Collocation benefits VCU students, Richmond

Garima Prasai knew she wanted to attend business school. She just wasn’t sure where.

Before high school graduation in 2005, she and her mother visited Virginia Commonwealth University to see what the university and the School of Business had to offer.

Dean Michael Sesnowitz invited Prasai to his office where he unfurled giant blueprints of a planned new home for the School of Business and talked about the transformation that was on the horizon.

“His excitement was absolutely contagious,” Prasai said. “I don’t recall if I was more struck that day by the magnitude of how cool the new business building was going to look or whether I was awed by the ‘down-to-earth’ dean, in whose office I was sitting, chatting with so casually. Maybe it was a combination of the two, but I remember going home and thinking ‘VCU is it,’”

Now as a junior pursuing a double major in accounting and finance on the CPA track, Prasai is thrilled by what VCU has accomplished. The Monroe Park Campus Addition, where Snead Hall for the School of Business, East Hall for the School of Engineering and the VCU Brandcenter are located, opened in January.

“On the first day of classes, I walked in and was blown away not only by how beautiful the building was, but how technologically advanced the study rooms were,” she said. “It’s amazing how a new facility can make all the difference. People are so much more focused and serious about their classes. The openness of the learning environment allows students to see one another studying, and it has created a peer-motivating learning environment and has led to a greater exchange of ideas.”

That type of collaboration spurred the development of the Monroe Park Campus Addition and the collocation of the schools of Business and Engineering. The idea originated over a golf game between business and community leaders Steve Markel and Bill Goodwin. They envisioned business and engineering students learning side-by-side to create well-rounded graduates ready to play a pivotal role in the Richmond workforce.

“The combination of a new campus for VCU and redeveloping a large part of the city as well as bringing business and engineering together really made the project a winner,” said Markel, who is the chairman of the School of Business Foundation Board of Trustees and vice chairman of the Markel Corp.

Collocation, continued on Page 4
When Markel served on the VCU Board of Visitors, he said, the group struggled with crafting a workable plan to improve the business school facilities. “Until this plan came together, none of the others got any traction,” he said. “A key part of the new business school plan was the creation of a School of Business Foundation to bring an important group of supporters together to seriously engage with VCU to help develop the VCU School of Business for the long-term future.”

The School of Engineering Foundation Board of Trustees collaborated with the business board to work toward a common goal. Both boards, which are composed of some of the top business leaders in the area, were instrumental in raising awareness and money for the project, said Peter L. Wyeth, vice president for University Advancement.

“These board members fostered unbelievable support for this project, as well as long-term championship of the two schools among local businesses, the community, and our alumni and friends through their dedication and hard work,” he said.

Paul Rocheleau, a founding member of the School of Engineering Foundation board of trustees and its current president, also stressed the board members’ role in supporting the school by helping to ensure that it runs efficiently and effectively while producing outstanding graduates, which will benefit, in turn, the community.

“As you can imagine, many of the foundation executive committee members have dedicated a lot of time to ensure the program has grown to the level it is today,” said Rocheleau, who is managing director for Cary Street Partners and is responsible for investing the foundation’s endowment. “We are now in a wonderful position to have excellent facilities, an established accredited program and improving financial resources.”

The board, Rocheleau said, wants this growth — in the quality of new students, faculty and programming — to continue.

“We are very encouraged by the attractive prospects for new graduates, increased student applications for 2009 and continued corporate support for the program,” he said. “The new building represents another key milestone along a path to success, but most importantly the success will be driven by the faculty and students who occupy the new building.”

The students, for their part, are ripe for the challenge.

“The most exciting thing about the building is the change in itself. The change has created a momentum of students who are excited about learning,” Prasai said. “What this has given me, and every other student at VCU, is a chance to highlight our best efforts. This building stands as a belief in our potential success, and we will work hard to reciprocate and make everyone proud.”

To support the School of Business, contact Ken Blaisdell, executive director of the School of Business Foundation, at (804) 828-1487 or kcbiaisdell@vcu.edu. To support the School of Engineering, contact Brian Thomas, vice president of the School of Engineering Foundation, at (804) 827-0067 or bsthomas@vcu.edu.
Brandcenter’s creative space matches its mission

Bright green floors. Metal staircase. An upstairs patio perfect for sipping a drink. Ping-pong, pool and foosball in the basement. Cool, roll-up doors that let the breeze flow in and the sounds of the Neville Brothers waft out, greeting passers-by.

A swanky, new downtown hotspot where all the hipsters hang out?

Try again.

An educational space that melds creativity and business savvy?

Exactly.

The Virginia Commonwealth University Brandcenter’s new home is a far cry from other, more traditional buildings on campus.

The mission to move the Brandcenter into a permanent location began about five years ago, when Rick Boyko, former chief creative officer and co-president of Ogilvy and Mather Worldwide Inc., became managing director of the program. From the beginning, he stressed the need for a suitable home and told VCU President Eugene P. Trani, Ph.D., that the old Central Belting Building would be the perfect location.

Fortunately, VCU owned the property. Longtime benefactors Dianne and C. Kenneth Wright had donated it in 1999. “When I donated the building, it was with the idea of enabling VCU to expand east across Belvidere Street,” Kenneth Wright said.

But there was a caveat, recalled Dr. Trani at the Brandcenter’s grand opening in March: When discussing donating the building, which had served as the headquarters of Kenneth Wright’s business, he said to Dr. Trani, “You are going to save the building, right?”

The new 27,000-square-foot space — designed by internationally renowned architect Clive Wilkinson, creator of spaces for Google, the Disney Store and advertising agencies such as TBWA/Chiat/Day in Los Angeles — incorporates many features from the old structure, including exposed wooden beams, wood floors, brick walls and parts of the original elevator, which was used for storing carriages belonging to guests of The Jefferson Hotel.

VCU Brandcenter

• Founded in 1996, the VCU Brandcenter is the only graduate program in advertising to combine business-oriented communications strategy and brand management tactics with leading-edge marketing creativity.

• Two-year Master of Science degree program with five tracks: art direction, copywriting, creative brand strategy and creative technology.

• Enrollment: 180 students; 38 percent minority, 51 percent female.

• Alumni: 500

The Wrights’ property gift served as the catalyst for the development of the 11-acre Monroe Park Campus Addition, which also includes Snead Hall for the School of Business and East Hall for the School of Engineering, as well as the 689-space Jefferson Street Parking Deck. A residential college, complete with a full-service Chili’s and a Starbucks, is scheduled to open this fall.

“This hardscrabble piece of earth has never been as good as it is now,” Dr. Trani said at the celebration.

The opening of the new building also signals the investment of resources, energy and support of the advertising world in the program.

Michael Roth, chairman of Interpublic Group, told the crowd that the program is addressing, with “passion and talent,” issues that the advertising industry is facing.

When he was asked to make a gift to the campaign during a major downturn in his company’s business, Roth bit the bullet and donated $1 million. His philosophy: “Put your money where your mouth is, if you believe in something.”

He saw the Brandcenter program as a source of outstanding future advertising and branding professionals.

“Without talent, you can’t have sustainability to prosper,” Roth said. “It was our chance to make a step forward and to set an example for the industry and our company.”

Another major benefactor of the program has been Yahoo, which committed $500,000 to name the Yahoo Big Idea Student Lounge in the building. The company’s consigliere and Brandcenter board of directors member Matthew J. Sheckner secured the entertainment for the grand-opening festivities.

The board met secretly to discuss possibilities, Sheckner said. They chose the Neville Brothers, he said, because “the group epitomizes the four attributes of the Brandcenter: creativity, sustainability, heart and soul.”

The Brandcenter students exhibited that heart and soul through a personal thank you to the Wrights.

“The Brandcenter students sent us a large poster signed by them with notes of thanks and how much it has meant to them; how much better they can concentrate and accomplish their work than their previous location before moving into these truly unique new quarters,” Kenneth Wright said. “The acknowledgment and expressions of gratitude are humbling and satisfying to us both. We feel great pride in being significant participants in the growth and expansion of VCU.”

To make a gift to the VCU Brandcenter, contact Beth Harrington, senior director of development, at (804) 828-8384 or ekharrington@vcu.edu.
In order to understand how disease affects a living organism, you’ve got to understand how the living organism functions,” he said. “How a disease modifies the function of an organism is where it’s essential to have an understanding of the physiology and the chemistry of the organism that’s infected. It’s … a question of understanding.”

With the establishment of this endowed chair, the VCU Department of Physiology and Biophysics attracted Diomedes Logothetis, Ph.D., a leader in his field, from Mount Sinai University in New York as the new head of the department. Logothetis’ research is aimed at understanding the molecular functioning of ion channels.

Logothetis says he was initially drawn to the university when a respected colleague from Mount Sinai who had already come to teach at VCU told him about the school and Strauss’ vision for the future.

The endowed chair provides funding that Logothetis can use to support research, faculty salaries or equipment costs — whatever is needed. More importantly, though, Logothetis says being named the John D. Bower, M.D., Chair in Physiology makes a statement about his worth to the university.

“It gives a sense of how you’re valued as a leader coming in to the institution,” he said.

Bower’s hope is that with the money he has donated, Logothetis can make important and necessary improvements in the department. Logothetis’ hopes for the department are in line with Bower’s wishes.

“So what are Logothetis’ plans?”

“To make it the No. 1 physiology department in the country,” he said.

To make a gift to the School of Medicine, contact Tom Holland, associate dean of development, at (800) 332-8813 or tehollan@vcu.edu.
Dentistry Class of ’57 surpasses gift-giving goal

The School of Dentistry Class of ’57 was a small one — only 48 strong. A quarter of the alumni had passed away before their 50th reunion in April 2007.

With so few living classmates, it was an ambitious goal when class leader Dr. Harold P. Heafner Jr. (D.D.S. ’57/D) came up with the idea of raising $50,000 to commemorate the class’s 50th reunion. The class surpassed that goal, however, at the reunion banquet, topping out at $59,000.

How did the class pull off such a feat? “It just happened,” Heafner said.

The 50th reunion donation began as an idea Heafner threw around after he heard about another class’s reunion donation. He thought it would be a good idea for his class to band together after 50 years to raise some money to present to their alma mater at their reunion banquet.

“We had all done some things [to give back to the school] individually, but we had never done anything as a group,” Heafner said.

When classmates Dr. Joe M. Adair (D.D.S. ’57/D) and Dr. William H. Allison (D.D.S. ’57/D) each agreed to pledge $5,000, Heafner knew this was an idea worth pursuing. He pledged another $5,000, and a generous $15,000 contribution came from classmate Dr. Dick S. Ajalat (D.D.S. ’57/D). They had raised $30,000 between the four of them, and then Heafner was off, sending letters and making phone calls to the rest of his classmates. Others stepped up to fill in the remaining $20,000.

At the reunion banquet, someone suggested the class set a $57,000 goal, and, Heafner said, “everyone just started giving.” The class reached its new goal that night.

After the reunion, classmates who couldn’t attend the banquet sent in their contributions, pushing the class over its second goal. Heafner and classmate Dr. Hubert E. Kiser (D.D.S. ’57/D) then contributed a little more to make the final gift an even number.

In the end, the class donated $59,000 to their alma mater. The money went to the school’s Campaign for Clinical Simulation, which funded renovations in the school and installation of Dentsim Virtual Reality Simulator System training equipment, said Ed Kardos, senior director of advancement in the School of Dentistry.

The Class of ’57 Conference Room in the School of Dentistry was named in recognition of the reunion gift.

For the School of Dentistry Class of ’57, giving back to VCU was a matter of gratitude. “We all owe everything to the school,” Heafner said. “We all admit that.”

For more information about making a donation to the School of Dentistry, contact Ed Kardos, senior director of advancement in the School of Dentistry, at (804) 828-0324 or egkardos@vcu.edu.

Business alumni and friends build Ram pride

More than 700 School of Business alumni and friends gathered for the VCU men’s basketball game against Old Dominion University on Feb. 16.

The “VCU Means Business” event has grown from 20 participants six years ago to include hundreds of alumni from throughout the area. A pre-game reception, also attended by VCU President Eugene P. Trani, Ph.D., featured Rodney the Ram and the VCU cheerleaders, dance team and pep band.

In other giving news . . .

- The CarMax Foundation awarded a $27,000 grant to the Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University to support its “Include Me” project. The grant, made via the Richmond Funding Program, will help the partnership foster quality, inclusive education for preschool-aged children.

- The VCU Massey Cancer Center will open a Phase I pancreatic cancer study later this year in conjunction with leading researchers from Israel, marking the first time cancer researchers at VCU have partnered with their counterparts in Israel. The study is supported by a $950,000 grant from the U.S.-Israel Bi-National Industrial Research and Development Foundation. Leaders from the Virginia Israel Bioscience Commercialization Center helped to foster Israeli interest in research at VCU. The trial involves a novel, targeted therapeutic agent developed by BioCancell of Jerusalem and will offer new hope for one of the most difficult-to-treat cancers.

- The Office of Naval Research awarded $3.5 million in four grants to the VCU Reanimation Engineering Shock Center for research using the blood substitute Oxycyte in studies of decompression sickness, embolisms, traumatic brain injury and blast injuries. VCURES is VCU’s critical injury and illness research group that specifically studies the delivery of oxygen. VCURES has generated approximately $35 million in research funding over an eight-year period in work that has myriad applications in areas such as homeland security and traumatic brain injury.

- The VCU Massey Cancer Center has created a line of gift cards. Tribute cards are available for a minimum $25 tax-deductible gift. Massey will send one of six specially designed cards to recipients, letting them know that a gift to cancer research has been made in their honor. In addition, the program provides several options to inform guests of a gift made in their honor, such as inscribed special scrolls, table cards or gift tags. To order, call (804) 827-0652 or visit www.massey.vcu.edu/pdf/TributeCardWebsiteOrderForm.pdf.

- This year’s VCU Staff Senate Walk-a-Thon raised more than $11,600 for the Virginia’s Caring University Scholarship. The event, now in its fourth year, drew more than 200 employees and members of the surrounding community. The scholarship is awarded annually to a junior or senior in financial need with a GPA of 2.7 or higher who has demonstrated community service. Some of this year’s community sponsors included Target, Sam’s Club, Ab[Soul]ute Massage, Barksdale Theater, Richmond Braves, The Cheesecake Factory, Olive Garden, Crowne Plaza Hotel and The Jefferson Hotel.
**Annual consortium celebrates heartfelt campaign**

This year’s annual Cardiology Consortium served a dual purpose: To offer insight into current cardiovascular health issues while celebrating the successful conclusion of the $10 million The Next Generation: Campaign for the VCU Pauley Heart Center.

About 80 donors, campaign advisory committee members and heart center staff joined Eugene P. Trani, Ph.D., VCU president and chair of the VCU Health System; Dr. Sheldon M. Retchin, CEO of the VCU Health System and vice president for VCU Health Sciences; and Dr. George W. Vetrovec, chairman of the Division of Cardiology; for the February event at The Country Club of Virginia.

Before dinner, Dr. William C. Roberts, of the Baylor Heart and Vascular Institute at Baylor University Medical Center, spoke about “Atherosclerosis: Its Cause and Its Prevention.” Afterward, Dorothy and Stanley Pauley were honored for their transformational gift to the campaign, which was led by chair James Sanderlin of Troutman Sanders. Also recognized were campaign honorary chairs Martha M. Kimmerling, James C. Roberts and Charles G. Thalhimer Sr.

**VCU Arts names recipient of Binsted scholarship**

The School of the Arts has named the first recipient of the Tyler Binsted Endowed Scholarship in Sculpture + Extended Media. Conor Backman is a rising sophomore from Purcellville, Va.

The scholarship was created in memory of Tyler Binsted, an undergraduate sculpture student who died in March. The merit scholarship is designated for the top Art Foundation student at VCU who has been accepted for enrollment in the Department of Sculpture, in which Binsted was enrolled.

Freshman academic performance and work in the annual spring Art Foundation portfolio review will be the main criteria in the scholarship selection process. Backman will receive $1,000 from the scholarship for the 2008-09 academic year.

**Brown-Lyons Lecture keeps attendees in stitches**

Jack D. Spiro, Ph.D., had 450 donors, friends and alumni in stitches at the 23rd Annual Brown-Lyons Lecture when he spoke about “Jewish Humor – It’s No Joke!”

Spiro, the Harry Lyons Distinguished Chair of Judaic Culture and director of the Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Judaic Studies, discussed humor’s inherent role in Judaism and explored the entertaining nature of Jewish humor from Abraham to Mel Brooks.

The annual lecture is sponsored by the VCU Libraries, the VCU Center for Judaic Studies, the Jewish Community Federation of Richmond, the Richmond Jewish Foundation and the Weinstein JCC.

**VCU medical school alumni reconnect in Raleigh**

Dr. Jerome F. Strauss, dean of the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine, recently hosted a reception for alumni and friends living in North Carolina’s Research Triangle area. Strauss shared his vision for the medical school with the evening’s three dozen guests, who enjoyed refreshments while catching up with one another at the Umstead Hotel and Spa. The dean travels around the country throughout the year, and a visit to San Antonio, Texas, is already on his fall calendar.

Cayette and Tjukong Tjoa, parents of second-year medical student Tjoson Tjoa, enjoy hearing about the future of their child’s educational experiences.

Tony Segreti (left), who earned his Ph.D. in Biostatistics in 1977, greets Glenn Simon, who earned his Ph.D. in Pharmacology and Toxicology in 1979, and his wife, Susan, a 1978 alumna of the School of Nursing master’s program.
More than 100 teams and nearly 2,000 individual runners and walkers raised $538,234 to help put “Cancer on the Run” as part of the Massey Fundraising Challenge and the Ukrop’s Monument Avenue 10k.

Team Connie ran in honor of cancer survivor Connie Madison, who served as an informal “grand marshal” to start the April race. Afterward, Madison camped out along the course on Monument Avenue where each of the 34 members of Team Connie stopped for a hug and a photo with her. The team, led by Madison’s son and daughter-in-law, raised more than $18,000.

This year, a new Friends Asking Friends online fundraising program made it easy for teams and individuals to encourage donations. All money raised will support research of all forms of cancer. Massey partnered with the Richmond Sports Backers and Ukrop’s for the event. The Massey Fundraising Challenge was sponsored by Anthem.

More than 350 Massey staff and volunteers supported the race effort by stuffing race packets, manning water stations and more. This year, the VCU Alumni Association participated, handing out water and VCUAA wrist bands at the corner of Broad and Hancock streets.

With 30,000 participants, the Ukrop’s Monument Avenue 10k has become the fourth-largest 10k in the U.S.

‘Asking friends’ program pays off for cancer research

In April, the Virginia Commonwealth University College of Humanities and Sciences welcomed the Rev. Edward A. “Monk” Malloy, C.S.C., president emeritus of the University of Notre Dame, as the speaker for the Bishop Walter Sullivan Inaugural Lecture in Catholic Studies.

A large group of donors, friends and alumni gathered in the University Student Commons to hear Malloy’s talk, “Terrorism, Counter Terrorism and the Ethics of Warfare.” Malloy is a professor in Notre Dame’s Department of Theology and holds a doctorate in Christian ethics.

R. Andrew Chesnut, Ph.D., selected as the Bishop Walter F. Sullivan Chair in Catholic Studies, also was in attendance. Chesnut, a leading international authority on Christianity in Latin America, will join the VCU School of World Studies’ faculty in the fall.

The Sullivan lecture and the Sullivan chair have been generously funded through donations from alumni and friends of VCU.

Inaugural Sullivan lecture discusses ethics, religion

Celebrated author David Baldacci speaks at VCU

Acclaimed author David Baldacci (B.A.’83/GPA) visited with College of Humanities and Sciences students, faculty and alumni in April. Dean Robert D. Holsworth moderated a panel discussion, which focused on Baldacci’s experiences as a writer and alumnus.

Baldacci is a member of the Virginia Commonwealth University Board of Visitors and has generously supported the Creative Writing Program in the VCU Department of English.

Nursing school supporters gather in the garden

More than 100 guests gathered in April for a garden party at the VCU School of Nursing. During the event, designed to thank donors for their support, Dr. Baxter Perkinson Jr. (D.D.S. ’70/D) completed an original watercolor, giving guests the chance to see him paint in person.

A generous supporter of VCU, Perkinson donated 123 original watercolors to the School of Nursing in 2007 to decorate its new building. Through the Adopt-a-Painting program, funds have been raised to construct a garden behind the school. Work on the garden is set to begin this summer. Once completed, the garden will provide a relaxing space for students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends.

Best-selling author VCU alumnus David Baldacci greets one of the many students who attended a post-lecture book signing.

Top: Dr. Baxter Perkinson Jr. addresses the crowd gathered for the garden party. Bottom: Perkinson paints an original watercolor, which he donated to the school for display in Dean Nancy Langston’s office.

College of Humanities and Sciences Dean Robert Holsworth (left) welcomes the Most Rev. Walter F. Sullivan and the Rev. Edward A. “Monk” Malloy to the VCU Scott House for a reception and dinner.

Members of Team Connie — including Mark Madison (front left), Steve Nuckolls (with Stuart the dog), Dean Madison, Connie Madison, David Madison and Kristina Reiss — gather at the Nuckolls home on Monument Avenue. The 34-member team raised more than $18,000 in honor of Connie, who is a patient at the VCU Massey Cancer Center and was selected as the official starter of the Ukrop’s Monument Avenue 10k.

‘Asking friends’ program pays off for cancer research

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