

# WILMU<sup>®</sup>

## FAREWELL, DR. VARSALONA

**Dr. Jack P. Varsalona**

retired last month, ending his distinguished career as President of Wilmington University. We explore his life, career successes, and hopes for the future.

THE PUBLICATION FOR THE **WILMINGTON UNIVERSITY** COMMUNITY

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Summer in New Castle



PHOTO BY PAUL PATTON

*“There are no words that truly express the gratitude I feel for Dr. Varsalona and the way he has inspired me throughout the 27 years I’ve worked with him.”*

—Dr. LaVerne T. Harmon



## A New Beginning and a Fond Farewell

It is my pleasure to offer my first WilmU Magazine letter as President of Wilmington University. As honored and humbled as I am to serve this great institution, I would prefer to use this space to bid farewell to my predecessor, Dr. Jack P. Varsalona, a man I’m privileged to call my friend and mentor. We dedicate this issue to him.

We offer a cover story that explores Dr. Varsalona’s life and career successes, and includes testimonials from numerous colleagues and community leaders who have been impacted by his leadership. We also present a special tribute from our senior leadership team who wished to offer Dr. Varsalona their sentiments.

There are no words that truly express the gratitude I feel for Dr. Varsalona and the way he has inspired me throughout the 27 years I’ve worked with him. Our leadership styles are actually very similar: we’re both student-centered; we believe that education can transform lives; and we understand how fortunate we are to work with the incredible people of Wilmington University.

Dr. Varsalona has never wavered in his support for me, and for that, I will always be thankful. I have admired his tenacity and compassion; the way he led with intellect and fairness; and how he always understood the importance of collaboration. And even though he will end his 30-year distinguished career at

Wilmington University, he will always be a member of the Wilmington University family.

In addition to our tributes to Dr. Varsalona, we offer several compelling stories about Wilmington University graduates, like Brig. Gen. Carol Timmons, who was recently named Delaware’s first female Adjutant General after replacing Lt. Gen. Frank Vavala, a WilmU alumnus who retired in January after 50 years of service. And Roberto Rodriguez, who arrived in the United States at the age of 16, couldn’t speak English, and then earned two Wilmington University degrees. He now leads efforts to protect network security at Capital One.

Those are just two of many stories you’ll find in this issue about our faculty, staff and alumni. The articles exemplify the reasons that Wilmington University is a place where students can realize their potential while seeking intellectual challenges and personal fulfillment.

I hope you’ll find this issue as inspiring as I do. [WU](#)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "LaVerne T. Harmon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. LaVerne T. Harmon  
President

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## CONTRIBUTOR



### DR. JOHN C. GRAY

Dr. John C. Gray is the Dean of the College of Education at Wilmington University. Prior to his appointment, he served WilmU as its director of graduate specialty programs; chair of M.Ed. programs in school leadership, instruction and educational

technology; and coordinator of clinical studies. John enjoyed a distinguished career in education before joining the university staff, and over a period of 25 years served as an elementary school teacher, reading specialist and principal in schools throughout Delaware. He has been affiliated with numerous organizations, including the Delaware Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. He formerly served as a member of the board of directors of the Delaware Foundation for Mathematics and Science Education and as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Fairville Friends School in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. He was a member of the National Advisory Committee for the School Leaders Licensure Assessment and helped develop assessment/certification exams for school and district leaders. He has earned numerous awards and fellowships, including the Harry Passow Fellowship in Curriculum and Teaching and the TTT (Training Teacher Trainers) Fellowship from Columbia University, the IBM Executive Educator Award, and the Outstanding Public Service Award from the Wilmington United Neighborhoods association. John earned an Ed.D. at Columbia University, where he taught for several years as an adjunct assistant professor, and holds an M.Ed. from the University of Delaware. For this issue, he offers “A Promising and Practical Path for Education Leaders,” which details Wilmington University’s Ed.D. in Educational Leadership. The program has expanded to include concentrations in Teacher Leadership and School Leadership, making it more practical for educators who want to lead and remain at the school level. **WU**



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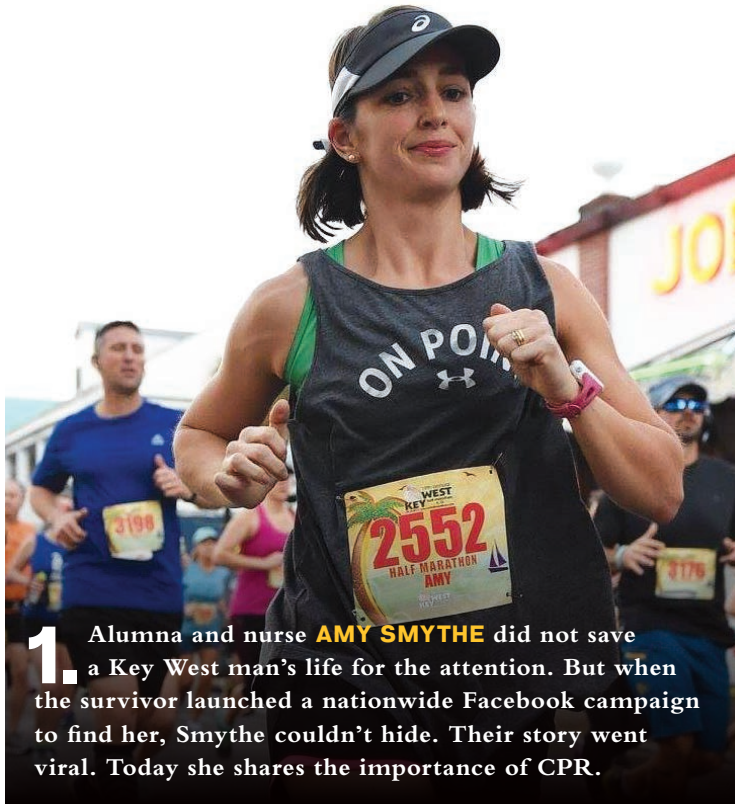
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by Britney Gullede

# #TRENDING



**1.** Alumna and nurse **AMY SMYTHE** did not save a Key West man's life for the attention. But when the survivor launched a nationwide Facebook campaign to find her, Smythe couldn't hide. Their story went viral. Today she shares the importance of CPR.

**2.** Adjunct **RACHEL PIAZZA** is being heard. Her essay on ESPNW, "How Feminist Self-Defense Flips the Script on Violence Against Women," received thousands of clicks. (More in the fall issue.)



**3.** WilmU's tech competition **EAST COAST REBOOT** will be bigger in 2018. With a new partnership with Dub3, about 30,000 people are expected to attend, making a \$6 million economic impact on the City of Wilmington.



**5.** The hashtag **#WILMUGRAD** buzzed with support for the graduating class of 2017. Congratulations!

Read more on commencement: page **64**



Read exclusive stories on our digital edition.



Don't forget to connect with Wilmington University on Facebook.



**4.** WilmU heated up with **SPRINGFEST**, an afternoon of live music from regional artists, delectable food truck eats, and family-friendly fun.

# THE NEWS

## Graduating with Her BFF/Mom

**B**est friends graduating together is always special. But it's even more poignant when those best friends happen to be mother and daughter. That's the case with **MICHELLE** and **ERIN FURMAN**, who wore the green cap and gown at Wilmington University's spring commencement in May.

Prior to enrolling at WilmU in 2015, both had earned associate degrees from Delaware Technical Community College — mother Michelle in Human Services and daughter Erin in Elementary Education. After getting her Del-Tech degree, Erin says, "I knew I wanted to transfer as a junior to Wilmington University to get my bachelor's degree and certification to teach."

Michelle, meanwhile, was thinking about going back to school. Erin gave her a gentle nudge. "I was able to convince her to apply for the same semester I did." So, it came to pass: Michelle enrolled in Behavioral Sciences and Erin in Elementary Education K-6.

"I had a goal set to graduate in May 2017, and my mom just paced herself to do what she could," says Erin. "It became evident about a

**“I’ve been offered so many opportunities through WilmU. I feel much more prepared for my career than many of my peers who are going for the same degree.”**

—Erin Furman

year ago that if she scheduled her classes correctly, we could graduate together. She's my best friend and I wanted nothing more than to graduate at the same time as her, so I pushed her to keep up with her classes so we could stay on track together."

Like many WilmU students, both held full-time jobs. Erin worked at McDonald's and then at a day-care center before qualifying for the University's year-long residency program, when she began teaching at Cedar Lane Elementary School in Middletown. Michelle holds two positions at an alternative high school in the Middletown area, where she is a counselor and aids in transitioning students back to their home schools.

Both mother and daughter feel well qualified for a career in education, thanks to WilmU.

"I've been offered so many

opportunities through WilmU," says Erin. "I feel much more prepared for my career than many of my peers who are going for the same degree."

Michelle, who took many of her classes online because of her work schedule, says she had "great instructors."

"These classes require a lot of work," she says, "but the instructors are usually readily available to assist us when we need extra help. They made the classes more enjoyable."

The ultimate moment for both, of course, was the commencement ceremony in May. Interviewed for this story some weeks prior to that event, Erin ticked off the family members scheduled to attend: "My dad, my sister and brother, my mom's parents, her sister, my dad's mother and his two brothers mother."

"I'm sure it's going to be emotional." **WU**

—Bob Yearick





*Michelle and Erin Furman*

# LEGAL EAGLES

**P**ay close attention in the *Legal Research* class. Opt for an internship. Get involved in community service activities that the *Legal Studies* program offers. Take your coursework seriously.

That's good advice for undergraduate students who dream of attending law school. The advice comes from experts **ALEXANDRA "ALEX" JOYCE, DAVID MASSULI** and **JOSH BROOKS**. All are students at the Delaware Law School of Widener University and graduates of WilmU's

Legal Studies program.

Joyce, who plans to graduate from law school in May of 2017, was named a Wolcott Fellow at Widener. This prestigious fellowship offered her the opportunity to serve as a clerk for the Honorable Leo Strine, the Chief Justice of the Delaware Supreme Court. The legal research skills she learned at WilmU provided a strong foundation for her success in law school and her clerkship. Upon graduation, she'll clerk for Superior Court Judge John A. Parkins Jr., a connection she made through the

law firm where she interned as an undergraduate.

"The Legal Studies program curriculum tracks the concepts in the substantive courses in law school very well," says Joyce. "The program gives you a great foundation and introduces you to material at the undergrad level that will be covered in law school in more depth."

Massuli also credits writing and research skills learned as a Legal Studies student with giving him an advantage in law school. "While other students struggled with learning



*WilmU grads Massuli, Joyce and Brooks attend Delaware Law School of Widener University.*

## GUARANTEED ADMISSION PROGRAM WITH **WIDENER UNIVERSITY DELAWARE LAW SCHOOL**

Students earning a bachelor's degree from Wilmington University who meet the following criteria are guaranteed admission to Widener University Delaware Law School's Juris Doctor (J.D.) program:

- Complete all the requirements for conferral of a Wilmington University baccalaureate degree
- Earn a cumulative undergraduate GPA of 3.5 or higher
- Achieve an LSAT score that meets or exceeds the median LSAT score of the current Delaware Law first year entering class
- Satisfy all law school admissions requirements relating to character and fitness
- Submit a completed application to Delaware Law no later than April 1 of the calendar year in which the student plans to begin legal study

For more information, contact Legal Studies Chair Amy O'Dell at [amy.l.o'dell@wilmu.edu](mailto:amy.l.o'dell@wilmu.edu).

the legal citation system," he says, "I already had exposure to it."

Returning to school at age 30, Massuli completed his Legal Studies degree in just over two years and continued on to law school where he recently completed his second year. At Widener, he jumped in with both feet and is involved with activities like oral argument competitions and honor society events. Massuli completed an internship in former Delaware Governor Jack Markell's office while he was an undergraduate; an experience he says propelled

him toward law school. "The encouragement I received from the staff in the Governor's office was key to my decision to apply to law school," he says. "I would highly recommend a Legal Studies internship to any student interested in pursuing a law degree because it gives you real world interaction and exposure to the legal system."

Having finished his first year of law school as an evening division student, Brooks works at a major law firm in Wilmington. As an undergraduate, he worked as a judicial case processor

for the Justice of the Peace Court.

Brooks, Joyce and Massuli participated in community service activities like the "Wills for Heroes" event, which provides estate planning for first responders. Brooks enjoyed the "provoking and probing" he experienced at the hands of his undergraduate instructors. "The professors are dedicated to their students' success," he says. He especially liked the courses that tied the law to policy issues. "We had some great debates." **WU**

—Lori Stitler

THE NEWS



*From left: Kaitlin Meinhardt, Kimberly Colder, Laurie Guinard*

**DID YOU KNOW?...**

Fun facts compiled by University Relations

WILMU HAS ENTERED THE SCIENCES WITH ITS NEW, HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL, ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE AND POLICY DEGREE PROGRAM?

Watch Chair **MILTON MULDROW'S** two TEDx talks on YouTube.



FORTY PERCENT OF **DELAWARE EDUCATORS** ARE WILMU GRADS?



# WINNING RESEARCH

**I**ntrigued by the opportunity to do original research, **KIMBERLY COLDER, LAURIE GUINARD** and **KAITLIN MEINHALDT** each responded to Dr. Johanna Bishop's invitation to become part of a research team, selecting human trafficking as their topic. Then the hard work began.

All three were from the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences: Colder in the Administration of Human Services graduate program; Meinhardt, a Behavioral Science undergrad; and Guinard, who was studying Psychology. Yet they didn't know one another. That would all change as they spent hours reviewing the literature, poring over locally published articles about human trafficking, constructing interview questions, and conducting survey research to gauge the level of awareness in New Castle County about human trafficking.

The team surveyed citizens at the WilmU library, on Main Street in Newark — even at a local Walmart. They interviewed professionals in the field, volunteers with faith-based organizations, and attended meetings conducted by the Delaware Human Trafficking Coordinating Council. Transcribing and coding all the data was the final step before writing the research paper, *Exploring the Dark Side of the World As We Know It: A Descriptive Case Study of Human Trafficking Awareness in a Mid-Atlantic State*.

The paper was accepted by the Eastern Sociological Society for presentation at its January conference in Philadelphia. Months of research and writing culminated in the students and Dr. Bishop presenting portions of their research at three separate sessions.

PHOTO BY RON DUBICK

Colder, who graduated in May 2017 and is applying to doctoral programs in counseling psychology, describes the research process as “a rigorous experience,” but she enjoyed meeting professionals from other universities around the country at the conference.

Guinard was motivated to join the project. She says she would be “learning the reality of doing research.” She plans

**The team interviewed professionals in the field, volunteers with faith-based organizations, and attended meetings conducted by the Delaware Human Trafficking Coordinating Council.**

to complete her undergraduate degree in January 2018, then pursue a graduate degree in mental health counseling.

Meinhardt graduated from WilmU in January 2017 and plans to study Human Sexuality in graduate school. At the conference, she not only learned about current research findings but also intriguing research methods like ethnography. “This experience definitely prepared me for grad school — research, writing, applying the skills that we learned — will all be valuable to me,” she says. “This project is a real-world application of knowledge.”

And to Dr. Bishop, who the team calls a teacher and mentor, they say, “Thanks for a great experience.” **WU**

—Lori Sitrler

FIFTY-FOUR PERCENT OF WILMU ALUMNI PLAN TO COMPLETE ADDITIONAL DEGREE OR CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS IN THE FUTURE?

Fall Block I is a great time to return to class!



WILMU ADOPTED MASCOT WILEY D. WILDCAT IN 1968?

He made his official debut at a 2009 women's basketball game.



# Survivor

**B**orn in South Vietnam in 1957, Wilmington University Professor **DR. THAN LAM** survived the Vietnam War. Now he's living in the land of opportunity.

"That is what I always tell people close to me," says Dr. Lam. "If you are looking for opportunities, they are right here in America, especially compared to where I came from."

Where he came from was a country controlled by Communism following the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, and the withdrawal of U.S. troops. His father, who died of a heart problem when Dr. Lam was 12, was a sergeant in the South Vietnamese Army, fighting alongside American soldiers. When the Communists took over South Vietnam, his family members were considered traitors, and Dr. Lam was sent to one of the many "reeducation camps," along with millions of others.

For three years, he worked on

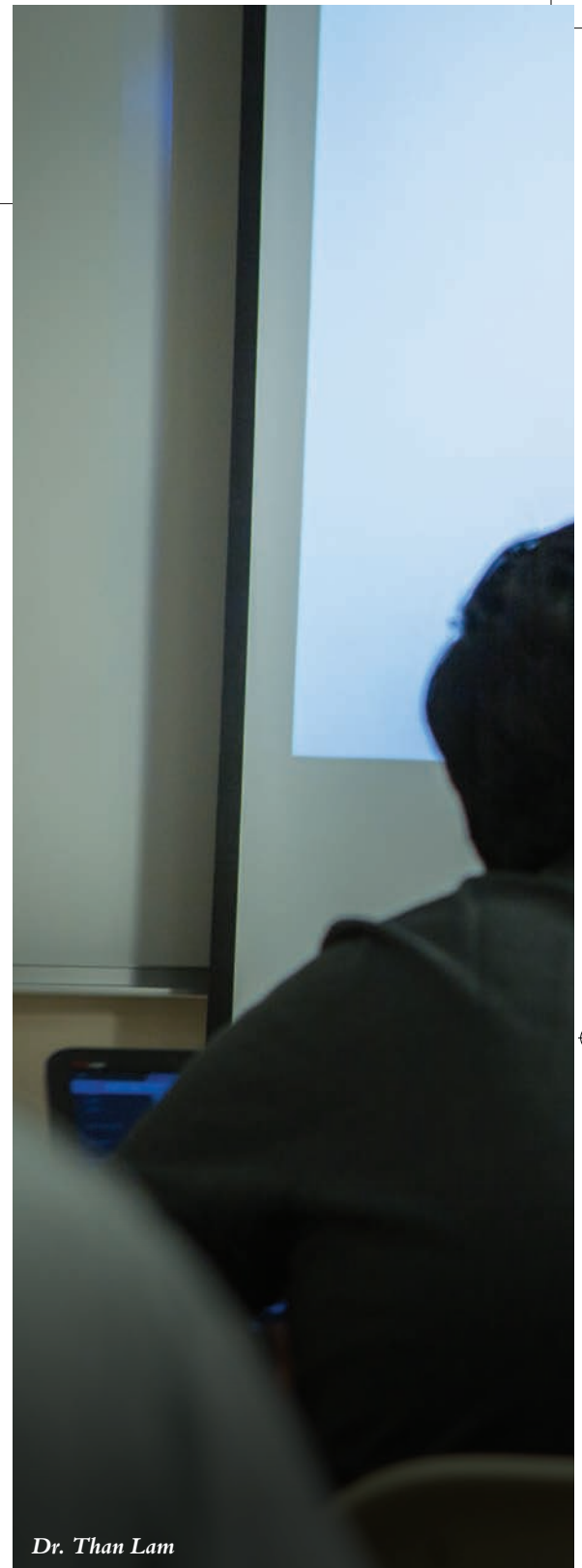
crews rebuilding railroads destroyed during the war. Meanwhile, he and his siblings looked for ways to escape Vietnam.

In 1979, their chance came in the form of a 30-foot wooden boat bound for Malaysia. They joined the mass exodus of "boat people" — hundreds of thousands of refugees who set sail from Vietnam in various crafts. Many failed to survive the passage, facing hardship and danger from pirates, over-crowded boats, and storms.

There were 58 people crammed into Dr. Lam's boat, which drifted in the South China Sea for two weeks. He estimates that they had enough food for only two or three days.

"A lot of cargo ships passed us," he says, "but no one wanted to pick us up." Finally, they were spotted by a U.S. Navy search plane, which dropped a box of food and water to them. Three days later, a Norwegian super tanker, apparently alerted by the U.S., took the refugees aboard.

"All my life," says Dr. Lam, "I wanted to touch American soil." After several months in a Singapore refugee camp, and through the auspices of the Norwegian and U.S. governments, he achieved that goal in January of 1980. Sponsored by a Protestant church, he and his siblings were resettled in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He spoke little

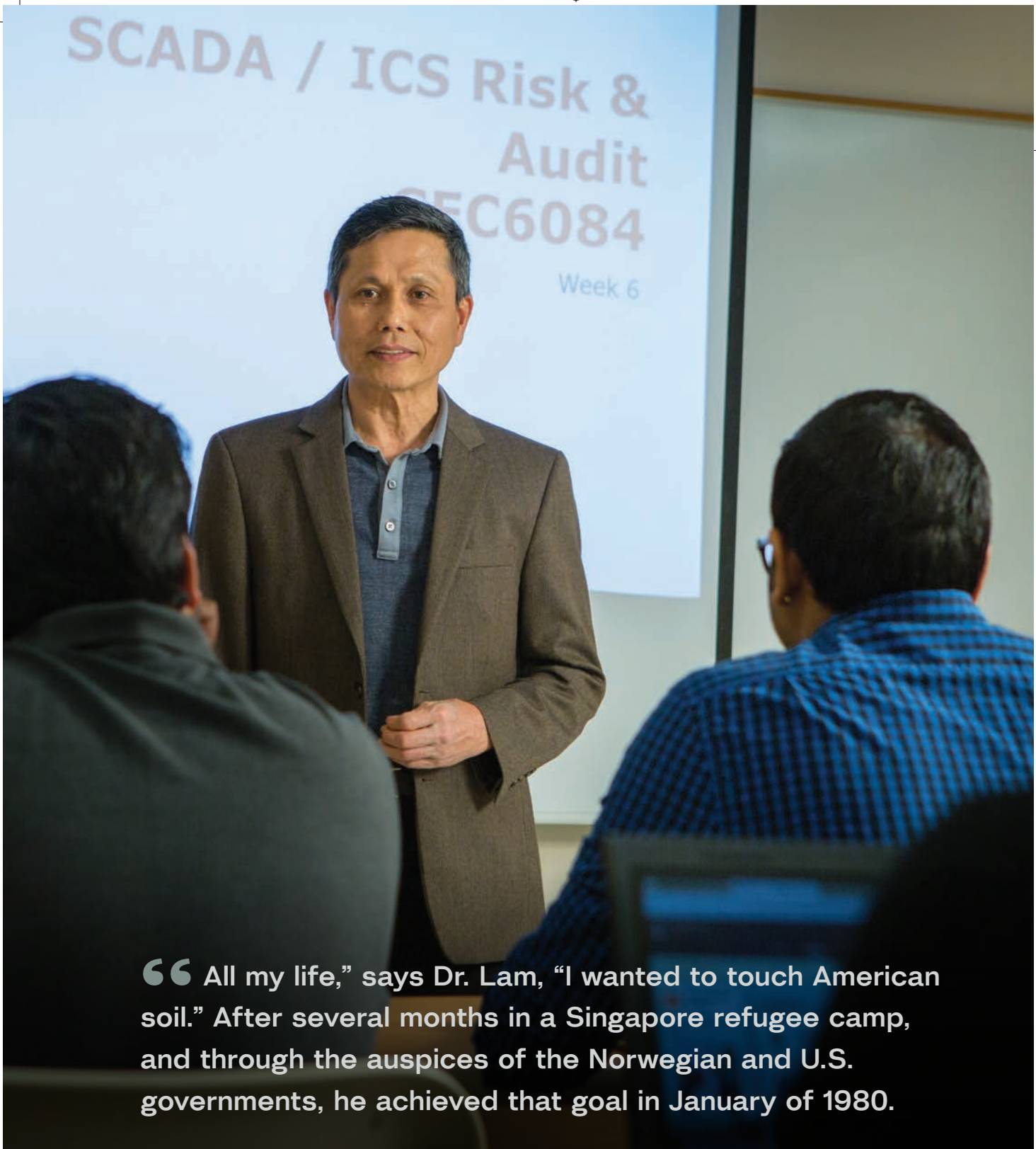


*Dr. Than Lam*

English, so he had to take menial jobs like washing dishes in restaurants.

Over the next four decades, his odyssey took him to Albany, New York, the Bronx, Philadelphia and New Jersey. Along the way, he accumulated academic degrees and honors and extensive industry





“All my life,” says Dr. Lam, “I wanted to touch American soil.” After several months in a Singapore refugee camp, and through the auspices of the Norwegian and U.S. governments, he achieved that goal in January of 1980.

experience in systems and software engineering and management information.

In 2014, he joined the University’s College of Technology as an adjunct and became full-time last year.

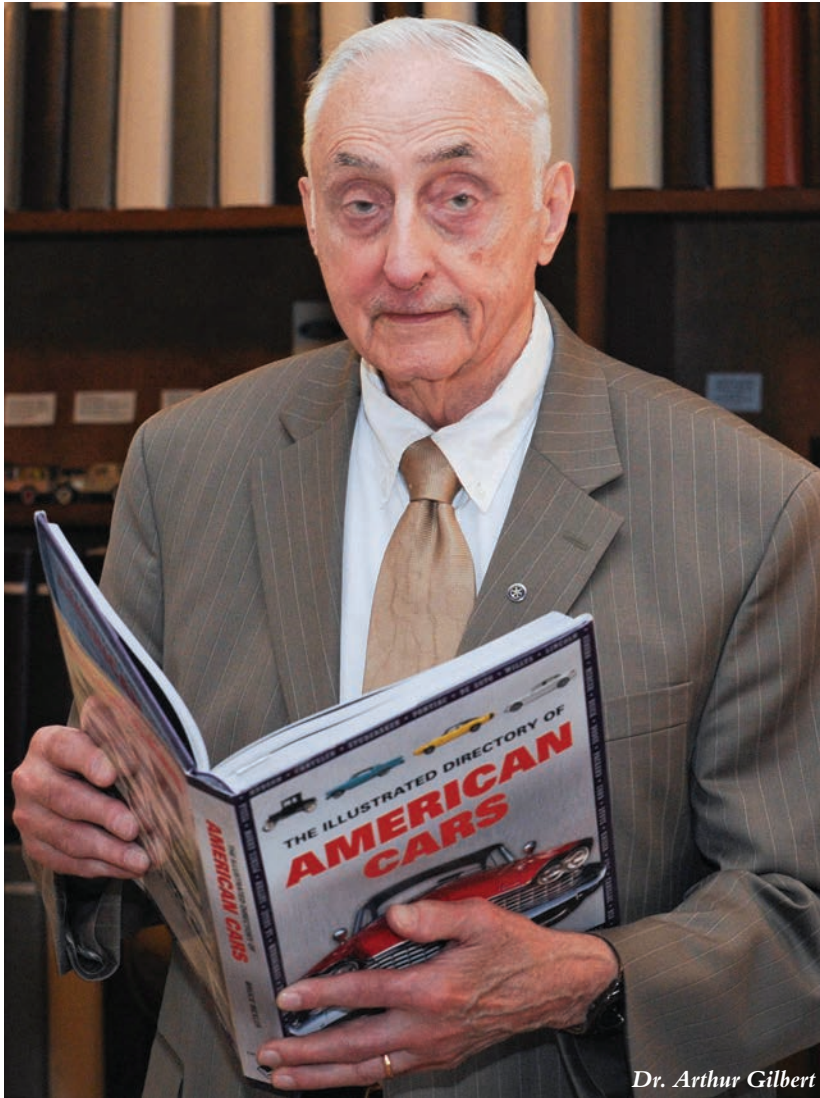
Dr. Lam achieved U.S. citizenship in 1985 and married in 1989. He and

his wife, who live in Barrington, New Jersey, have two sons and two daughters, all in their 20s. His daughters are studying for their master’s degrees at WilmU.

Five years ago, Dr. Lam was struck with bone cancer, but he is now cancer-free.

He likes to say it has taken him 40 years to learn English, and he still has an accent, but he is articulate in summarizing his life: “I feel I was born three times. Once, at my birth, second, when I came to America, and third, when I beat cancer.” **WU**

—Bob Yearick



PHOTOS BY SUSAN L. GREGG

Dr. Arthur Gilbert





# Revved Up

**D**R. ARTHUR GILBERT remembers exactly when his love affair with automobile advertising began. It was an ad for the Nash Ambassador in a January 1954 issue of "Time." The teenage Gilbert saw the ad for the red four-door sedan, photographed against a scenic Arizona landscape, and he was hooked.

Today, Dr. Gilbert is coordinator of the Adjunct Graduate Program at Wilmington University's downstate campuses, and the proud owner of a massive collection of automobile ads dating back to the carriages and wagons of the 1880s. The collection, which he plans to donate to the University for display at the Dover campus, extends to automobile books, magazines, die cast models of vehicles, even riding clothes. He estimates that it comprises 50,000 items.

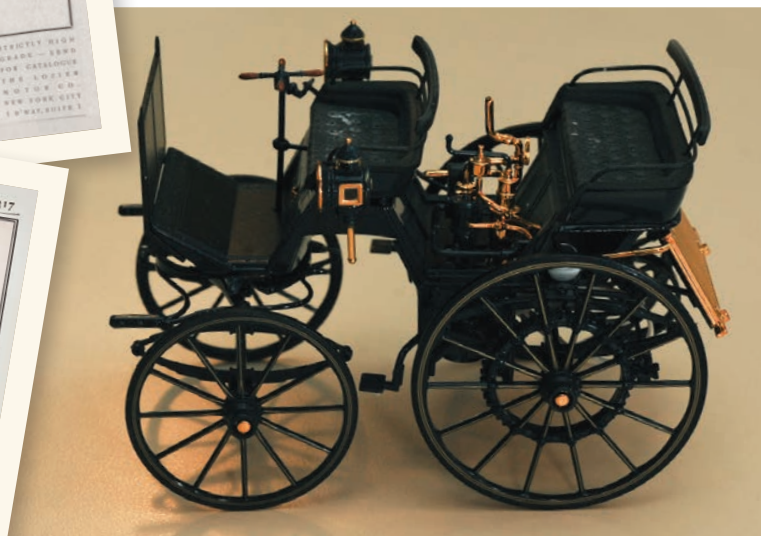
In accumulating his collection, he's also become an expert

on the history of the automobile, and for the past few years he has shared that knowledge through the WilmU Library website in the form of "Dr. Art's Auto Ramblings." The "Ramblings," which began as a two-page newsletter for monthly meetings of the Historical Vintage Car Club of Delaware, now run 300, 400, even 500 pages each. The library digitizes the articles, posts them, and catalogs them.

They've become an important resource for researchers worldwide, according to Library Director Jim McCloskey. "This is in keeping with one of the University's strategic initiatives — Expanding Opportunity and increasing the visibility of the University," McCloskey says. "It's very exciting for that reason as well as the fact that, while the traditional role of the library is as a collector, we've become a de facto publisher. And there are very few libraries that focus on the topic of automobile advertising."

Dr. Gilbert does most of his research and writing on weekends. His current focus: an article about defunct automobiles from the 1920s and '30s. So far, he has about 400 pages of typed notes.

Says the indefatigable 81-year-old: "I estimate that this large one will take me about a year to do. I'm hoping to complete it by August." WU



# Dr. Muldrow to Participate in Florida Keys Study

Dr. Milton Muldrow



PHOTO BY SUSAN L. GREGG

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has asked Wilmington University Assistant Professor **DR. MILTON MULDROW** to participate in a continuing study of the Florida Keys coral reef ecosystem.

The request comes as a result of Dr. Muldrow's doctoral dissertation, *Assessing Reef Experts' Baseline and Values Regarding the Florida Keys Ecosystem: Implications for Historical Ecological Knowledge of the Region*.

Completed last December, his study establishes a consensus baseline for the Florida Reef, something that had not been done previously.

Dr. Muldrow will be included in the NOAA's "bethnic" (sea floor) calls along with other top scientists in the field as they look to establish baselines for the largest barrier reef ecosystem in the United States.

A native of Baltimore, Dr. Muldrow joined WilmU's College of Arts and Sciences last September. He started and is chair of the University's four-year Environmental Science and Policy Program. **WU**

Shallow water colony of the great star coral, *Montastraea cavernosa*, in 15 feet of water.



PHOTO BY JOHN REED/NOAA

# Living the Mission

Wilmington University makes education affordable and accessible for working adults.

**#1** most affordable private, nonprofit institution\* in the region

**60%** less student loan debt than the US average

**17:1** Low student-to-faculty ratio

**87%** of WilmU students work full-time or part-time

**150+** accredited, career-focused degree and certificate programs

**72%** of WilmU students are over the age of 25

"Education shouldn't be a one-time deal. We should continue to learn throughout our lives.

Wilmington University makes that possible." — *U.S. Senator Tom Carper*

Accredited by



Learn more at [wilmu.edu/Impact](http://wilmu.edu/Impact)

\* based on published 2016-17 tuition rates  
Sources: Delaware Department of Labor | National Center for Education Statistics

# Avid Alumna

“Wilmington University is the best place ever!”  
Based on  
**LAUREN HALE’S**

enthusiasm, that sentence almost requires two exclamation points. Hale fell in love with the University at first sight — orientation, 2009 — and her experience as a student and alumna has only deepened that ardor.

Much of her initial passion was the result of a welcoming talk by Dr. Stefanie Whitby, then director of Alumni Relations Services and now senior director of the University Partnership Center. At the orientation, Hale expressed interest in a proposed Student Alumni Association. She was invited to the first meeting, where, she says with typical enthusiasm, “I had a blast.”

She subsequently became chapter chair and continues to serve in that post today. “Our mission is to bridge the gap between students and alumni,” Hale says. “We encourage students and recent alumni to join the chapter that is closest to their location.”

Alumni Relations Associate Stacey Stickel points out that all alumni are considered part of the Alumni Association. “There are approximately 300 active members who regularly attend chapter meetings and events,” she says. “The seven chapters are based on geography: New Castle County, Kent and Sussex, Pennsylvania,

New Jersey, Maryland, Pi Gamma Mu (honor society affinity chapter) and the Student Alumni Association.”

Chapters host various events throughout the year. In Maryland, for instance, it’s the Crab Feast, and in Pennsylvania it’s Spirit of Philadelphia Boat Cruise. Hale ticks off the Student Alumni Association’s major events: Spring Fest, Kick-off the Semester Social at Iron Hill Brewery, Pause for a Cause, I Love WilmU Week, and Making Strides Against Breast Cancer 5K.

Hale received her bachelor’s in Criminal Justice in 2010 and a master’s in Homeland Security and Information Assurance in 2012. Her take on her student experience is typically impassioned: “Great instructors. Best place I could’ve ever been while having a full-time job. You can work around your schedule — online classes, night classes, Saturday classes.”

A resident of Mantua, New Jersey, Hale is senior account and marketing manager at Hire Edge Logistics Personnel in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

“Being part of the Alumni Association has helped me grow my leadership and networking skills,” she says. “There have been opportunities afforded to me in leadership and networking that I would have not gotten anywhere else and have truly shaped me into the professional I am today.” **WU**

—Bob Yearick



Lauren Hale



# FAREWELL, DR. VARSALONA



2017

BY MARIA HESS

Dr. Jack Varsalona retired last month, ending his distinguished career as President of Wilmington University. We explore his life, career successes, and hopes for the future.

It was the last time Dr. Jack Varsalona would take the stage as President at a Wilmington University graduation. There he stood this past May, presenting diplomas and holding back tears, realizing perhaps more lucidly that this chapter of his life was ending.

He had always been emotional at commencement exercises. It didn't matter that Dr. Varsalona had conferred more than 38,000 degrees since taking the helm in 2005. Each graduate had a story. Several were the first in their families to earn college degrees. Many studied while holding down full-time jobs and raising children. Others came to learn new skills to advance in their fields. Some were 25; others 65. Dr. Varsalona understood students who overcame obstacles because he overcame a few himself.



Colleagues attribute the University's collaborative culture to the former President's sense of fairness, and his business acumen for its considerable growth. Yet it takes more than business acumen to succeed in higher education, particularly at a unique institution

like Wilmington University, where students come first. It takes humanity, empathy, and a genuine belief that every man and woman who works hard, no matter who may have undervalued them before, deserves a chance.

Dr. Varsalona's benevolence was cultivated early on, long before he first came to then Wilmington College as an adjunct in 1983. "He's so sincere in his sympathy toward other people," says former Wilmington University Board of Trustees Chairman Irénée du Pont Jr., a board member since 1973. "He's gracious, modest, responsive, firm and above all, thorough. He learned the principles of business and ethics in his early childhood."

Those principles would shape the leader he became.



## Humble Beginnings

**B**orn in 1948 to James and Rose Varsalona, Jack Varsalona grew up in a row home in a blue-collar Italian neighborhood in Trenton, New Jersey. James, an accountant, was born in Italy; Rose was born in the United States a year after her parents emigrated from Italy. Dr. Varsalona had no siblings but did have 12 cousins, and they gathered at family homes every week.

It was a nice way to grow up, he says, speaking of his close-knit family, as well as an era when neighbors were neighborly and the bonds of loyalty and trust strong.

He's still in touch with classmates from St. James Elementary — about 30 of the 45-member class showed up at a recent reunion — and from Notre Dame High School, where he made All-State in football, was senior class president and graduated as salutatorian (the student who usually has the second highest rank in a graduating class

and delivers the salutatory address at commencement).

At the time, most young men from blue-collar neighborhoods finished high school, then found jobs to help support their families. The Varsalonas were different. James and his brother-in-law, John, served in World War II: James in the Philippines and John in Europe. Both attended college on the GI Bill. They learned the hard way that education was a privilege. So the young Jack Varsalona didn't have a choice: He was going to college.

The slightly rebellious teenager could've veered off the road to academia. One summer during college, he took a well-paying job driving a bulldozer. "I told my father I didn't know if I wanted to go back to college because it was paying so well," he says. "And I showed up to work that Monday and they wouldn't let me on the bulldozer."

That was thanks to James, who was involved in all aspects of his son's life — including construction sites. Both

he and Rose were ardent supporters of their son until their passing 15 years ago — just eight months apart. They wanted him to attend college away from the distractions of Trenton, and because Dr. Varsalona was an outstanding football player (defensive lineman), he chose to attend the University of Delaware.

That's where he met his longtime friend and fellow New Jerseyite, Joe Purzycki — an equally exceptional scholarship player (defensive back, and later, captain) — while they were signing up for freshman classes.

"Guys in the '60s from New Jersey wore black leather jackets," says Purzycki. "So I see this guy with a black leather jacket, and I walk up to him and say, 'Hey, where are you from?' He said he was from Trenton and we became fast friends. Jack was very gregarious from the first time I met him."

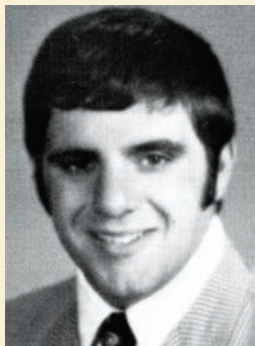
They became roommates, then eventually pledged Theta Chi fraternity. All the frat brothers agreed that Dr. Varsalona should run for



**1968**  
At UD, Dr. Varsalona was interfraternity council president, which governed 10 fraternities and eight sororities.

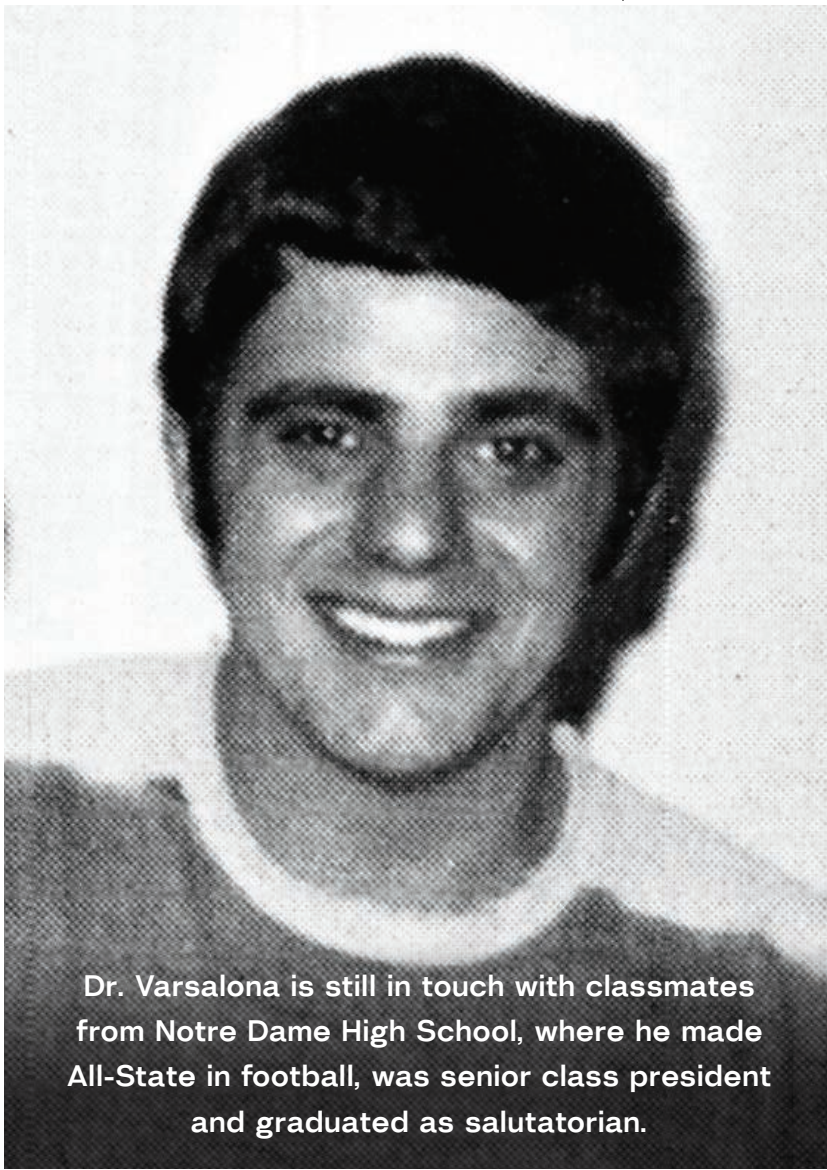


**1968**  
Dr. Varsalona during his college days at the University of Delaware, where he pledged Theta Chi fraternity.



**1983**  
Dr. Varsalona becomes an adjunct for then Wilmington College.





Dr. Varsalona is still in touch with classmates from Notre Dame High School, where he made All-State in football, was senior class president and graduated as salutatorian.

fraternity president, but he assumed the higher office of interfraternity council president instead, in his senior year. UD's interfraternity council governed 10 fraternities and eight sororities, all of which were highly competitive.

"When people are young and headstrong," says Purzycki, "some solve problems through a show of bravado. But Jack was the conciliator. He could take any two groups, sit them down, and get them to come together."

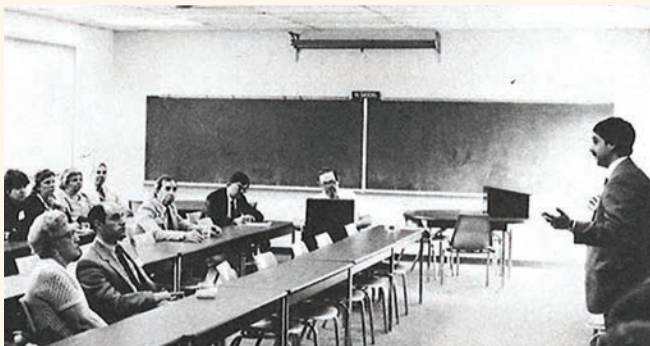
Purzycki adds that while Dr. Varsalona suffered a severe shoulder injury that cost him his football career, he continued to support the 1969 Blue Hens and remained close with then head football coach Harold R. "Tubby" Raymond. As interfraternity council president, Dr. Varsalona also was asked to teach math and job skills to UD's cafeteria staff and fell in love with teaching. He earned three degrees at UD: a bachelor's in History; a master's in Education; and an Ed.D.

1983

Dr. Varsalona teaches his first course at then Wilmington College's Dover site. (PSY 318)

1987

Dr. Varsalona is named Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty.

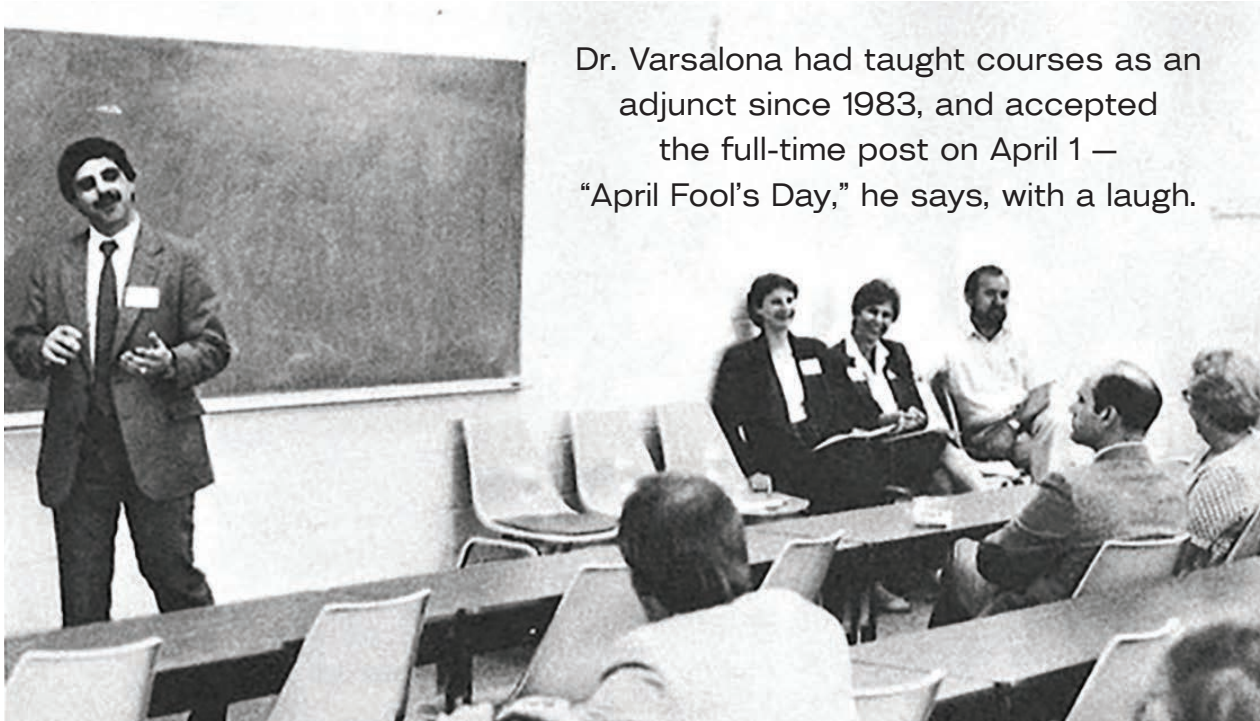


Faculty and staff look on at the first step of College expansion.



## Building a College and Curriculum

Under the direction of the College's new Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Jack Varsalona, the faculty takes a new look at its curriculum goals and a core curriculum to meet these goals. In 1987, the College places new emphasis on meeting the individual needs of students while preparing them for both further education and immediate careers. In addition to the new curriculum the New Castle Campus will have a new look. And these changes began with a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Student Center in early spring. Many prominent members of the Wilmington College Faculty, Staff and other community citizens viewed the exciting event.



Dr. Varsalona had taught courses as an adjunct since 1983, and accepted the full-time post on April 1 — “April Fool’s Day,” he says, with a laugh.

in Educational Leadership.

Purzycki became a widely respected head football coach at Delaware State University, then pursued a career in banking, ending as COO and vice chairman of Barclaycard US. Dr. Varsalona stayed

with his alma mater at first, serving as its director of Development. Then in 1981, he became special assistant to Delaware Gov. Pierre (Pete) S. du Pont IV, serving as a liaison for the Delaware Education Commission, the National Task Force on Education for

Economic Growth, and the National Governor’s Association’s Education Committee. He continued with the state for six more years, aiding various departments and finishing as executive assistant to the State Superintendent of Schools.



1990

**1991**  
Dr. Varsalona is promoted to Executive Vice President.



2000

**1993**  
Dr. Varsalona is flanked by nursing faculty upon the initiation of the MSN program.

**2005**

Dr. Varsalona is named President of then Wilmington College. He poses with daughters Dr. Jacque Varsalona and Jamie Meanor.

President Varsalona at the New Castle campus in front of the iconic bell tower.



When the time came to contemplate new career opportunities, Dr. Varalsona considered several prestigious job offers. None were as altruistic as the one he accepted.

## The WilmU Years

In 1987, then Wilmington College President Dr. Audrey Doberstein recruited Dr. Varsalona for the position of vice president for Academic Affairs. He had taught courses as an adjunct since 1983, but met with Dr. Doberstein to accept the full-time post on April 1 — “April Fool’s Day,” he says, with a laugh. (His formal hire date was April 6, 1987.)

His high profile work in both the public and private sectors had appealed to Dr. Doberstein, but that wasn’t the main reason she hired him. “It was really because he had such a great reputation as an adjunct,” she says. “We got rave reviews about his teaching. His work as education liaison for Pete du Pont was certainly a factor, but when I met him, I could tell immediately that he had all the

qualities we needed to fit into our culture.”

It was a caring culture; one that supported an underserved population: working adults who needed flexible schedules and affordable tuition. While many universities today target this demographic, it was a revolutionary concept at the time. Dr. Doberstein cared about all students and believed in giving opportunities to all students, says Dr. Varsalona. “That’s really what attracted me to the job. I learned everything about higher education from her.”

“That’s very flattering,” says Dr. Doberstein. “But Jack is incredibly smart (he is a member of Mensa) and a great communicator. He understands what people need to be inspired and work toward goals. He gets people thinking about what’s important.”

Wilmington College was a traditional school for its first 10 years. “But it was Audrey who saw the need to serve working adults,” says Dr. Varsalona. “She wanted an Education degree, and I told her I wanted to

make that happen. So the following September, we had our first master’s program in School Leadership.” (Many academic programs followed.)

The two worked and brainstormed together in the same office for six years, a period both call “very collegial.” Dr. Varsalona was promoted to executive vice president and provost in 1991. When Dr. Doberstein retired 14 years later, he assumed the presidency.

His work enhanced student services and created an active educational community that supported excellence both inside and outside the classroom. Under his leadership, enrollment grew from 10,222 in 2005 to more than 21,000 in 2017; locations increased from four to 11, expanding to New Jersey and Maryland; 118 online programs were developed, making WilmU a regional pioneer in distance learning; and in 2007, to better reflect its strong strategic plan and evolving nature, Wilmington College became Wilmington University.





*Dr. Varsalona celebrates with scholarship recipients at the first Green & White Scholarship Ball in 2008.*

**2005**

Former Board of Trustees Chair Irénée du Pont Jr. (left) and the late Harry Lynch, also a Trustee.



**2007**

Dr. Varsalona and college partners commemorate the opening of WilmU's three New Jersey sites: Burlington, Salem and Cumberland.

**2005**

Former Provost Dr. Betty Caffo, former Wilmington College President Dr. Audrey Doberstein and Marcie Wilson (retired) help cut the presidential confection.



According to Delaware Gov. John Carney, “Jack has enabled so many Delawareans to advance in their careers because his focus has primarily been on working students. One of the biggest challenges we face in Delaware is developing a workforce that will enable our businesses to be competitive in the future so that we can attract good businesses. That’s the important role Wilmington University provides for Delaware.”

Carney’s predecessor, Jack Markell, agrees. “It’s difficult to think about Wilmington University without thinking about Jack Varsalona,” he says. “And it’s difficult to think about education in Delaware without thinking of him.”

U.S. Senator Chris Coons calls Dr. Varsalona the sort of “value-centered leader who patiently and persistently leads others to value diversity and inclusion, to reach for a higher level of education in our community, and to make a lasting difference.”

## The Heart of the Matter

Dr. Varsalona’s vision spurred monumental success for Wilmington University, though he credits its staff and faculty. “They know how to work together,” he says. “They come up with solutions that improve the lives of students, and they’re so focused on our mission.”

His statewide counterparts consider him one of Delaware’s influential leaders in education. Dr. Mark Brainard, president of Delaware Technical Community College and a WilmU alumnus, says Dr. Varsalona has succeeded by being informational and “always placing value on relationships.” Goldey-Beacom College President Dr. Gary Wirt calls him “a master at helping to meet the needs of working students in a way they can afford and schedule.” Another WilmU alumnus, Dr. Fred Keating, president of Rowan College at Gloucester County, says Dr. Varsalona possesses one of the most significant leadership traits: “the desire and ability to nurture future leaders.”

U. S. Sen. Tom Carper has worked with Dr. Varsalona for years, joining forces to serve the Boys & Girls Clubs of Delaware. (Dr. Varsalona worked with many community organizations for decades and earned multiple service awards.) “So many kids don’t have good role models or they live in unsafe communities, and he’s been a very generous supporter,” says Carper. “He’s got a good mind, a good heart and a great sense of humor.”

Dr. Varsalona’s longtime WilmU colleagues — those who’ve worked with him throughout his entire tenure — think it was his emotional intelligence that influenced the University’s collaborative culture. When they saw limitations, he saw opportunities. Both Dana L. Abbott-Painter, an employee since 1983, and Deborah Morris, since 1987, say he’s always recognized employees’ accomplishments instead of touting his own. Mark Paris (1981) commends him for the University’s growth and for caring about “all those who made the University what it is.”





*The award-winning WilmU cheerleaders surround the former President.*

Alice Corning (1983) first met Dr. Varsalona at WilmU's Dover Air Force Base site when he was an adjunct. "Nothing ever bothered him," she says, "even when we played musical classrooms at the last minute." As time progressed and he became President, Corning adds, Dr. Varsalona visited

classes throughout the state. "He takes care of everyone the same way he'd want to be taken care of."

His successor, Dr. LaVerne Harmon, who became President of Wilmington University this month, says that Dr. Varsalona took advantage of every opportunity to make a difference

in the lives of students. "He empowered colleagues to do their best, and he was secure enough within himself to let others shine," she says. "I admire his courage, sensitivity and intelligence, and the way he led by example. When he made a tough decision, it's because, as he always said, 'It's the right thing to do.'"



## And So We Say Farewell

**D**r. Varsalona wants to be remembered, simply, as someone who cared about people. He's had a happy and fulfilling career at Wilmington University. "There was never a time I dreaded coming to work," he says. "When times were tense, I'd go sit in classrooms. (He visited more than 350 classes a year.) The students kept me grounded because all the things that go on here support that classroom experience."

He calls his WilmU colleagues "the kindest people I've ever known," so saying goodbye as their President was hard. He's an unselfish person. And unselfish people don't view retirement as sad endings for themselves, but rather new beginnings for others.

"It's like a Broadway play," says Dr. Varsalona. "It continues, and the cast changes. I wasn't in the original cast, and I won't be part of the final cast."

For a Broadway show to enjoy a long run, it has to have had a great director. The Honorable Joseph J. Farnan Jr., the chairman of Wilmington University's Board of Trustees, gives Dr. Varsalona a standing ovation, calling him inspirational. "He has real vision in the education world," says Judge Farnan. "He was inclusive. He shared that vision, took input, and inspired others to work as a team and execute the goals of the University."

That's not unlike the frat days when the diplomatic college senior built teams within disparate groups. "He never changed," says Purzycki. "Jack was the person you could trust. He was a loyal friend who would always stand behind you."

Rowan's Dr. Keating, whose Gloucester County college partners with WilmU, believes that leaders inspire cultures. "Jack's style and personality permeated the University," he says. "He built an institution with credible and quality people; one that's accessible and affordable. In today's world, those

are probably the two greatest demands. You put all that in a blender, turn it on, and you've got Wilmington University. And you had in Jack a leader who positioned it to withstand the slings and arrows of the future."

There is someone who might feel Dr. Varsalona's absence even more profoundly than the legions of others he's inspired. Donna Quinn, executive assistant to the President and secretary to the Board of Trustees, has been by Dr. Varsalona's side since 1987, when she first served as his secretary. "I have witnessed first-hand his level of caring and compassion for faculty, staff and students," she says. "He is so genuine and has such a big heart. I'm reminded of his level of humility at every graduation ceremony when he advises the graduates: 'Whatever you do, please don't forget where you came from. Because that's who you are.' He never forgot where he came from. And that's a quality that places him above the rest." **WU**



**2010**

Dr. Varsalona accepts one of what would be numerous awards.

Celebrating the licensure granted by Maryland to offer Middle Level Education degree at Cecil College.



**2014**

Dr. Varsalona chats with The Honorable Joseph J. Farnan Jr., who was named chair of the Wilmington University Board of Trustees.

**2014**  
Dr. LaVerne T. Harmon is named Executive Vice President





# A TRIBUTE TO DR. VARSALONA

PHOTO BY SUSAN L. GREGG





COMPILED AND EDITED BY MARIA HESS | PHOTOS BY PAUL PATTON

## The vice presidents of Wilmington University offer expressions of gratitude to the former President.

### DR. ERIN J. DIMARCO *Senior Vice President*

“My earliest observation of Dr. Jack Varsalona’s leadership was watching him initiate a two-year study on the impact of taking then Wilmington College to the designation of Wilmington University. He wanted to conduct research and understand the impact to constituents and the higher education community. He determined that since Wilmington College met much of the criteria to be considered a university, including having multiple campuses, programs of study ranging from associate to doctoral degrees and more than 11,500 students, assuming University status would allow us to compete on a global scale. What impressed me most was the way he reminded everyone, both internally and externally, that a university status would not change our culture and that we would always be a student-centered institution that offered affordable tuition and quality programs at convenient locations. That was 2007, and those characteristics remain the hallmark of what drives us. He had a unique vision that allowed him to overcome obstacles to advance our institution, embrace change and never become complacent.

At every graduation ceremony, he said that we had the best faculty and deans because they are futurists in their fields; the best communicators and teachers; and people who care genuinely about students. He called the faculty the brains and heart of the institution; and the WilmU staff the masters of student services who offer a level of caring that’s second to none. This is all true, but it’s because of Jack’s leadership. He’s one of the most kindhearted people I know. He wanted all who sought education to have the chance to obtain it. He provided opportunities by challenging his administration, faculty and staff to create relevant programs and deliver outstanding customer service. He reminded us that students had enough to do inside the classroom, so it was our job to make their student service experiences as smooth as possible.

His accomplishments are too numerous to mention and his success speaks for itself. WilmU has grown from 10,000 students to 21,000. Under his leadership, it became a major player, competing with many other Mid-Atlantic institutions. He raised awareness of students’ issues and concerns. He worked to eliminate roadblocks that deterred students — they already had enough hurdles to climb balancing family, work and



Dr. Erin J. DiMarco

school. He visited many classrooms to get direct student feedback and suggestions for improvement. He instructed vice presidents to create new and innovative practices so that WilmU’s image would always be fresh; one that remained progressive and attracted students. He may have held the highest position at the University, but he gained a following because of the person he was (and is), not the title he had.

He was always impeccably dressed and greeted everyone with a smile. He lost no time taking command of his audiences at University meetings — thanks to his witty, often impromptu, remarks. His self-deprecating humor made him relatable. Jack constantly



thanked employees for all they did, and always took a moment to remember those who had passed. He is compassionate and caring, and always had our best interests in mind while making decisions not just for the University, but also for all who worked there.

I thank him sincerely for his devotion and hard work. He's had a huge impact on the University, and it has matured considerably under his direction. He had the foresight to recognize an untapped need by partnering with community colleges in New Jersey and Maryland, which afforded more students the opportunity to obtain advanced degrees.

I can't thank him enough for sharing his wisdom and guidance, and for helping me develop professionally. He trusted me. He gave me opportunities to offer recommendations to improve processes. Thanks to that, I have a newfound confidence in the way I do my job. It's a debt I can never repay, but I plan to honor him by emulating his high standards. He's always given credit where credit was due. He's been a valued mentor and trusted friend, and through his guidance, I became a more effective leader. He gave me the foundation on which to carve my path.

Saying goodbye to him as our President was difficult. But I wish for him all the best in his next chapter. He deserves it! I want him to enjoy his retirement, but to always keep his cell nearby. I may need to call."



Heather O'Connell

**HEATHER O'CONNELL**  
*Senior Vice President & CFO*

“My most vivid memory of Jack was watching him at the end of each graduation ceremony. Tearing up and clearly emotional, he told the graduates — at every ceremony, every time — that they were forever part of the Wilmington University family. Even when I knew it was coming, I find myself completely undone. The fact that a leader could be vulnerable and express his heartfelt emotions in front of a crowd of more than 3,000 always impressed me.

For years, Jack has been an indefatigable champion of low-cost, high-quality higher education for nontraditional students. His commitment to widening access and opportunity for students with few resources has enabled thousands to achieve their dreams and improve the quality of life for themselves and their families.”



**DR. PETER (PETE) BAILEY**  
*Vice President for External and  
International Affairs*

“Dr. Varsalona has a unique ability to make everyone feel like they’re appreciated and special. I remember in the summer of 2001, when I ran into Dr. Varsalona and (former Board of Trustees chair) Mr. Irénée du Pont Jr., in the hallway. Jack asked my opinion about keeping one of the academic programs, and I let him know my thoughts. It was at that moment that I knew he valued every staff and faculty member — and our opinions — and that we all had a voice when it came to the future of the University.

He influenced higher education by making the unique mission of Wilmington University — including low tuition and open enrollment — even more accessible to new students in New Jersey, Maryland and online.

He’s always been honest with me, whether to tell me the good or bad news. I can’t say enough about how much I appreciated that.

I want to tell Jack that his University family will miss him. Under his leadership, we experienced enormous growth in both enrollment and programs, and he has put in place new ideas that will sustain the University. I thank him for making Wilmington University an institution for which I’m proud to be a part.”

“He influenced higher education by making the unique mission of Wilmington University — including low tuition and open enrollment — even more accessible to new students.”



*Dr. Peter Bailey*



*Dr. Eileen Donnelly*

**DR. EILEEN DONNELLY**

*Vice President of Enrollment Management*

“Dr. Varsalona has been an extraordinary leader who built and developed a University culture that those external to the University marveled at and those who worked for treasured.”

“Dr. Varsalona is a brilliant visionary who was deeply committed to Wilmington University’s students, faculty, alumni and staff. He continually looked for ways to demonstrate his gratitude for the commitment and skill of those serving and educating students. He has been an extraordinary leader who built and developed a university culture that those external to the University marveled at and those who worked for treasured.

Dr. Varsalona influenced higher education by focusing on our University mission and sharing how we maintain affordable tuition while increasing enrollment and innovation. He knew that we were and are a unique institution, and he was happy to share the successes of the University he led. He cared about higher education in the state and the country.

One of his dominant traits is his humility. A wise and successful leader, he was quick to recognize the efforts of others and deflect the limelight. He always demonstrated his appreciation for our contributions.

Dr. Varsalona gave his heart and mind to Wilmington University. We have all benefited from his exemplary leadership. I wish him continued happiness and great health as he begins the next chapter of his life. We will miss him very much.”

“Jack taught me to look at problems as challenges, to always give credit to others when things go right, and to take personal responsibility when things go wrong.”

CAROLE PITCHER  
*University Vice President*

“When I first met Jack more than 25 years ago, I immediately noticed his great intelligence and infectious enthusiasm for the mission of what was then Wilmington College. Over time, I learned that he inspired others with his loyalty, integrity and compassion. Jack taught me to look at problems as challenges, to always give credit to others when things go right, and to take personal responsibility when things go wrong.

He never forgot that our students are the reason our University exists. We are here to create opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable. By supporting our students in every way possible — without compromising our academic integrity — he set an example for the entire University. While Jack kept in touch with staff and students by what he terms “managing by walking around,” he was also a visionary who successfully created a university from what was once a small college.

John Quincy Adams said, “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and



*Carole Pitcher*

become more, you are a leader.” If Adams was right, then Jack is one of the greatest leaders I have ever known. Although I’m sad that he’s retiring, he is leaving a great legacy.

I believe that students, faculty and staff have become better people through knowing Jack — I know I have. And I can’t wait to see what Jack Varsalona does next.”



“Like hundreds of people before and after me, Jack offered me a chance to help best contribute to the success of our students and the University. I can’t thank him enough.”



*Christian Trowbridge*

**CHRISTIAN (CHRIS)  
TROWBRIDGE**

*Vice President for Administrative  
and Legal Affairs*

“**W**hen Jack first asked me to manage the legal work for the University, it was a surprise to me. I have since learned that he had an uncanny knack to spot a need and find a solution. The timing of his offer was perfectly matched to the need. Like hundreds of people before and after me, Jack offered me a chance to help best contribute to the success of our students and the University. I can’t thank him enough for identifying my potential to help and extending the opportunity.

I have spoken with many colleagues at other universities, and few have a president as approachable to students, staff and faculty as Dr. Varsalona was. His availability and sincere commitment to students were the hallmarks of his positive influence on higher education. Jack’s longtime message, which expresses that students are customers who deserve the absolute best service we can provide both in and out of the classroom, is now commonplace in higher education.”

## DR. JAMES (JIM) WILSON

*Vice President for  
Academic Affairs*

“Having worked only a few months in higher education and at Wilmington University, I was confronted with a significant personnel matter that had risen to the level of our then provost/vice president for Academic Affairs: Dr. Varsalona. I remember commenting to my wife how this was a first for me, and would essentially be a test of the level of support I would have at the University. It quickly became very apparent that Dr. Varsalona fully supported the position I had taken because the position was, quite simply, in the best interest of our students. What a relief it was to report this to my wife later that day. That was nearly two decades ago.

Dr. Varsalona's support continued throughout my career. Over the years he said to me privately that he wanted me to have a long and successful tenure at the University, and has accordingly offered advice, encouragement and at times, challenge. One example was at a time when my family went through a season of significant, major and even life-threatening challenges. Throughout this period, Dr. Varsalona made it quite evident, through words and deeds, of his and the University's support for my entire family. For this, I shall always be grateful.

His support of others extended well beyond my personal story, and there are myriad examples of his generous support of faculty, staff,



*Dr. James Wilson*

“Dr. Varsalona made it quite evident, through words and deeds, of his and the University's support for my entire family. For this, I shall always be grateful.”

students and the community. Under his presidential leadership, the reputation of Wilmington University's level of care for individuals, handed to him from former President Doberstein, will extend far into the future. Of particular note are the many scholarships he personally awarded to students. I'm aware of several friends who had received such scholarships without my knowledge. Each of these

individuals would not have begun, no less completed, a college degree without such generosity.

As Jack — he always wanted to be called by his first name — moves into his retirement, may he draw much satisfaction, encouragement and gratification from the influence he has had on me, my family and so many others that will extend through many generations.” **WU**

BY JOHN GRAY | PHOTOS BY PAUL PATTON

Wilmington University's Ed.D. in **Educational Leadership** expands to include concentrations in Teacher Leadership and School Leadership, making the program more practical for educators who want to lead — and remain at the school level.

# A PROMISING — AND PRACTICAL — PATH FOR EDUCATION LEADERS





***“All teachers should be leaders, and all leaders should be teachers.”***

from “The Secrets and Simple Truths of High-Performing School Cultures,”  
by Cathy J. Lassiter

**F**irst, a little history: *Doctor* is an academic title that originates from the Latin verb *docēre*, which means “to teach.” The term doctorate is derived from the Latin *doceō*, which means “I teach.”

The first Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree was established at Harvard University in 1921. The degree was designed to be comparable to other professional doctorates, such as those in divinity, law and medicine. Ed.D. programs have grown steadily in the U.S. and worldwide since 1921, and the degree is now awarded in the U.S. to about 10,000 students annually. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, this is approximately the same number of doctorates awarded in engineering, slightly more than are awarded in the biological/biomedical sciences, but fewer than in the legal professions (about 44,000) and the health professions (about 67,000).



*Educators want to lead, but they also want to remain at the school level.*

Wilmington University launched its first doctoral degree program in the late '80s, the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Innovation. It was designed to fill a need in Delaware and the region for school district leaders (superintendents and school system administrators) who possessed the knowledge and skills needed to effectively lead and manage complex public school systems. As such, the degree program has been very successful. Several hundred educators in the region have completed the

degree over the last quarter century and have assumed school district leadership positions.

But things are changing.

A growing number of educators are now expressing a desire to earn a doctorate that can also address school-based issues rather than one designed only to prepare school superintendents. Those educators want to lead, but they also want to remain at the school level, and they're not particularly interested in engaging in the political and administrative tasks required of school

system administrators. Until now very few options have been available to those educators, even though newer school-based career paths are beginning to emerge, primarily due to the widespread adoption of "distributed leadership" principles and practices. This has produced new opportunities for school-based educators, such as instructional coaches, professional development coordinators, interventionists, curriculum and assessment specialists, learning environment coordinators,



began to drift away from the hard work of identifying and solving real problems, preferring to place greater emphasis on theory, research and dissertation-related coursework.

While these elements certainly have a place in doctoral studies, we have to remember that successful professional educators spend far less time *doing* original research and publishing scholarly articles than on *applying* research to improving the teaching, learning and leadership environment.

To counter this trend, about 10 years ago, 80 highly regarded institutions of higher education — including Drexel and Johns Hopkins in the Mid-Atlantic region — joined an initiative known as the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate. The initiative received substantial funding from the Carnegie Foundation and the U.S. Department

of Education and is now headquartered at the University of Pittsburgh.

Through a collaborative, authentic process, the CPED developed a Framework for Ed.D. program design/redesign that supports the creation of quality, rigorous practitioner preparation programs while honoring the local context of individual institutions. The CPED Framework consists of three components: a new definition of the Ed.D.; a set of guiding principles for program development; and a set of design-concepts. All serve as program building blocks.

WilmU's College of Education used the CPED framework to design its "refreshed" and expanded Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and did so in ways that should better meet the needs of 21st-century scholar-practitioners at all levels. Dr. Joe Crossen, program chair, is leading this effort with support from College of Education faculty,

A growing number of educators are now expressing a desire to earn a doctorate that can also address **school-based issues** rather than one designed only to prepare school superintendents.

turn-around principals, home-school coordinators, charter school directors and others. WilmU's new Ed.D. program in Education Leadership provides candidates with pathways that could lead to those positions.

It's important to note that the Ed.D. degree is a *professional* doctorate, and was originally focused on producing scholarly practitioners who could use their knowledge and skills to tackle and resolve tough issues related to teaching, learning and leadership. Over time, however, some programs

*WilmU's College of Education used the CPED framework to design its "refreshed" and expanded Ed.D. in Educational Leadership.*





**“The newly-redesigned Wilmington University doctoral program in Educational Leadership affords public school practitioners many unique opportunities.”**

—Dr. Henry Wagner

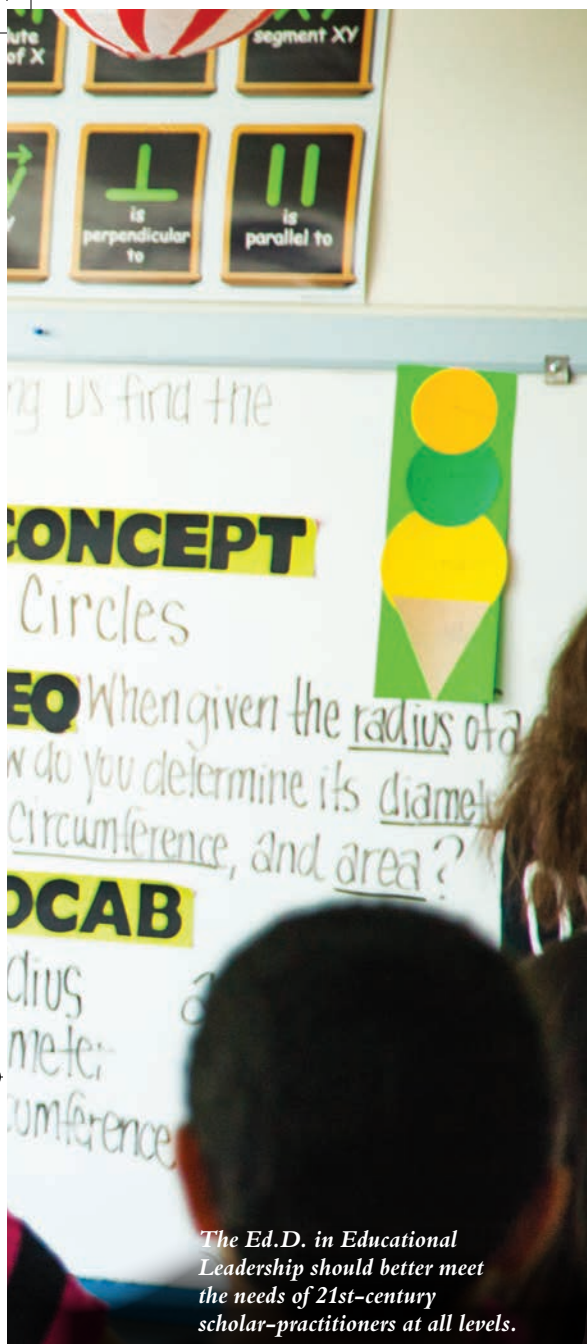
and Dr. Kathi Brown, director of Advanced Programs.

The College of Education believes that the potential value of this new program is very high. The program has been reviewed with several school superintendents in Delaware and the region, and the response has been positive.

“The truth is, there have always been teachers who were leaders,” says Matt Burrows, Appoquinimink School District’s superintendent of schools. “What was lacking was a process that intentionally prepared for, supported and recognized the role of teacher leader; accommodated their unique voice and contributions;

and didn’t require that they leave the classroom and become an administrator in order to be a change agent.”

According to Dr. Henry Wagner, superintendent of schools for Dorchester County Schools in Maryland, “The newly-redesigned Wilmington University doctoral program in Educational Leadership affords public school practitioners many unique opportunities. Specifically, the program provides working professionals with a hybrid model of inquiry that features flexibility and real-world applications. Principals



*The Ed.D. in Educational Leadership should better meet the needs of 21st-century scholar-practitioners at all levels.*

and those interested in leadership will be able to develop solutions to challenging issues in collaboration with district leadership. This model provides, therefore, a meaningful research pathway that will lead to positive tangible outcomes.” **WU**

*Dr. John Gray is dean of Wilmington University’s College of Education. Applications for the 2017–18 cohort of the Ed.D. program opened in May. For more information, contact Dr. Crossen at [joseph.l.crossen@wilmu.edu](mailto:joseph.l.crossen@wilmu.edu) or Dr. Brown at [kathryn.m.brown@wilmu.edu](mailto:kathryn.m.brown@wilmu.edu). Or visit [wilmu.edu](http://wilmu.edu).*

## FEATURES OF WILMU’S “REFRESHED” ED.D. IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM:

- Candidates can personalize their degree programs depending on individual scholarly/career interests and needs, and can choose to focus on Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, or District Leadership. (The current Ed.D. program in Educational Leadership only addresses District Leadership.)
- Candidates identify a Problem of Practice (P.O.P.) early in their programs, which will then serve as the basis for their fieldwork and research. The P.O.P. will usually be one that is embedded or directly related to their current work setting.
- Candidates do an extensive review of the literature related to their P.O.P., create a detailed plan to address and solve the problem, implement the plan, evaluate the results, and report the project’s outcomes in a public presentation — all within a three-year window.
- The traditional five-chapter doctoral dissertation is replaced with a Dissertation in Practice (D.I.P.), based on principles of action research.
- The traditional dissertation defense is replaced with a public presentation of D.I.P. results.
- The three-year, “start-to-finish” timeline requires fewer total credits than the current program.
- The program is cohort-based, and includes team-building orientation sessions and annual, one-day reflection/residency seminars.
- The program places increased emphasis on innovation, school reform/improvement, equity, social justice and collaboration with all stakeholders.
- All classes are semester-long hybrids, and are “flipped” (most content online, analysis and discussion face-to-face). Once-weekly class meetings alternate between face-to-face and online sessions.
- Candidates may be able to apply some master’s level courses to their doctoral programs, which could permit even more program choices and flexibility.



# Cyber Warrior

BY BOB YEARICK



*Roberto Rodriguez (right) at WilmU's Pratt Center with his fiancée, Gretchen Wagner, and parents, Francisco and Flor de Maria Roberto Rodriguez*

*Ten years and two Wilmington University degrees after arriving in the U.S., Roberto Rodriguez is leading efforts to protect network security at Capital One.*

When Roberto Rodriguez arrived in the United States at the age of 16, he couldn't speak or write a full sentence in English. He also had no idea how to properly sweep or mop a floor, which, he discovered, are necessary skills when you can only get basic jobs because, well, you don't know English.

To learn the language, he began watching movies — at least 100 of them, by his estimate. “Also, I remember sticking little pieces of paper on different appliances at home with their names in English,” he says. “Sometimes, it was so hard I cried.”

But he stuck with it, calling on the steely resolve (he likes to use the American term “grit”) that has enabled him to earn two degrees from Wilmington University, start his own cyber security company, and become a cyber security leader at one of America’s largest banking institutions — all in just 10 years.

Rodriguez was born in Miami but when he was 2, his family moved back to Peru, their native country. There, he and his two older brothers enjoyed a middle-class life with a father who was a computer programmer and a mother who taught kindergarten.

“My mother was very strict with everything,” he says, “especially school.”

Young Roberto was a good student and athlete, playing soccer and volleyball and running the 100 and 400 meters in track. “I really wasn’t interested in computers,” he says. “I loved dogs, and at first I wanted to be a veterinarian. Then I thought about electrical engineering.”

Like most Peruvian students, he graduated from high school at 16. That’s when his father told him he must return to the United States before he was 18 or risk losing his U.S. citizenship. It came as a shock to Roberto, who had already applied to a university in Peru. But his father insisted, and he arranged for Roberto to live with a cousin in Newark, Delaware. To ease the transition, his father also moved to Newark, but stayed only three months.

When he left, Rodriguez says, “It was a very hard time for me.”

Gradually, he began learning his new country’s language, bringing home a new movie almost every night, both with and without Spanish subtitles. He chose crime stories and dramas for their more realistic dialogue.

“I would pause them over and over,” says Rodriguez, “and try to translate what they were saying.”

He bought a dictionary of idioms and also began learning “phrasal verbs” — phrases that combine a verb with a preposition or adverb, or both, whose meaning is different from the combined meanings of the individual words. These can be especially problematic for anyone new to English. For instance, Rodriguez learned that “I ran into my friend at the mall” does not mean that there was a literal collision. Soon he was able to use phrases like “I ran out of fries,” now knowing that it meant more French fries were needed.

Says Rodriguez: “It helped me to feel like I was speaking like anybody else out there.”

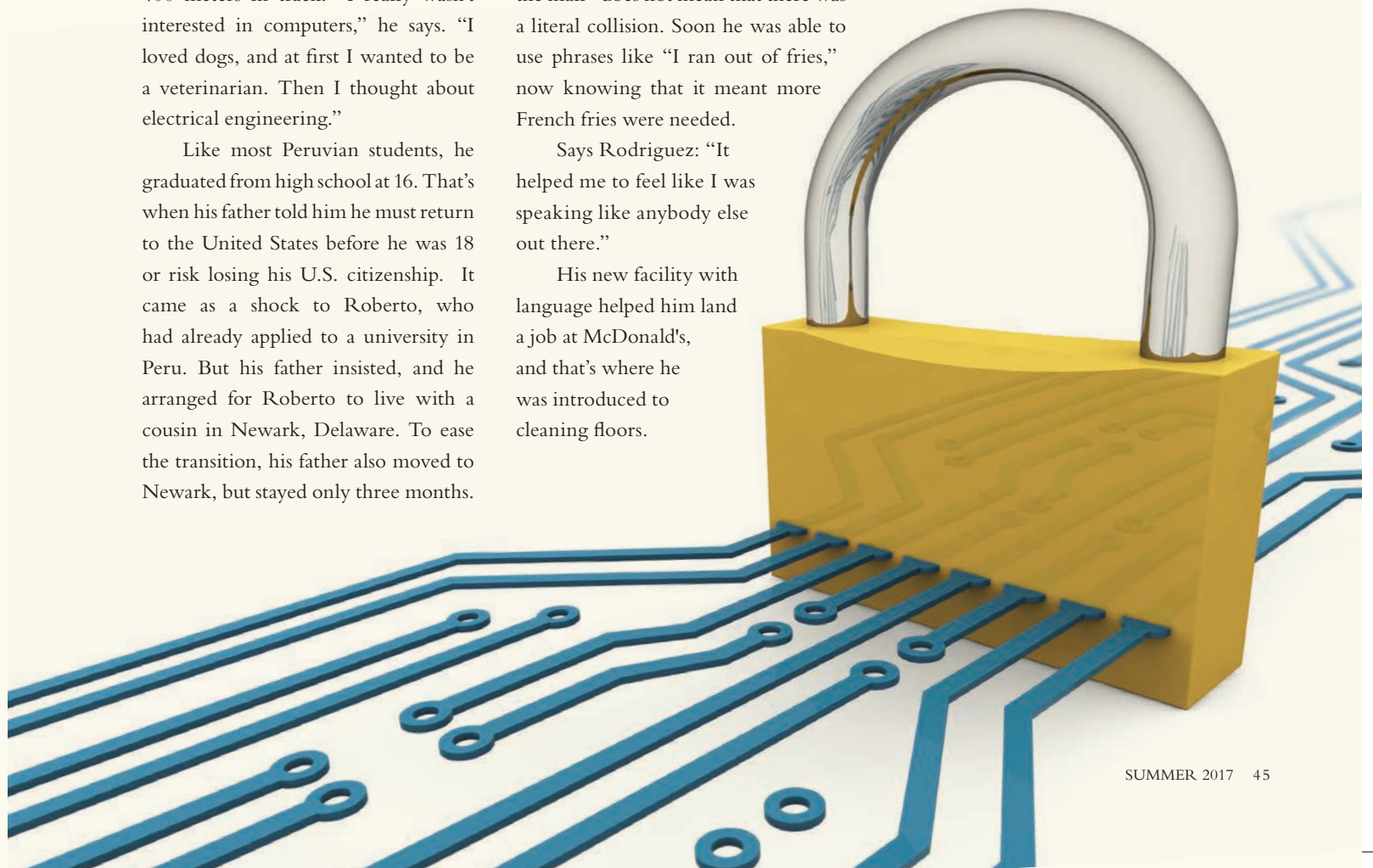
His new facility with language helped him land a job at McDonald’s, and that’s where he was introduced to cleaning floors.

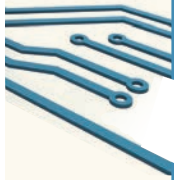
“We had a maid in Peru, which is not unusual there,” says Rodriguez, “and our parents wanted us to focus on school.” As a result, he did almost no household chores like, say, cleaning floors.

But he was a quick learner. He soon became proficient with a broom and mop, and after about a month he was promoted to the kitchen. There he found an English teacher of sorts: an older man, who, Rodriguez noticed, wore an ankle bracelet, of sorts. Despite the man’s criminal past, he proved an effective mentor.

“He would teach me a couple of words a day,” says Rodriguez. “Everyday words. Like, he would point to his apron and then say the word.”

Meanwhile, he had enrolled at Delaware Technical Community





*“Roberto is the epitome of a Wilmington University student. He works full-time and he’s looking for opportunity, and he was able to take advantage of our Work-Integrated Learning program. I was impressed with Roberto’s professionalism and his character.”*

—Dr. Ed Guthrie

College to study Computer Network Engineering. At about the same time, he got a job at a McDonald’s that was closer to home. There, yet another co-worker became an English teacher, concentrating on slang terms. Which had its downside.

“One Sunday I hurt my back, and I asked him how to say that [with a colloquialism],” says Rodriguez. The co-worker eagerly complied, teaching him a term containing an obscenity followed by “up.”

The next day in class, the teacher asked students to describe their weekends. Rodriguez, always eager to practice his new language, raised his hand. The teacher called on him and invited him to come to the front of the class, where he described tweaking his back, proudly using the hyphenated term he had just been taught. The class laughed, the teacher asked him to step into the hall for a short discussion, and Rodriguez learned another lesson: Americans are fond of practical jokes.

Despite moments of embarrassing miscommunication, his education was progressing nicely and he was gaining confidence. He joined the soccer team and earned a partial but substantial scholarship.

It was on the soccer pitch that he first encountered Wilmington

University. “We beat them 2-1, and that was the first time DelTech ever beat Wilmington,” he says. “That was an epic game for us. Of course, we played them again later and we lost.”

The game also introduced him to WilmU, and he was impressed with its soccer team’s uniforms, equipment, coaching staff, and even the mascot, Wiley D. Wildcat.

So, after earning his associate degree from DelTech in 2012, he almost immediately enrolled at WilmU, switching his major to Computer Network Security. “I decided stopping cyber criminals would be more interesting than dealing with switches, routers and modems,” he says.

He continued to work full-time, and as his English improved, so did his jobs. He was a manager at Olive Garden in Elkton, Maryland, when he entered WilmU. On his first day of classes, he encountered Dr. Ed Guthrie, who had been a customer at the restaurant. Dr. Guthrie, who was then dean of Technology and is now dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, complimented Rodriguez on the leadership qualities he had displayed as a manager.

“He told me he had seen me talking with servers and sitting down with customers, and sort of keeping

things calm,” Rodriguez says.

Rodriguez called his parents that night to thank them for their guidance on how to interact with people. “They told me to always smile, be friendly, make eye contact, say hello to people,” he says.

He says that Dr. Guthrie and his wife, Connie, have become mentors to him. “In fact,” he says, “I call them my American parents.”

Dr. Guthrie, in turn, calls Rodriguez “the epitome of a Wilmington University student. He works full-time and he’s looking for opportunity, and he was able to take advantage of our Work-Integrated Learning program.”

“I was impressed with Roberto’s professionalism and his character,” he adds. “Again, the epitome of a Wilmington University student.”

After earning his bachelor’s in 2014, Rodriguez took a two-month break, then enrolled in WilmU’s Master of Science program with a concentration in Information Assurance. He excelled, compiling a 3.89 grade point average.

He was also on the three-member team of graduate students who entered the 2015 Cyber 9/12 competition. The first WilmU team to take part in the prestigious event, they went up against such schools as MIT, Carnegie Mellon, Purdue, and Brown. Demonstrating that he had indeed gained proficiency with English, Rodriguez was chosen to give the final presentation before the judges, and the team won the Most Creative Policy Response Alternative award. He has been asked to help coach the team during several competitions this summer.

While he was finishing his bachelor’s program, his employment picture brightened once again. Finally leaving the food service industry behind, Rodriguez got a job in his chosen career field, cyber security,



joining MySherpa, a Wilmington firm specializing in IT services and computer security.

After a year-and-a-half, seeking more challenges, he left MySherpa to form his own company: HumanFirewalls. He recruited three WilmU students and offered services such as security awareness, threat intelligence, network security monitoring, vulnerability management, and cloud-based web and email security.

In the meantime, he took a full-time job with DuPont as a member of its Cyber Security Incident Response team in Wilmington, where he helped protect the organization's trade secrets from targeted sophisticated attacks. The job lasted only about 18 months, when the DuPont/Dow merger became a reality, and he moved on to Capital One at the financial corporation's McLean, Va., headquarters.

Impressed with Rodriguez's

credentials, and the fact that he was finishing his master's degree at WilmU, Capital One created a new position for him: cyber intrusion subject matter expert. "They told me they're trying to build the best cyber security team in the banking industry, and that's exciting to me" he says.

After landing the Capital One position, he once again called his parents in Peru to report the good news and to thank them for instilling in him the work ethic that has helped make him a success.

He expressed his gratitude to them once again — this time publicly — at January's graduation ceremonies, where he was one of the featured speakers. In his remarks, he also thanked the University for its diverse culture. "I believe that learning with people from different backgrounds encourages collaboration and innovation due to the different

perspectives they have and challenges they go through," he said. "And when I say Wilmington University, I do not mean only my professors, but all its staff . . . the admission team, security guards, the cafeteria team, maintenance, librarians, etc. You all contributed to our success and helped us to be prepared for the challenges that we will face."

Rodriguez' most immediate challenge is marriage, a journey he will embark on in September. He plans to wed fellow Capital One employee Gretchen Wagner in her hometown of Pittsburgh. Ever a fast learner, Rodriguez has already become a Steelers fan.

He says the only minor hiccup in their relationship occurs when they're watching a film and he reveals what's going to happen in the next scene. Apparently, that's the downside of translating more than 100 movies. **WU**

*Dr. Ed Guthrie (right, foreground) has served as a mentor for Roberto Rodriguez.*



# SPORTS

## Coming to You *Live*: Wildcat Sports

**A**re you a Wilmington University sports fan but find yourself unable to make it to all games? No problem. Now you can watch many Wildcat contests live — in the comfort of wherever you happen to be, thanks to the Athletics Department and the College of Technology, who have combined to webstream games.

The concept was born three years ago when Adjunct Professor **TIM SHAFFER** and Coordinator of Sports Information **DAN LAULETTA** produced the first three-camera soccer games for the 2014 Wilmington Homecoming Weekend.

Fast-forward to this past basketball season, when College of Technology Assistant Professor **TIM DAY** introduced a few producing upgrades, resulting in a high definition operation to stream live basketball.

“We saw an opportunity that could really benefit our College of Technology students,” Day says. “The on-location broadcasts give them hands-on experience in what it’s like working a live event. It helps our students gain valuable out-of-classroom experience while also helping to promote Wilmington athletics.”

The men’s basketball home playoff game, the first in program history, featured 250 online plays with a peak audience of 96 at one time.

During the spring, Day’s team filmed the softball team from the upgraded press box at Asbury Field. They produced a multi-camera broadcast during multiple games this past season, reaching a peak audience of 129 during the doubleheader with Goldey-Beacom College on April 12.

Softball Head Coach **MIKE SHEHORN** has discovered that the live stream helps recruiting. “We have had a number of recruits email us following a game saying they were excited to be able to watch us play,” he says. “Parents from all over the country can send their daughters to Wilmington knowing they are going to be able to catch the home games.”

A multi-camera setup was planned this past season for the baseball team and Wilson Field, and plans are underway to extend the webstreaming program to fall sports. **WU**

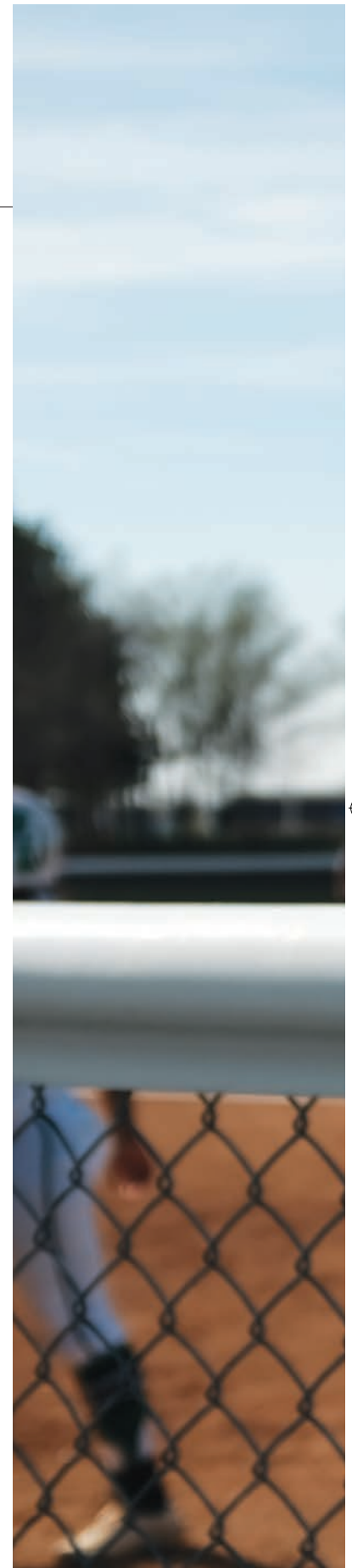
—Dan Lauletta

To catch a game, visit [wilmu.mediaspace.kaltura.com](http://wilmu.mediaspace.kaltura.com), or search for WilmUTube. All live links also will be posted on the athletics website: [athletics.wilmu.edu](http://athletics.wilmu.edu).



“The on-location broadcasts give the College of Technology students hands-on experience in what it’s like working a live event.”

—Tim Day





*Shooting a live broadcast*

# Wilmington Student-Athletes Highlighted by CACC

Five Wilmington University student-athletes were part of the Central Atlantic Collegiate Conference's recent Future Success Starts Now campaign.

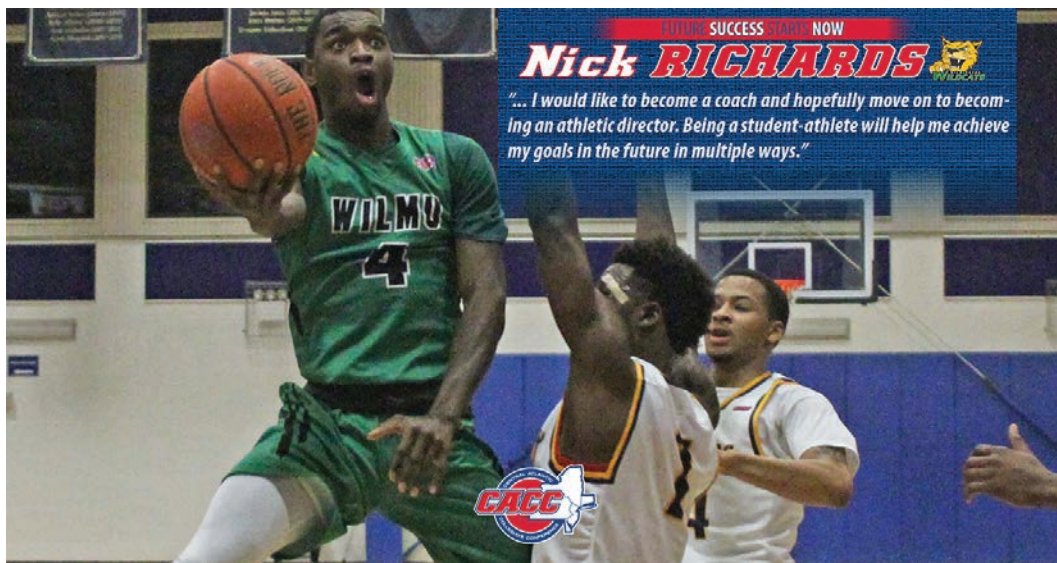
Participants were asked how being a student-athlete will help them reach their goals both in and out of the sport they play.

The CACC spoke to men's basketball's **NICK RICHARDS**, softball's **COLBY WYATT**, women's basketball's **MACY ROBINSON**, men's soccer's **DOMINIC FOLARIN**, and cross country's **ANDREW MILHAM**. Although their life goals are different, all five responded that being a student-athlete will help them get to where they want to go. **WU**

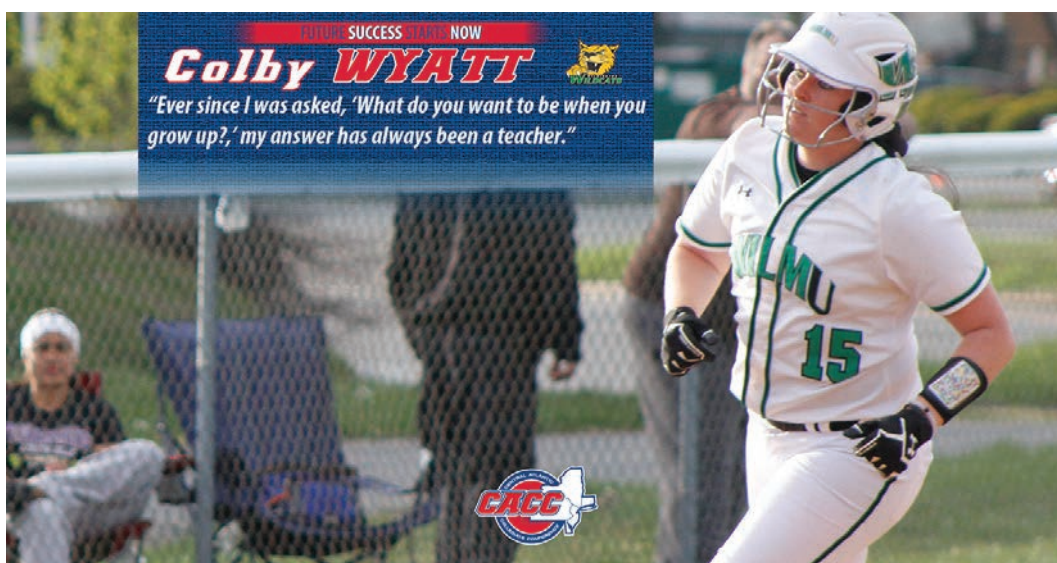




**FUTURE SUCCESS STARTS NOW**  
**Macy ROBINSON**  
*"My career goal is to open up my own private practice and counsel people who are struggling with addiction ... there is nothing more rewarding than helping someone get back on track with their life that cannot do it on their own."*



**FUTURE SUCCESS STARTS NOW**  
**Nick RICHARDS**  
*"... I would like to become a coach and hopefully move on to becoming an athletic director. Being a student-athlete will help me achieve my goals in the future in multiple ways."*



**FUTURE SUCCESS STARTS NOW**  
**Colby WYATT**  
*"Ever since I was asked, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?,' my answer has always been a teacher."*

# ALUMNI

## DR. RAYMOND NWANERI: Making Lives Better

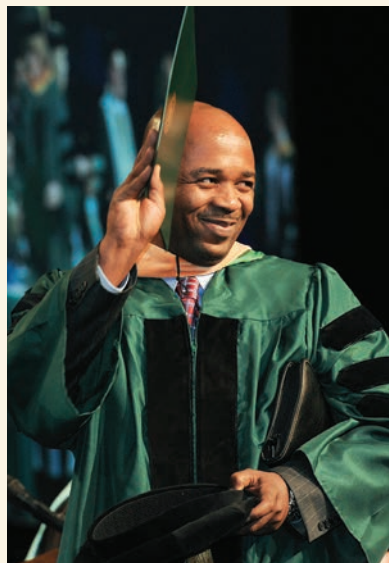
A career change is no easy feat, but this alumnus believes determination makes all the difference. **By Britney Gulledge**

The day was January 29, 2017. That's when **DR. RAYMOND NWANERI** fulfilled one of his lifelong goals of completing a doctoral program — more specifically, WilmU's Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program. His dream of rising in the health care field came after years of financial setbacks, nine college experiences and an alternative business career. But on this day, he walked the Chase Center at the Riverfront stage for winter commencement, sharing the moment with several VIP audience members: his wife, two children, three siblings, and most poignant, his parents, who had traveled from Nigeria to celebrate.

Dr. Nwaneri's story began in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, some 5,610 miles away from Wilmington's Chase Center stage in Wilmington, where his parents instilled in him the importance of education.

"They gave my siblings and I daily reminders about how we were to study hard to become professional," says Dr. Nwaneri, adding that they insisted their children become engineers or doctors.

He researched medical schools in



Nigeria, but money was tight. The cost of local medical schools exceeded the cost of other degrees, so Dr. Nwaneri chose to study business over medicine.

He was determined to be the best at it and went on to earn a bachelor's in Accounting from the University of Uyo, a master's in Economics from the University of Lagos, and an MBA from Ekiti State University.

Dr. Nwaneri began a promising banking career in Nigeria's capital city of Lagos, a global financial center

and one of the fastest growing cities in the world. There Dr. Nwaneri excelled, becoming the bank's youngest branch manager at 28. The average age for the position was 35. Despite his successes, he still wanted to work in health care.

"I've always wanted to add value to the lives of others," says Dr. Nwaneri. "When I was in banking, I added monetary value by managing portfolios and helping others make money. But I wanted to give value in a more personal way that touched lives forever."

He moved to the United States to begin a career in health care, which he admits was challenging, especially when one is so successful already. "I had to start over completely," he says.

He earned an associate degree in Science from Camden County College and a diploma in nursing from Our Lady of Lourdes School of Nursing. He then attended the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey for his MSN before completing his degree at Rutgers University. He also earned a post-graduate Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner certificate at Wilkes University, then passed two



*Dr. Raymond Nwaneri*

Nurse Practitioner board exams that focused on psychiatric mental health and adult gerontology primary care.

As if that weren't enough, Dr. Nwaneri landed at Wilmington University in 2014 to enroll in his DNP program. "I attended an open house and was so impressed by how the faculty described the program," he says. "Their knowledge and care was evident. I knew I could attend WilmU and get the quality education I needed to move to the next level in my career."

He wanted to combine his business background with his newly acquired education in direct care, and to position himself for a career in health care leadership. The DNP program fit the bill.

"The program is focused on integrating skills our practitioners can apply immediately in the changing world of health care," says Dr. Aaron Sebach, chair of WilmU's DNP, which offers an innovative curriculum emphasizing health care engineering and interdisciplinary collaboration

among expert clinicians, health care leaders and policy makers.

Dr. Nwaneri earned a 3.88 GPA. Dr. Stacey Graves, who chaired his doctoral project, says his dedication to the program was unparalleled.

"I would say that the thing that stood out the most was Raymond's determination to complete the program despite all of the challenges he had to face managing family, work and school," says Dr. Graves. "There was a point in the process when he had to change both the focus and the site of his project, at which time I suggested he take an extension, but he was determined to push through and finish with his cohort."

That determination energized Dr. Nwaneri, through all the naps in the library, car and anywhere else he could fit in a quick snooze between work and class.

"I had to completely step away from life at some points," he says.

Dr. Nwaneri is grateful to the WilmU staff for helping make his transition into health care administration a fruitful one. He currently works at five Philadelphia area nursing homes through Med Options, an assisted-living facility behavioral services provider, as well as a contractor for Haven Behavioral Hospital of Philadelphia. He plans to work his way up the ladder.

He has also returned to the classroom — as an instructor. "I want to be able to give back like the faculty members at WilmU gave back to me," he says. "I want to help the next generation of practitioners prepare for the health care field of the future." **WU**

# FLYING HIGH: Carol Timmons

Alumna Carol Timmons became Delaware's first female Adjutant General this year.

By Bob Yearick

**S**ure, it took **CAROL TIMMONS** seven years (2006–13) to earn her master's degree from Wilmington University. But she has a pretty good excuse: She had to fight a war in Afghanistan, earning a Bronze Star in the process. Brig. Gen. Timmons interrupted her studies in 2008 to command a combat unit as part of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Her service in Afghanistan is just one of the many achievements in her 39 years in the Delaware National Guard that prompted newly-elected Gov. John Carney to name her Delaware's first female Adjutant General in January. Timmons, who had served as assistant Adjutant General since 2012, succeeds Lt. Gen. Frank Vavala, who retired on Jan. 31, after nearly 50 years of service.

In making the Cabinet appointment, Carney said, "Gen. Timmons is respected in Delaware and across the country for her service, and she is prepared to lead the Delaware National Guard on day one. She is the right person to take on the vitally important tasks of leading our Guardsmen, and making the right decisions for the future of the Delaware National Guard."

Born in Texas but raised in New Castle, Delaware, Timmons graduated from William Penn High

School and immediately began her career as a citizen-soldier. She enrolled at Delaware Technical Community College in the Criminal Justice program. Her schooling was interrupted for Air Force Basic Training in Lackland, Texas, and she received her Del Tech degree in 1979 and her second lieutenant's bar one year later.

She enrolled in the Aviation Management program at what was then Wilmington College in 1982, receiving her degree in 1984.

In the meantime, she started her civilian career as a commercial airline pilot, and today she is a first officer with United, piloting B-767s and 757s, with more than 10,000 hours of flying time.

Her military career has been a continual ascent up the ranks. She was promoted to brigadier general in 2011. Besides the Bronze Star, which is one of the highest honors the military can bestow, she has been awarded the Meritorious Service Medal (with a Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster), the Air Medal (with four Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters), the Aerial Achievement Medal (with two Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters), the Air Force Commendation Medal and the Army Commendation Medal.

She was inducted into the Delaware Women's Hall of Fame in 2004 and the Delaware Aviation Hall



of Fame in 2007.

Timmons is authorized to fly the C-130, the huge transport aircraft that fly out of Dover Air Force Base (DAFB), as well as the UH-1 helicopter, known as the "Huey."

She says she had always emphasized the importance of education to those under her command, and, through WilmU, she has followed her own advice. She returned to the University in 2006 to enroll in the master's





*Carol Timmons*

program in Management, Public Administration. The Afghanistan deployment and a family illness took more than 18 months out of her pursuit of that degree, but she calls it a great experience, one made easier by a culture that caters to the working person.

“As an airline pilot, it’s tough to do classes during the week,” says Timmons, “but I was able to take weekend courses at Dover Air Force Base. And the faculty was

tremendous and so supportive when I had to take time off. They work with you. And the instructors are people from the field who have experienced it.”

She says she also appreciated the diversity of the classmates. “They were people from many different backgrounds and it was fascinating to get to know them.”

Timmons is excited about her new duties as Adjutant General. To make time for the job, she has asked

for and received a leave of absence from United.

“This is the opportunity of a lifetime, and I’ve got a great team to work with,” she says. “I never planned for it, but it’s a great honor for Gov. Carney to select me.”

She says there have been about a dozen female Adjutant Generals in various states over the years, and currently there are four: in the Virgin Islands, Alaska, Maryland and, of course, Delaware. **WU**

# STAY INVOLVED WITH YOUR ALUMNI ASSOCIATION.

## 1994



**RICHARD L. GREGG**, M.Ed. in School Leadership and Innovation, of Newark, Delaware, has been hired as superintendent of the Christina School District. Gregg was formerly the assistant superintendent of the Penn-Delco School District in Aston, Pennsylvania.

## 1998



**JOHN PETRUZZELLI**, M.Ed. in School Administration, of Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania, has been named

principal of St. Joseph's Preparatory School in Philadelphia. Petruzzelli was formerly the principal of Bethlehem Catholic High School in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

## 2007



**FOSTINA DIXON**, M.Ed. in School Leadership, of Bear, Delaware, has released her latest album, "Here We Go Again." Dixon was recently honored to join other jazz musicians to play for Vice President Joe Biden at a celebration concert upon his return to Delaware after leaving office.

## 2009

**MICHAEL BROWNE**, M.Ed. in School Counseling, of Greenbackville, Virginia, was honored as the 2017 Maryland National Distinguished Principal. Browne is the principal of the Pokomoke Elementary School in Maryland.

## 2009



**DR. MARGO HANDY**, Ed.D. in Innovation and Leadership, of Salisbury, Maryland, is retiring from Wicomico School District

after a 38-year career. Dr. Handy is the recipient of several honors, including Educator of the Year from her alma mater, Morgan State University.

## 2012

**EVANS ARMANTRADING JR.**, B.S. in Business

Management, of Dover, Delaware, is the owner of CNU Fit in Dover.



Armantrading is passionate about seeing people of all ages become healthy and disease-free. He is also involved in the Dover community and sits on the executive board of the Central Delaware Chamber of Commerce as well as the President of Mom's House of Dover.

**Membership is free!** Become an active member of your local chapter. Learn more about Wilmington University Alumni Association's events and meetings by visiting [WILMU.EDU/ALUMNI](http://WILMU.EDU/ALUMNI).

## 2015

**LETISHA GALLOWAY**, M.S. in Administration of Justice, of Dover, Delaware, is an African-American Literary Award nominee and has published her second book, "Letters to Jordan, Finding Hope after the Loss of a Child." Galloway is a senior social worker and case manager in Delaware.



## 2015



**BRIAN MOORE**, MBA in Homeland Security, of Greenville, Delaware, is publishing his first book, "Practical

Incident Management in K-12 Schools." The textbook, set to premier this month, concerns emergency management in schools. Moore is the director of Public Safety for the Red Clay School District in Delaware.

## 2015



**STARLESE PRICE**, M.S. in Administration of Human Services, of Dover, Delaware, is program coordinator

for Sojourners' Place in Wilmington, Delaware. Its mission is to assist homeless women and men on their journey to self-sufficiency through a case-managed, residential program.

## 2016



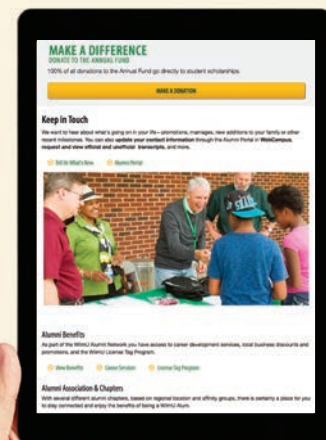
**TANNER ASSIMOS**, MBA in Marketing Management, of North East, Maryland, was hired by A. J.

Billing and Company as a sales associate. His duties include real estate sales and digital marketing.

## 2016



**COURTNEE McNEAL**, B.S. in Human Resource Management, of New Castle, Delaware, was hired by Century 21 Emerald in Wilmington, Delaware, as a sales associate and will specialize in residential property sales.



# UPDATES

*Gloria Johnson leads the way.*

## 'SOLE' SISTERS

Every day, WilmU's Annual Fund Senior Director **GLORIA JOHNSON** laces up her sneakers, grabs her water and hits the pavement.

She's part of the growing movement called GirlTrek. With close to 100,000 neighborhood walkers, GirlTrek encourages African-American women to use walking as a first step to inspire healthy living and positive change in their communities. With icons like former First Lady Michelle Obama supporting the revolution, it has become the largest health-

related nonprofit of its kind.

In March of 2014, Johnson searched for a local walking group to jump-start her fitness journey. "Dealing with weight gain," she says, "I wanted to be able to walk around without losing my breath and feeling exhausted."

She found GirlTrek online and created a local team named Delaware Sole Sisters, which is comprised of sisters, mothers, daughters — and many WilmU alumnae. The group inspires Johnson because they're taking control of their lives, which is important for African-Americans



who face dangerous health statistics.

The Centers for Disease Control and Preventions estimates that nearly 48 percent of African-American women have some form of cardiovascular disease that includes heart disease and stroke. The group also has the highest rate of obesity of any group in America.

“We don’t just rattle off daunting statics: we *are* the statistics,” says GirlTrek Co-Founder Vanessa Garrison. “We stay awake at night, have endless brainstorms, and are compelled to act every day. I calculated the average life expectancy of the

women in my immediate family. It was 66.”

Johnson says her group has morphed her “fitness journey into her health journey.” It performs community service and hosts monthly social events to promote various forms of self-care and focus on the mental effects of changing one’s life. To date, there are 200 members in its Facebook group.

In 2016, the national branch of GirlTrek awarded Johnson’s team the Trek Team of the Year. **WU**



Online Learning • Cooperative Educational Credit for Prior Learning



*The COEL Team: In back: Stephen Scheib, Christian Broderick, Kelly Clayton, Emily Henig, Adam Voyton. In front: Lauren Haas, Dr. Sallie Reissman (AVP & Dean), Russ Lichterman, Megan Erickson. (Not pictured: Dr. Matthew Davis, Dr. David Caffo, Lindsay Rice, Stephen Buchanan, Mary Beth Youse, Shannon Netta, Vin Favoroso, Christina Asroff, Drew Cline, Alla Powell, Lauren Havens, Tracy Harder)*

## A New Dean: Dr. Sallie Reissman

**D**R. SALLIE REISSMAN lives by the Robert Ingersoll quote: “We rise by lifting others.” Her work ethic as well as her growing department is evidence of it.

She was recently named WilmU’s Assistant Vice President and Dean of the College of Online and Experiential Learning (COEL), and has worked her way toward that title since coming to WilmU as a student in 1991.

Dr. Reissman is widely respected as an innovator. As a part-timer at WilmU, she started its summer camp. That was more than 25 years ago. She left a career as a third-grade teacher in the Brandywine School District to join WilmU in 2000 as its first instructional technologist. She was later named senior director of Online Learning and Educational Technology.

She has focused mainly on educational technology, bringing in multimedia services for instructors and assisting in hybrid learning. She also spearheaded TEDxWilmingtonUniversity in 2014.

“WilmU was the first place I was given autonomy to

work on projects that truly inspired me while making a difference in our students’ lives,” says Dr. Reissman, crediting former President Dr. Audrey Doberstein for her support and leadership.

Multimedia Manager Russ Lichterman says that Dr. Reissman “leads by example,” crediting her for having the foresight to grow WilmU’s online learning department.

Dr. Reissman plans to keep up the momentum. Within one year as dean, she and her team have already created an e-learning certificate and have plans to expand the college’s offerings.

“Professional Studies is a growing field and we see ways to fit the needs of those in the workplace and emerging fields,” she says. The new elearning certificate provides skills that students can apply to medical training, corporate education, and more.

“I’ve been successful because the leadership has allowed creativity,” says Dr. Reissman, who earned the University’s 2016 Betty Caffo Award for Leadership and Innovation. “I want to lift my team to do the same.” **WU**



WE ARE  
**WILDCAT  
COUNTRY**  
HOMECOMING 2017  
OCTOBER 2-7

**Come home to WilmU this fall**  
for events to showcase your Wildcat pride.

For details visit  
[wilmu.edu/Events](http://wilmu.edu/Events)

GREEN & WHITE  
SCHOLARSHIP

*Ball*  
A MASQUERADE PARTY

*October 21, 2017*



# Driving Influence

There are three things that stand out about **BILL SWAIN**, WilmU’s senior director of University Relations: he believes in the power of marketing; he nurtures talent; and he’s not afraid to express his opinion.

That was evident when he took a meeting with co-founders **MAC NAGASWAMI** and **GREG STAR** of the Wilmington-based Carvertise, Inc., an advertising company that pays everyday drivers to place removable advertisements on their cars. The company was in its infancy then, and the founders thought WilmU would be a good client.

Swain saw promise in Carvertise and pointed out ways that marketing could impact its growth and brand. Not

only was CEO Nagaswami listening; he also offered Swain a spot on his board of directors.

Nagaswami then created a mentor series to highlight leaders who inspired him. About Swain, he wrote: “Never had we met a marketer more sophisticated in their approach to getting their message seen by the right audience, in the right place, at the right time.”

Today the two share a solid mentor/mentee relationship, which is not to imply that Nagaswami always heeds Swain’s advice. Avoiding the creation of a proper website was one example.

“It took me about a year to finally come to grips with Bill’s correct observation that our website’s landing page should actually be geared toward advertisers instead of



*Integrity Warehouse Jobs is one of many Carvertise clients.*





Bill Swain (left) with Carvertise CEO Mac Nagaswami

COURTESY OF GREG STAR

“Marketing builds brand awareness, but it can also increase sales and engage customers if it’s focused on the right target.”

—Bill Swain

drivers,” says Nagaswami.

Carvertise now has a presence in all major markets across the United States.

According to Swain, “Marketing builds brand awareness, but it can also increase sales and engage customers if it’s focused on the right target.”

Swain has the same passion for his work at WilmU. The 13-person team he leads is essentially WilmU’s own marketing firm, and it completes more than 5,000 projects a year.

“WilmU is always my first priority and marketing is my passion,” says Swain, “but I’ve also been thrilled to have the privilege of mentoring leaders of several new companies. It’s my way of paying it forward.” **WU**





Gena Bennett



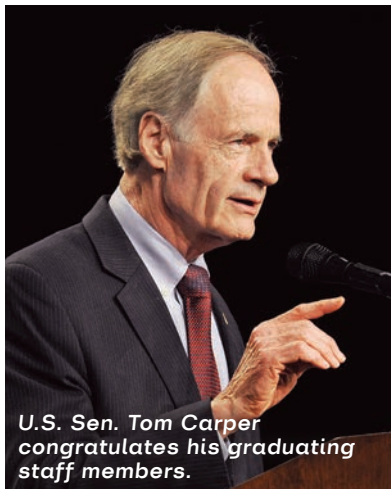
# Commencement: Winter and Spring 2017



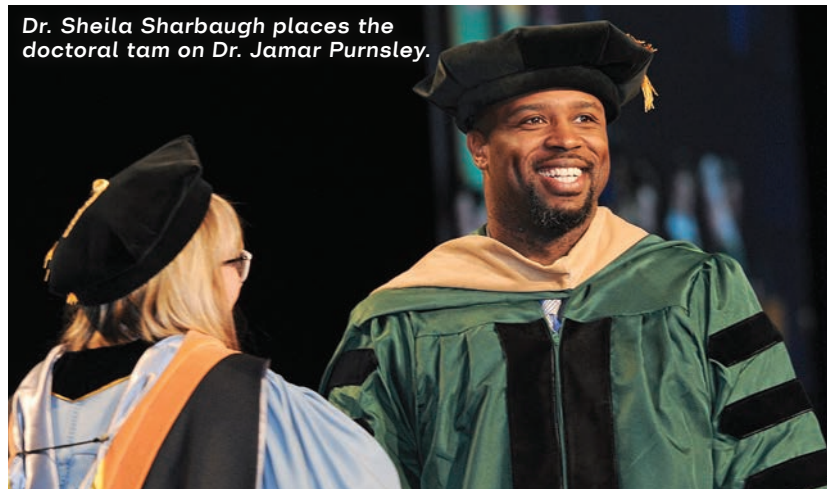
Srikanth Manne orchestrates a selfie with former President Dr. Jack Varsalona



Dr. Denise Way



U.S. Sen. Tom Carper congratulates his graduating staff members.



Dr. Sheila Sharbaugh places the doctoral tam on Dr. Jamar Purnsley.

4,505

Number of students who **graduated**

3,459

Number who **walked** in commencement ceremonies

770

Number who **completed** degree programs solely online

18

Age of the **youngest** graduate

72

Age of the **most mature** graduate

COMPILED BY DANA EGGLESTON



Jessie Welch and Giada (Ms. G), her service dog, accept their diploma.



Hanadi Sharif



PAUL PATTON

Michael David Rupert Jr. actually flips over graduating.



Robert Passarelli



Artist Clay Jones proposes to Loveleigh Dey Goode on stage during commencement. (Jones surprised Goode, who thought he was still in Germany. The proposal made print headlines, rocked social media and hit the airwaves.)



Former President Dr. Jack Varsalona presents a diploma to Dr. Lauren Benson.

## EVENTS

Want your event listed in the fall 2017 issue? Please send your information to **BRITNEY GULLEDGE** at [BRITNEY.J.GULLEDGE@WILMU.EDU](mailto:BRITNEY.J.GULLEDGE@WILMU.EDU). Deadline is Aug. 15, 2017.



# University Events

July 18

### 2ND ANNUAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS SYMPOSIUM

WilmU's College of Social and Behavioral Sciences presents this symposium to create awareness and educate attendees on how to recognize trafficked persons. This year's keynote speaker is Holly Austin Smith, author, advocate and survivor of child sex trafficking. Registration is required. Continental breakfast and lunch will be provided.

(Contact: [johanna.p.bishop@wilmu.edu](mailto:johanna.p.bishop@wilmu.edu))

Aug. 31, Sept. 2

### MEN'S SOCCER HOSTS A WILDCAT INVITATION

Dust off your foam fingers and grab a seat in the stands! The men's soccer team is hosting a Wildcat Invitation for four local soccer teams at the WilmU Athletics Complex:

- **Aug. 31:** Bloomfield U. vs. UDC at 2 p.m. / WilmU vs. Millersville U. at 4:30 p.m.
- **Sept. 2:** Bloomfield U. vs. Millersville U. at 2 p.m. / WilmU vs. UDC at 4:30 p.m.

(Contact: [daniel.j.lauletta@wilmu.edu](mailto:daniel.j.lauletta@wilmu.edu))

Sept. 8-9

### WILDCAT REGIONAL INVITATIONAL FOR VOLLEYBALL

Come out for a two-day regional volleyball invitation hosted by the women's volleyball team at WilmU's Athletics Complex in Bear.

(Contact: [daniel.j.lauletta@wilmu.edu](mailto:daniel.j.lauletta@wilmu.edu))

Oct. 1, 2

### CACC GOLF CHAMPIONSHIPS

We're heading to the green with the men's golf team for the Central Atlantic Collegiate Conference Championships at the Back Creek Golf Club in Middletown.

(Contact: [daniel.j.lauletta@wilmu.edu](mailto:daniel.j.lauletta@wilmu.edu))



## Oct. 2-5

### WILDCAT PRIDE WEEK

Student Life and Student Alumni are hosting a fun-filled, spirited event each day at New Castle for Wildcat Pride Week leading up to Homecoming. For information, visit [wilmu.edu/homecoming](http://wilmu.edu/homecoming).

(Contact: [brad.w.gilbert@wilmu.edu](mailto:brad.w.gilbert@wilmu.edu))

## Oct. 18

### FALL OPEN HOUSE

WilmU invites prospective students to attend the Fall Open House to learn about:

- Career-focused degree programs that align with your interests
- Seamless credit transfer policy to fast-track your degree
- Low tuition that helps your budget
- Flexible course options that fit your life and learning styles

The Open House will be held at the New Castle, Dover and Georgetown locations. Faculty will be available to answer questions.

(Contact: [lauren.m.godwin@wilmu.edu](mailto:lauren.m.godwin@wilmu.edu))

## Oct. 20

### HOOPFEST

Kick off the winter sports season with the annual can't-miss WilmU event: Hoopfest! Support the men and women's basketball teams as they begin their seasons. Enjoy food and games.

(Contact: [daniel.j.lauletta@wilmu.edu](mailto:daniel.j.lauletta@wilmu.edu))

## Nov. 14

### THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE

The College of Arts and Sciences is hosting this presentation to shed a definitive light on the war: its lessons and legacy. A historical display opens at 4 p.m., and the event takes place at 6 p.m. in the Doberstein Admissions Center. It's free and open to the public.

(Contact: [lynn.w.moore@wilmu.edu](mailto:lynn.w.moore@wilmu.edu))

# Alumni Events

## July 28

### CRAB FEAST — HOSTED BY THE MARYLAND ALUMNI CHAPTER

What better way to celebrate the summer than with seafood and a cool river breeze? Join your WilmU friends for the 4th annual Crab Feast at The Wellwood (523 Water St., Charlestown, Maryland). Cost is \$40 per person. Registration is required: [wilmu.edu/CrabFeast](http://wilmu.edu/CrabFeast).

(Contact: [donna.j.hardy@wilmu.edu](mailto:donna.j.hardy@wilmu.edu))

## July 27, Aug. 12

### WILMU STUDENTS & ALUMNI @ SHOREBIRDS MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

Take me out to the ball game! Students, alumni, faculty and staff are gearing up for nine innings of fun. Register online at [wilmu.edu/alumni](http://wilmu.edu/alumni).

- **July 27:** Hardball Café \$22.50 per person
- **Aug. 12:** Sky Suite \$25 per person

(Contact: [donna.j.hardy@wilmu.edu](mailto:donna.j.hardy@wilmu.edu))

## Oct. 7

### HOMECOMING GAMES

It's a full day of sports for this year's Homecoming game day festivities! Visit the WilmU Athletics Complex to enjoy the following games:

- **11 a.m.:** WilmU women's volleyball vs. Bloomfield U.
- **12 p.m.:** WilmU women's soccer vs. Dominican U.
- **1 p.m.:** WilmU women's tennis vs. Holy Family U. (Game located at the Delcastle Tennis Center)
- **2 p.m.:** WilmU men's soccer vs. Dominican U.

(Contact: [daniel.j.lauletta@wilmu.edu](mailto:daniel.j.lauletta@wilmu.edu))

## Oct. 12

### WILMU FALL FESTIVAL AT RAMSEY FARM

Did someone say fall leaves, warm sweaters and s'mores? The Alumni Relations and Student Life departments collaborate on this family-friendly event featuring a bonfire, hayride, corn maze, hot dogs and apple cider. Yum!

Cost is \$5. (Contact: [brandi.d.purcell@wilmu.edu](mailto:brandi.d.purcell@wilmu.edu))



## Oct. 21

### THE GREEN & WHITE SCHOLARSHIP BALL

It's time to don your formal wear and select your most festive mask to attend the annual Green & White Scholarship Ball. Staffers transform the Doberstein Admissions Center into an exciting tour around the globe with themed rooms and food. Proceeds go toward scholarships and other benefits for students of Wilmington University.

(Contact: [brandi.d.purcell@wilmu.edu](mailto:brandi.d.purcell@wilmu.edu))

# A FIRST

## WilmU's First Online DBA Grad



*Online student Dr. Bob Sarver came from Iowa to defend his dissertation.*

“Robert’s colorful personality has a way of making people feel comfortable. . . . When he flew in to defend his DBA, he greeted us with fresh steaks from his Iowa farm.” —Dr. Ruth Norman

In May, **DR. BOB SARVER** of Iowa became the first College of Business DBA graduate to earn the degree online.

After accumulating more than 30 years of business experience, Dr. Sarver serves as senior director of Logistics for Walmart, handling operations that support volume totaling up to \$2 billion in annual inventory shipments.

For all intents and purposes, Dr. Sarver was at the top of his game. Yet he wanted to be more effective in his work and serve as a role model to his children, both of whom were earning their doctorates the same time he was.

“I’ve always stressed the importance of education to them,” he says. “It became a way for us to connect and understand what each other was going through.”

College of Business Associate Professor Dr. Ruth Norman commends Dr. Sarver for his ability to connect virtually with his cohort. “Robert’s colorful personality has a way of making people feel comfortable,” says Dr. Norman, who served as Dr. Sarver’s adviser throughout his DBA program but met him in person in February, when he flew in to defend his DBA. “He greeted us with fresh steaks from his Iowa farm,” she says.

His dissertation, *Important aspects of job satisfaction for full-time hourly production workers and how they affect retention in small, rural, Iowa markets*, required him to examine three logistics warehouses.

But for commencement, he traveled from Iowa to Wilmington to graduate with his cohort. We’re a team, he says. “We made it together so we should walk together.” **WU**

# 96% of alumni would recommend WilmU to friends and family.



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- Seamless credit transfer, affordable tuition
- 100% online programs, real-world curriculum

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application fee.  
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This WilmU alumna became Delaware's first female Adjutant General this year.  
Read her story on page 54.

PHOTO BY SUSAN L. GREGG