to get a picture of this, because no one is going to believe this. Here we are in the 21st century, riding horseback.' So, I took the picture and sent it back to headquarters."

Spence displayed photographs of Afghan mud-hut villages with no electricity, a single well, and few trees. He told stories of carefully avoiding mine fields, comically learning how to stop a horse that did not understand the English, "whoa," and unintentionally upsetting the local economy since the only currency the Americans brought with them were $100 bills.

He displayed a photo and shared a poignant account of a little girl, the only female they saw. "Once we liberated Afghanistan, this little girl could go to school, she could get a job, she could actually leave her house without a male escort. When Afghanistan fell in 2021, those rights were taken away from her. She can no longer

Continued on next page

Post Briefs

Wise's Novel Published in France

"Holy City," a novel written by Maj. Henry A. Wise III '05, assistant professor in the Department of English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies, was recently published in France under the name, "Nulle part où revenir," meaning "Nowhere to Return." The book has been favorably reviewed by French national newspapers and journals including Transfuge, a prestigious cultural and arts journal, which conferred upon Wise its "Transfuge Prix Polar" award for best crime novel. The novel was also discussed on a segment of Radio France and featured in Rolling Stone magazine. Publication in France marks the third international publication of the book. It has been released in Italy and the United Kingdom, and during the next several months it will be published in Germany, Hungary, and Japan.

"Holy City" tells the story of Will Seems, who, after a decade of exile precipitated by the tragic death of his mother, returns home from Richmond to rural Southern Virginia and takes a job as a deputy sheriff. Seems' efforts to go about his life are disrupted when a mysterious, brutal homicide claims the life of an old friend. Wise teaches American literature and creative writing and serves as faculty adviser to Cadence, VMI's annual fine arts journal, which he edited as a cadet.

Chemistry Research Presented at Conference

Lt. Col. Kevin Braun, associate professor in the Department of Chemistry, and 1st Class cadet Charles McLaughlin '26 presented their research at the American Chemical Society's fall conference held at the Washington Convention Center in D.C. in August. Braun gave a talk centered on the chemistry department's incorporation of computational methods throughout the general chemistry curriculum, a method that uses computer simulations to help solve complex problems. For the last three years, Braun and his colleagues, Col. Daniel Harrison '05 and Maj. Caleb Brown, have been using the free research-grade computer programs, ORCA and ChimeraX, that use computational design to help cadets visualize molecules and develop fundamental chemistry skills.

McLaughlin, a chemistry major from Tennessee, gave a poster presentation of his Summer Undergraduate Research Program project on the trace lipid residue analysis of archaeological pottery. For McLaughlin, attending the conference was a wonderful experience to interact with his peers, explore advancements in chemistry, and present his research to many people.

Poetry Workshop for Veterans

Dr. William "MacGregor" Kimsey, instructor at both VMI and James Madison University (JMU), is facilitating a series of three poetry workshops this fall for U.S. military veterans at JMU.

The workshops are part of the Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellowship awarded to Virginia's poet laureate, Mattie Quesenberry Smith, Ph.D., an instructor in the Department of English, Rhetoric and Humanistic Studies at VMI, for her veterans' poetry project, "Perseverance and Resilience: Supporting Veterans through Poetry."

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Master Sgt. Christopher C. Spence discusses his time in Afghanistan following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in Gillis Theater Sept. 10.—*VMI Photo by Jake Falcone '27.*

uncover her face, she can no longer go to school, she can no longer have a job. Think about the freedoms we wake up to every day being taken for granted. This little girl had those freedoms snatched away from her after 20 years."

Reflecting on the fall of Afghanistan, Spence asked if there were any Vietnam veterans in the audience. One man raised his hand to whom Spence addressed, "Sir, I understand how you felt when you saw Saigon fall. I never understood it until this happened to us. The blood, the sweat, and tears that you saw, we experienced the same thing when Afghanistan fell. Thank you."

Spence concluded by contemplating the simple act of his taking photographs. "The photographs led to a book, 'Horse Soldiers' by Doug Stanton, which led to a film, '12 Strong.' And one photograph led to a statue. Because of that one picture, the world finally knew what the special forces had done. But none of this would have happened if I hadn't raised my right hand and taken an oath to serve my country. That one act launched this whole affair."

VA250 Commission Hosts Event at VMI

By Marianne Hause

VMI hosted a Virginia 250 Commission (VA250) Constitution Day event, "To Support & Defend," honoring the 250th anniversaries of the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, and Navy, Sept. 17 in Cameron Hall. The patriotic program included music performed by the VMI Regimental Band, and 1st Class cadets commissioning into the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, and Coast Guard were seated in a place of honor, recognizing their commitment to serving in the armed forces.

Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 made his first public appearance as superintendent at the event. After welcoming the assembly, Furness remarked that the 250th anniversary provides an opportunity to educate, engage, and inspire Virginia students about American history, values, and beliefs. "More specifically we turn our focus to three resolutions that were officially signed by the Continental Congress in the year 1775 shortly after the 'shot heard round the world' at the Battles of Lexington and Concord. As our fledgling nation fought for freedom, the first citizen-soldiers officially joined the fight. VMI was founded on this tradition, and we continue to graduate citizen-soldiers who embrace a high sense of public service."

Col. Joe Hansen hands a challenge coin to Matthew Kleinschuster '26.—*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

Col. Joe Hansen, commanding officer of the Army ROTC; Col. Ryan Finn, commanding officer of the Naval ROTC; and Cmdr. James Sullen, executive officer of the Naval ROTC; read aloud the U.S. Armed Forces Oath of Commissioned Officers.

A surprise appearance was made by Gen. George Washington, portrayed by Ron Carnegie from Colonial Williamsburg. Washington addressed the commissioning cadets, thanking them for being the next generation to whom the torch is passed, and honored the passing of the torch with an exchange of a newly minted challenge coin. "With humble gratitude to you here present and with the same gratitude to your fellow United States servicemen and women around the globe, the call is answered. The nation is served generation after generation, the challenge is met. But this simple and cherished act is more than the sharing of a coin, a handshake, or the possibility of a future well-earned beverage. It is the sharing of knowledge through the centuries, the sharing of an unbreakable bond, dedication to service, and the sharing of mutual respect between the generations." He then ordered the exchange of the coins, which commissioning 1st Class cadets received.

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MacAllister Clark '26 receives a VA250 challenge coin from Cmdr. James Sullen.—*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

Col. Ryan Finn shakes hands with Devin Auzenne '26 as he presents a VA250 challenge coin to Auzenne.—*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

Cheryl Wilson, executive director of VA250, was struck with the significance of holding the event at VMI. "We gathered here today on Constitution Day at one of Virginia's finest institutions, with the entire Corps of Cadets assembled. We were able to honor all three service branches: the Army, the Marine Corps, and the Navy, all established 250 years ago, before the Declaration of Independence, and before the Revolutionary War. Many of these cadets will one day raise their hand and swear to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. It is fitting to be here."

Established by the General Assembly in 2020, VA250 serves to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, the Revolutionary War, and the Independence of the United States in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Information about VA250 may be found at **www.va250.org**.

Gen. George Washington, portrayed by Ron Carnegie, concludes the VA250 Constitution Day event by leading the cadets in three cheers.—*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

O'Shaughnessy Talks American Revolution

By Lt. Col. Mark Boonshoft and Marianne Hause

Constitution Day was recognized by the Department of History, with support from the Jackson-Hope Fund, with a lecture by the award-winning historian Dr. Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy in Gillis Theater. O'Shaughnessy lectured about the global, imperial history of the American Revolution, and drew from his new book, "Republic and Empire Crisis, Revolution, and America's Early Independence," co-authored with the late Dr. Trevor Burnard.

O'Shaughnessy discussed the military history of the War for Independence as an example of counterinsurgency. He also focused on how understanding Britain's policies in their many colonies that did not revolt, helps clarify the 13 North American colonies' constitutional grievances in 1776.

Dr. Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy speaks to Thomas Sasso '27 after signing his book in Marshall Hall.—*VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.*

Dr. Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy discusses the American Revolution in Gillis Theater Sept. 17.—*VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.*

Approximately 250 faculty, staff, cadets, and members of the public attended the lecture. Earlier in the day, O'Shaughnessy visited and led seminars in three sections of the U.S. Constitutional History course.

Lt. Col. Mark Boonshoft, associate professor in the Department of History and holder of the Conrad M. Hall '65 Chair in American Constitutional History, stated, "Dr. O'Shaugnessy offered an incredibly thought-provoking perspective on the origins and course of the American Revolution, which reflected his decades of research and study on the subject. Cadets were clearly engaged with the lecture, and several stayed after it was over to talk with Dr. O'Shaughnessy and buy copies of his book."

Rat Crucible

Matriculation Week culminated Sunday, Aug. 24 with Rat Crucible, which included training on the North Post obstacles and swimming in the Maury River to Jordan's Point, with a few quick-passing rain showers taking place through the afternoon. The event concluded with a march up Letcher Avenue and the rats' first Old Yell.—*VMI Photos by Kelly Nye and H. Lockwood McLaughlin.*

Furness Starts Tenure with High Energy

By Marianne Hause

Forty-two years after his matriculation to VMI, Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 began his tenure as the 16th superintendent. In addition to moving into his office and helping his family acclimate to their new home, his first week at work mid-September was tightly scheduled with faculty and staff meetings, visiting offices around post, observing rat and cadet activities, hosting a Constitution Day ceremony, preparing for his first Board of Visitors' meeting, taking review of his first parade, and addressing each class of cadets.

Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 enters Memorial Hall to speak with the Rat Mass.—*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

He set aside time to meet separately throughout the week with the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Class cadets, as well as the Rat Mass on Friday morning. He told the rats they would always be special to him, since they are the first class he will fully see through the VMI journey.

Furness opened his relaxed talk with the rats by congratulating them on their courage in embracing the challenges at VMI. He confessed he had tried three times to get accepted to the Institute, but his poor grades prohibited it. He attended Virginia Commonwealth University for a while and got his grades up, retook the SAT, and was finally accepted to VMI. "Nobody wanted to be a VMI cadet more than me, but two months into it, I thought I had made the biggest mistake of my life." At that point as a rat—too embarrassed to tell his parents—he sought help from faculty members who patiently tutored and encouraged him toward success. Furness then urged the rats to also seek help when they need it. "We have amazing faculty, dykes, and professionals on post. Develop relationships

Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 takes review of his first parade as VMI superintendent Sept. 19.—*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

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with them. Ask for assistance if you are struggling emotionally or academically."

Furness also advised the rats to have faith in themselves and in the VMI process. "Our little school has produced great human beings. The process prepares you for the pitfalls of life. The journey is difficult, but it's worth it. Keep moving, don't quit. You are the life blood of the Institute. You energize the system." He stressed they take the Honor Code seriously. "Take the 'F' rather than cheat. Maintain your honor and integrity. Never do the easy wrong. Always do the hard right."

Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 responds to cheers at his first game as superintendent in Foster Stadium Oct. 4.—*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

During a lighter moment at the conclusion of his talk, Furness dispelled the rumors that he is taking away ice cream in Crozet Hall and reinstating Saturday classes, to which the rats leaped out of their seats and cheered.

Later that Friday, Furness took review of his first regimental parade. Alert spectators noticed the new three-star flag held behind him on the observation deck, indicating he is a lieutenant general. That Saturday, he watched the Keydet football game at the University of Richmond. He was proud of the team, dealing with a four-and-a-half-hour weather delay. "The team never quit and showed great tenacity."

Lt. Gen. David Furness '87 speaks to Col. Bill Wyatt and Brig. Gen. Dallas Clark '99 after the parade Sept. 19.—*VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.*

In a post-wide message early into his second week, Furness stated he is honored and privileged to be back at VMI. "I couldn't be more passionate about VMI and simultaneously more humbled by the opportunity to start my 'second rat year' as your superintendent."

2025-26 New and Promoted Faculty

The Office of the Dean of the Faculty announced the promotion and granting of tenure to several faculty members and introduced new members of the faculty for this academic year.

Promoted

Computer and Information Sciences
» **Col. Ramoni Lasisi**—Promoted from associate professor to professor.

English, Rhetoric, and Humanistic Studies
» **Col. Polly Atwell**—Promoted from associate professor to professor.
» **Col. Catharine Ingersoll**—Promoted from associate professor to professor.
» **Col. Michelle Iten**—Promoted from associate professor to professor.

Economics and Business
» **Dr. Bing Jiang**—Promoted from associate professor to professor.

Modern Languages and Cultures
» **Dr. Sabrina Laroussi**—Promoted from associate professor to professor.

Promoted, with tenure

Applied Mathematics
» **Lt. Col. Sarah Patterson**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

Biology
» **Lt. Col. Molly Kent**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

Civil and Environmental Engineering
» **Lt. Col. Kacie D'Allesandro**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

Computer and Information Sciences
» **Col. Imran Ghani**—Promoted from associate professor to professor, with tenure.

International Studies
» **Lt. Col. Timothy Passmore**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

Psychology
» **Lt. Col. Michael LaRocca**—Promoted from assistant professor to associate professor, with tenure.

Granted tenure

Computer and Information Sciences
» **Col. David Smith**

Human Performance and Wellness
» **Lt. Col. Daniel Baur**

New Full-Time Faculty

Chemistry
» **Dr. Sumirtha "Sumi" Balaratnam**

History
» **Dr. Semih Gokatalay**
» **Maj. Mattie Webb**

Mechanical Engineering
» **Lt. Col. Khosro Shahbazi**

Modern Languages and Cultures
» **Dr. Camille Bouillon**
» **Maj. Katie Ginsbach**
» **Maj. Isaac Veysey-White**

New Adjunct/Part-Time Faculty:

Biology
» **Shannon Carter**
» **Dr. Moshe Khurgel**
» **Dr. Melissa Krawiec '01**

Human Performance and Wellness
» **James "Ryan" Hunsberger**

Modern Languages and Cultures
» **Erin Hunter**
» **Dr. Minhui Lu**
» **Silvia Tort-Ranson**

New ROTC Faculty

Air Force
» **Tech. Sgt. Samantha Parker**
» **Col. Eric Steele**

Army
» **Capt. Tyler Brians**
» **Maj. Mackenzie Colella '08**
» **Sgt. 1st Class Mathew Quick**
» **Sgt. 1st Class Luke Walker**
» **Maj. Jerimiah Wood**

Also joining VMI, reporting to the Office of the Dean of the Faculty, include:

Office of Global Education
» **Capt. Nolan Lipscomb '19**

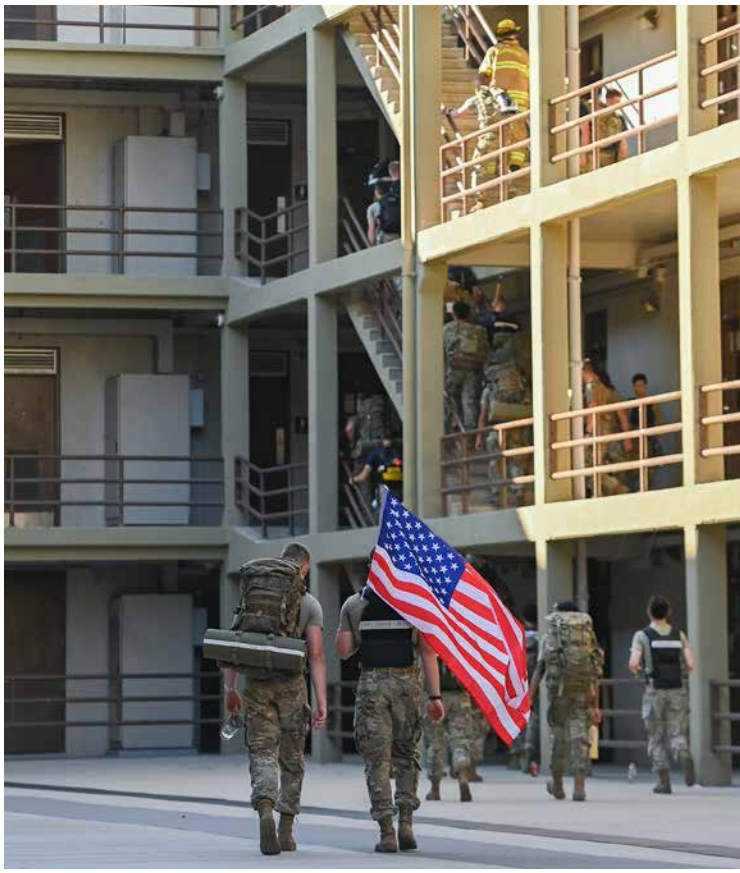
Office of Institutional Effectiveness
» **Maj. Jody Miller**
» **Maj. Andee Oberosler**

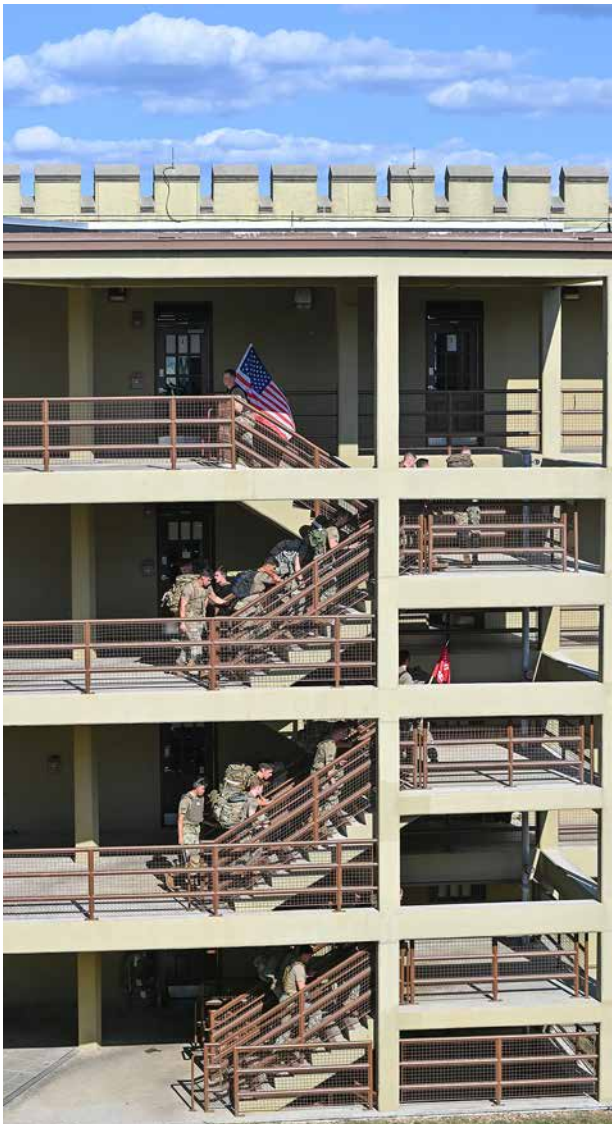
Office of Career Services
» **Maj. Brendan Harris**
» **Maj. Natalie Slone**

Registrar's Office
» **Lt. Col. Michelle Murphy**

9/11 Stair Climb

Cadets completed a 110-story stair climb on the evening of Sept. 11 in honor of those lost during the 2001 attacks. Members of the VMI Firefighting Club and any cadet who wished to participate joined together in New Barracks for remarks and a prayer by Capt. Eli Facemire '19. Some cadets took turns carrying a piece of glass recovered from the rubble of the Twin Towers, as well as an American flag recovered from ground zero. The evening before, rats also did a stair climb event to earn their shoulder boards.– *VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.*





Behind the Balance: Cadee Hegarty '26

By Laura Peters Shapiro

Cadee Hegarty '26 wanted to compete at a high level but also was drawn to the organization and discipline that VMI offered. Getting a soccer scholarship to the school allowed her to form a future at VMI.

Her recruitment was a little different. It was during the coronavirus pandemic, which limited how sports were played. Instead, she attended a soccer camp, which was hosted by former women's soccer coach Chris Haught-Thompson. From there, all it took was a visit to VMI.

"I always wanted a team that had girls that were so close and had a bond that wasn't like anything else," she explained. "At VMI, it's something else no one will understand except the people who go here. I was drawn to the school because of them."

Cadee Hegarty '26

The biology major is now in her last year and serving as the S9 captain, which includes preparing for pep rallies, company athletics activities, and creating permits. S9 is primarily made up of athletes, so cadets involved must pick up the slack when their counterparts on the staff are in season. As the S9 captain, she's fully responsible for NCAA athletes, especially the rats—moving them around, making sure they're able to do practice, but also participate in the Rat Line.

"When it's S9 time, it's S9 time, and 100% of my energy goes into that," she said. "But when I'm at practice, or when we're traveling, or when it's game day, 100% goes to game day. Then schoolwork or in class, I'm fully dedicated to school. If I have free time during the day before soccer starts, I try to always get my work done early, because getting behind really catches up to you."

She was drawn to holding leadership in S9 because of her love of sports.

"Being an athlete at this school is very different, and one of the biggest reasons of why I wanted this position was to show athletes that we can do it too, and we are just as part of the school as everybody else," she commented. "I have kind of one foot in both doors—athlete and non-athlete, with both my responsibilities, showing people there is a balance, it can happen, and everyone's allowed to do everything."

Although she's taking a lighter load, she's previously been pulling nearly 19 credit hours per semester.

"I try to take summer classes too, to kind of make up because in the fall we travel so much and we miss so much school. You can't afford to get behind," she said.

Cadet-athletes at VMI not only have their responsibilities with their selected sport but cadet duties on top of that. Cadets are also required to take physical fitness classes twice a week, participate in ROTC all

Continued on next page

Behind the Balance Highlights

Check out a wide array of feature stories on **www.vmi.edu**. Recent Behind the Balance stories focus on cadet-athletes juggling cadet life, academics, military training, and NCAA commitments. These stories share how they handle daily hurdles and have developed time management and discipline skills they will take with them well after their time at VMI.

four years, prepare for room and uniform inspections, practice for parade, guard duty, and more.

From early days to traveling each week, Hegarty works on taking each task as it comes. When the team is traveling, she could potentially miss up to three days of class—that means getting assignments ahead of time and working with her professors to make sure her work is done on time. She and her teammates spend a good amount of time studying while traveling. She struggled in her first year at VMI with balancing everything.

"My rat year, I didn't do well in school. That was hard for me. I never needed to study in high school. I never needed to, outside of soccer, go through film and read through plays and do stuff like that, but here you have to or else you're not going to be able to just skate by," she admitted. "I learned that sometimes you've got to cut out the naps. Sometimes you have to wake up a little earlier or stay up a little later to make sure everything gets done. I realized getting ahead is just being on time. I would try my best so I could stay ahead of all my work. So, if I did travel, or if there was a pep rally or a football game or something where I couldn't dedicate all my time to school, and I fell back a little bit, I was still on track."

The discipline that Hegarty has experienced at VMI is something she can take and build for the rest of her life.

"If something is given to me, I'm one of those people who can't sleep until it's done," she commented. "Prioritizing what's most important and getting that done first, and putting all your time, all your energy into that—just one task at a time. I feel like a big part of the real world is priorities and discipline with any type of task. Also, integrity. I feel like a lot of workplaces look for someone who they can trust, who they know will get the job done, and who lives by their word. And that is something VMI just drills into you."

Community Discusses Local Economy

VMI's Civil Discourse Initiative, along with local college partners, Washington and Lee University, Southern Virginia University, and Mountain Gateway Community College, held a community workshop focused on "How Can We Improve Our Local Economy?" Sept. 9 in Marshall Hall. Approximately 130 community members, students, faculty, and local officials and business owners participated in the moderated, solutions-based workshop.

The workshop format, called A Braver Campus Dialogue (ABCD), began when participants were asked to pair up to identify the issues. Then the moderator, Doug Sprei, director of the national College Debates and Discourse Alliance, invited attendees to share their personal opinions on areas for improvement. The major areas of concern were: childcare, affordable housing and zoning, workforce development and career pathways, K-12 and higher education collaboration, duplication of efforts across multiple local governments, and keeping college graduates in the area. Participants then discussed solutions, which is part of the ABCD process.

The Civil Discourse Initiative is a partnership between the Center for Leadership and Ethics and the Building BRIDGES club. It is supported by the Jackson-Hope Fund.—*VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.*

Fiorina Offers Convocation Speech, Speaks of American Ideals

By Marianne Hause

VMI opened its 186th academic year with a convocation ceremony Sept. 3 in Cameron Hall. Carly Fiorina, businesswoman and politician, addressed the entire Corps of Cadets, members of the academic board, faculty, staff, and guests.

Brig. Gen. Robert Moreschi, dean of the faculty and deputy superintendent for academics, opened the observance with a welcome. He spoke directly to the Rat Mass as they attended their first convocation, then to the full Corps. "Cadets, each of you has the opportunity to explore, learn and engage your interests and your passions, and the faculty and staff are eager to see what you do with the opportunities that await you in pursuit of your goals," he pronounced. Moreschi also recognized over 250 cadets distinguished in academic merit—those who earned a GPA of at least 3.5 during the 2024-25 academic year—who were seated at a place of honor in front of the stage.

Carly Fiorina addresses the Corps of Cadets during the convocation ceremony Sept. 3 in Cameron Hall.—*VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.*

Brig. Gen. Dallas Clark '99, acting superintendent at the time, also welcomed the audience, which included eighth grade students from Lylburn Downing Middle School. He offered a gentle word of advice to all members of the Corps. "Your approach to study and learning today will directly affect your lifelong thirst for knowledge. After graduation from the Institute, learning will no longer be measured by grades, but by your curiosity and your ability to solve problems, think critically, blend ideas creatively, exercise sound judgment, and your contribution to the good of others."

Before introducing the guest speaker, Clark stated that the Center for Leadership and Ethics (CLE) schedules many of the speakers who come to VMI. "The CLE's theme this year is 'American Values,' selected as a recognition of the nation's upcoming 250th anniversary. Throughout the year, the CLE's programming will reinforce the shared democratic core values of honor, service to our country, integrity, and the purpose of our nation, as outlined in our Declaration of Independence." He then welcomed Fiorina to the lectern.

Fiorina opened with a light-hearted nod to the rats and the demanding physical, mental, and academic challenges thrust upon them. "While it is my goal to keep you awake this morning, I will understand if a few of you nod off," she quipped.

She told the Corps she is inspired by their example of commitment, discipline, and devotion to each other, and confessed when she was their age she was very different. "I was a shy, goody-two shoes middle child. My specialty was pleasing other people, especially my parents. I had no idea what my future would be or what I was capable of." In college she studied history and philosophy and declared it was the best education for life she could hope for, "but a terrible education for getting a job." She held several jobs which some would consider dead-end, but learned the dignity and value in all work if done well. Eventually she went back to school and got her MBA.

Fiorina told the Corps that the theme of "American Values" is one they exemplify each day. To truly understand the meaning of American values, she advised they examine history. "A lot of Americans have become apathetic or cynical about our history, and we cherry-pick it to talk only about the heroes or the horrors. Yet we know as people, our personal history is hugely important to us. The popularity of genealogy websites speaks to a human longing to know, 'Where do I come from?' We know if we do not know who and where we come from, we feel unmoored, rootless, and it is hard to plot our future." She went on to acknowledge that some family stories are difficult to talk about because they are embarrassing, shameful, or frightening, but in order for a family to heal, those stories must be shared. "What is true for a family is true for a community and nation," she declared, referring to injustices in the country's history. "Ours is the only nation not founded on territory, ethnicity, religion, or tribe. Ours is the only nation in human history founded on ideas, values, and a system of government which you are trained to defend. When we do not know our history, then we do not know why we are Americans."

She stated that the study of history is the study of human nature, and despite differences in time, geography, culture, customs, language, and technology, certain aspects of human nature remain the same. "Humans have the capacity for both selfishness and sacrifice, cruelty and depravity, mercy and compassion, deep

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suspicion of others who are different from ourselves, as well as the ability to overcome those differences, to learn empathy and respect for one another."

She listed radical ideals throughout history that changed the world. "Plato spoke about the unique nature of an idea. It is abstract. You cannot see or touch it, yet ideas have substance, because ideas have the power to motivate and change behavior. Aristotle taught that ideals are models for our behavior and objects for our striving. Think about the Christian value that humility, mercy, and compassion are sources of strength, not of weakness. The philosophers of the Enlightenment who influenced our founders, believed in the ideals of human reason, human rights, and the skepticism of authority. Our nation is, despite all of its flaws and imperfections, the greatest nation on Earth."

She reminded the audience that July 4, 2026, the nation will celebrate its 250th anniversary. "Why do we celebrate the Fourth of July? Because the Declaration of Independence marks our highest ideal, our greatest American value. 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' These words were written by enslavers," she boldly declared, "and the men who gathered together to debate these words had many opportunities to change them, yet they did not. They were aware of the contradiction between the world around them and the ideal. These words were radical at the time, and they have shaped every movement toward human liberty, dignity, and equality ever since, in this country and all over all the world."

Brig. Gen. Robert Moreschi welcomes Carly Fiorina to the lectern as Brig. Gen. Dallas Clark '99 looks on.—*VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.*

Fiorina stated one American value stemming from the radical idea that all are equal in the eyes of God is pluralism. "We have always been a nation of differences and division. The first Americans were divided over all the same things we are now: ethnicity, class, religion, and race. The colonists were divided over whether or not a revolution was treason or heroic, and yet this nation chose to enshrine pluralism and respect for others in our founding documents. In the Constitution, we enshrined for the first time anywhere on Earth: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press."

A second American value according to Fiorina is innovation and entrepreneurship. "Entrepreneurship is a reason this is the most powerful, innovative, wealthiest economy on the face of the planet. Like so many other things, entrepreneurship was made here in Virginia. When the colonists first arrived, they were serfs, and yet necessity demonstrated over time that people work harder if they own the fruits of their labor. In the Constitution, private property was enshrined as a right. You can own your ideas. These were as radical a set of ideas as anything else that founded this nation."

She stated another distinctly American value is the power of the individual, that a single person can make a difference. She spoke of Alexis de Tocqueville, a French philosopher and writer who traveled in America around the time VMI was founded. "He remarked what I think was a hugely perceptive observation, 'The greatness of America lies not in being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults.' We are inspired by the actions of others, and this is a nation of citizen-leaders." Addressing cadets she said, "You are an example of citizen-leaders. What qualities should a citizen-leader possess? Courage to do important, difficult things; character to do the right things even when no one is watching; humility to know great things always require a team; and empathy to respect, listen, and learn from others. We see possibilities in ourselves, in each other, and in our future. Despite the reality we fall short every day, it is an undeniable truth that here in this nation more things have been more possible for more people from more places than anywhere else on the face of the earth. As citizen-leaders it is our duty to form a more perfect union.

"Virginia is sacred ground. Because Virginia is the birthplace of this great nation. It was the place where three great cultures came together for the first time: Indigenous, European, and African. And those three cultures coming together built a uniquely American culture. Virginia is where American values and ideas were formed. America was made in Virginia.

"You may be whatever you resolve to be. May you resolve to be a great citizen. May you resolve always to form a more perfect union. May you always find courage to stand strong for what you believe, to set an example for others through your actions, and to change things for the better. It doesn't matter what you look like, where you come from, or how you pronounce your last name. If you believe in these American values, then e pluribus unum—out of many one—is still possible in this great nation," she concluded to a standing ovation.

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Fiorina is the national honorary chair of The Virginia 250 Commission, and serves as the founding visionary and executive chair of The Williamsburg Institute, chair of the Board of Trustees of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, and member of the Board of Visitors for James Madison University. In 2015, Fiorina sought the Republican nomination for president. She has authored three best-selling books and is a frequent speaker to teams and executives of many industries worldwide.

Carly Fiorina talks with a select group of cadets at lunch in the Hall of Valor.—*VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.*