

# RIT

University Magazine

Spring 2025

## Also inside:

RIT in LA

Munson's movies  
mark an RIT era

Virtually endless  
possibilities

Tackling the **macro problem** of

# microplastics



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Board Vice Chair Susan Holliday, left, David Munson, second from left, and Board Chair Susan Puglia, far right, introduce Bill Sanders and his wife, Emily. Read more on pages 6-7.

## On deck—a home run hitter

I am pleased to welcome Bill Sanders and his spouse, Emily, to the Tiger family as Bill prepares to become our next president. This is an extraordinary time for the university. With our amazing community of creators and innovators, we are on to something that is truly exceptional.

Years ago, Bill and I were faculty colleagues in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at the University of Illinois. We were in different research groups, but I recall spending a Saturday working together on a research proposal that ultimately was not funded—a true badge of interdisciplinary exploration.

That must have been one of Bill's few misses. As proven by his impressive track record, he thinks big, and he hits home runs. I have watched Bill's career soar to impressive heights—from a pioneering researcher and successful entrepreneur to a collaborative and strategic leader. I am thrilled to have Bill as my successor because his appointment ensures that the future of RIT is secure, and the university's upward trajectory will continue. Indeed, we are in for quite a ride!

From my seat, this is a remarkable time for Bill to take the leadership reins. We are among the fastest rising universities in the nation, in terms of both scholarship and education. Much of that rise can be

attributed to our talented, super-creative and, dare I say, nonconformist people, as well as our recognized success in merging the arts with technology.

That said, we are not immune to the forces acting in the wider world. The new president will be faced with complex challenges that all leaders in academia are encountering in today's higher education landscape.

But Bill will not be alone. He will be surrounded by kind, talented, imaginative, supportive people who are community-minded. Here, I am speaking of the faculty, staff, student body, trustees, alumni, and our partners throughout the Rochester region and beyond. Together, we will be highly successful.

Nancy and I are forever grateful for these fruitful years at RIT. To all in the RIT family: I have been blessed with your ideas, passion, hard work, and friendship. We will be watching RIT's promising future unfold, and our new hobby in retirement will be visiting Rochester. We will be applauding you the whole way.

Forever a Tiger,

*Dave*

David C. Munson Jr., President  
munson@rit.edu



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RIT has solidified its presence in Los Angeles through a semester-long study away experience focused on the entertainment industry.

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### Virtually Endless Possibilities

Researchers are pushing the boundaries of immersive technologies.

**Cover:** Sustainability Ph.D. student Sydney VanWinkle checks thermometers attached to a corral being tested at RIT's Tait Preserve. Cover photo by Traci Westcott

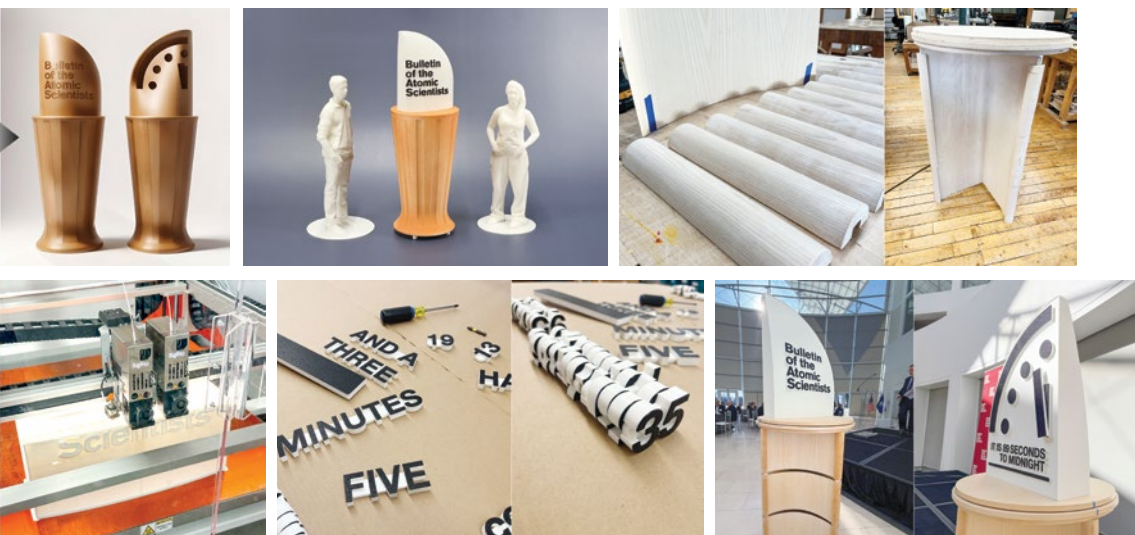




RIT Assistant Professor **Juan Noguera**, right, shakes hands with Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Juan Manuel Santos at the event where the clock was unveiled.



# ‘Doomsday Clock’ gets striking new look



The designers used artificial intelligence visualization tools and 3D printing, as well as traditional pencil sketches and wood crafting techniques, when creating the new clock.

An RIT faculty member helped redesign an infamous clock that made international headlines—and the body of the clock was printed in RIT’s SHED.

Juan Noguera, assistant professor in the School of Design, and Tom Weis, associate department head at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and founder of Altimeter Design Group, redesigned the “Doomsday Clock,” a symbolic attempt to assess how close humanity is to destroying the world.

Created 78 years ago, the time is set by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists’* Science and Security Board. On Jan. 28, the redesigned clock was unveiled and set to 89 seconds to midnight during an annual event at the United States Institute of Peace.

The designers first met when Noguera was a student at RISD and Weis was his professor. When Altimeter Design Group was contacted about the clock’s redesign, Weis took it as an opportunity to collaborate with Noguera.

Noguera and Weis agreed to combine both traditional and modern techniques in the redesign. The clock’s base was crafted with traditional woodworking techniques, the body and components of the clock’s face were 3D-printed in the SHED, and the pair used a combination of pencil-sketching

and artificial intelligence (AI) visualization tools in the ideation process.

The resulting design was more akin to a sculpture than the previous clocks—with the addition of the hand-crafted wooden base and a larger body—and commanded a presence when presented to global audiences.

“We liked the juxtaposition of the traditional woodcrafting techniques and the 3D-printed and AI elements. We think it represents what the *Bulletin* is trying to communicate,” said Noguera.

While the symbolism of the “Doomsday Clock” is far from positive, Noguera shared that he and Weis leaned into optimism when working on the project. The pair designed the new clock to be modular, attaching the text and hands on the clock-face with magnets and providing additional letters and numbers.

“I think everyone hopes that the clock changes and that, instead of being seconds from midnight, we can move back to minutes,” said Noguera. “Hopefully, they can make use of those other numbers and letters that are now in their toolset in the future.”

Felicia Swartzenberg ’19



## Buckley retiring

National Technical Institute for the Deaf President Gerard Buckley ’78 (social work), who made history as the first RIT/NTID alumnus to become president of the college, has announced his intention to step down after 15 years. His last day will be July 18.

His tenure as NTID president caps a career in higher education spanning more than 40 years.

“Fifty years ago, I entered RIT/NTID as a freshman student, and this college profoundly changed my life,” said Buckley.

Buckley joined NTID in 1990 as an assistant professor and chairperson of NTID’s Department of Educational Outreach.

He later served as director of NTID’s Center for Outreach, associate dean of student services, and assistant vice president for college advancement before being named president.

“Throughout his career, Gerry has been a fierce advocate for students, while dedicating his professional life to improving opportunities for members of the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community,” said RIT President David Munson.

Susan Murad



# Capstone project results in deaf-accessible kiosks

National Technical Institute for the Deaf information and computing studies students solved a problem that has made an immediate impact at RIT Dining locations across campus.

The initiative, begun nearly two years ago, has resulted in state-of-the-art, deaf-friendly point-of-sale systems that use interactive monitors for easy ordering and delivery of food and beverages. Previously, employees, who were often masked, used their voices to call out orders that were

ready for pick up, without significant accommodations for deaf and hard-of-hearing customers.

Prototype components for this project were developed through a mini grant offered by NTID. Students worked with Professor James Mallory, who helped them see how this idea could be transformed into a real-world application, as well as RIT food service managers, who were instrumental in the process.

Using their knowledge from classroom

instruction, the students figured out how the experimental process would flow, how to build their equipment and component list, and how to apply for the grant to acquire necessary funding, explained Mallory. Monitors and keypads connected to small controllers and scanners, along with technical know-how, helped them develop a prototype system.

“By tackling real-world challenges, students gained hands-on experience in problem solving, prototyping, and





Carlos Ortiz

The kiosks were the result of a capstone project by NTID information and computing studies students who wanted to develop a more accessible ordering system.

First-year computer science student **Pragyee Gurung** orders a snack using the newly installed self-service kiosk at The College Grind.

technical development—skills essential in the IT workforce,” said Mallory. “They learned to secure funding, adapt to setbacks, and collaborate with stakeholders, mirroring the innovation and troubleshooting required in IT-focused careers. This project with RIT Dining strengthened their technical expertise and helped prepare them to create meaningful solutions in their future technical roles.”

Luke Chrzan, a second-year motion picture science student from Middletown, N.J., is a

regular customer at The College Grind.

“It’s a lot easier for me to enter my order on the kiosk, which prints it out on paper, rather than trying to communicate by mouth or using sign language,” Chrzan said. “It’s not only efficient for us as students trying to hustle to classes, but for the employees who don’t have to slow down trying to figure out a customized order.”

Melissa Xie, a second-year advertising and public relations major from Queens, N.Y., has worked at The College Grind for

two semesters.

“I believe these automated kiosks have been extremely beneficial for me as a student worker,” she said. “Having these kiosks allows for customers to order at their own pace as well as helps them visualize the drinks and foods they are ordering with the images the kiosk provides.”

Five kiosks have been installed at three dining locations on campus.

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**Vienna McGrain '12 MS**



# William H. Sanders named RIT's 11<sup>th</sup> president

**W**illiam H. Sanders has been named RIT's 11<sup>th</sup> president. The current dean of Carnegie Mellon University's College of Engineering will assume the top post on July 1.

The RIT Board of Trustees selected Sanders from a national pool of candidates to succeed David Munson, who is retiring after serving eight years as RIT's president.

"It is clear to me that Rochester Institute of Technology is a very special place," said Sanders. "RIT has taken a unique approach on its path to excellence, working at the intersection of technology, the arts, and design. RIT's acceleration in excellence has been due to charting its own way—being strategic in picking the intellectual areas that it focuses on and creating an identity that does not seek to replicate what others are doing."

A 25-member search committee composed of students, faculty, staff, alumni, administration, and trustees narrowed the pool of candidates before the final selection by the Board of Trustees.

"Dr. Sanders has been instrumental in advancing Carnegie Mellon's reputation as a leader in transformative education and interdisciplinary and impactful research with an eye on doing good around the world," said Susan Puglia, chair of the RIT Board of Trustees, who also led the search committee. "Bill is the right leader at the right time to take the baton from President Munson and continue the acceleration of our university's amazing trajectory."

Sanders is the current Dr. William D. and Nancy W.

Strecker Dean of the College of Engineering at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. He joined Carnegie Mellon in 2020 and led the creation of a new strategic plan to further position its renowned College of Engineering as a research powerhouse to address societal challenges with global reach.

Prior to his time at Carnegie Mellon, he spent 25 years as a tenured professor and held the Herman M. Dieckamp Endowed Chair in Engineering at the University of Illinois, where he also held several leadership positions.

Sanders' research interests include secure, dependable, and resilient computing systems with a focus on critical infrastructures.

He has directed work at the forefront of national efforts to make the U.S. power grid smart and resilient. His scholarly record includes publishing more than 300 technical papers in this field.

A recognized leader in his field, Sanders was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 2023, one of the highest professional distinctions accorded to an engineer, for his contributions to cybersecurity and resiliency technologies for critical infrastructures.

This record of accomplishments drew praise from the Board of Trustees, Puglia, and Munson, who will retire June 30 after serving more than 45 years in higher education.

"On behalf of RIT and the Rochester region, I enthusiastically welcome Bill Sanders and his wife, Emily, to our community," said Munson.

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**Bob Finnerty '07 MS**





**Bill Sanders** was introduced on Jan. 28 as RIT's 11<sup>th</sup> president. Sanders begins his tenure on July 1.

## Get to know RIT's next president

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### What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

I enjoy outdoor activities, including hiking, kayaking, and canoeing. I also enjoy going to plays and getting together with friends to share home-cooked meals as well as going out to eat at local restaurants and listening to live music. I have also enjoyed photography as a hobby throughout my life.

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### Tell us about your family.

My wife, Emily, who studied French and art history at Michigan State University, made our family her career, supporting me and our children in innumerable ways. She enjoys art, gourmet cooking, travel, knitting, and hiking. Our daughter, Elizabeth, recently received her Ph.D. in engineering education from Purdue and is now a post-doc at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Our son, Zach, has a master's degree in biomedical engineering from Purdue and is an R&D engineer at Cardinal Health in St. Louis. Both enjoy playing musical instruments in their spare time.

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### Do you have any pets?

We have a very energetic 4-year-old Labradoodle named Ollie.

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### What was your first job?

My first job was during high school, working at a dry cleaner, first as a janitor and doing odd jobs and later as a presser. I also worked occasionally at the local planetarium, running the shows.

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### What is one thing people would be surprised to find out about you?

People are surprised to know that as a teenager I owned a "muscle car," a 1971 Mercury Cougar with a 351 Cleveland engine.



**RIT President David Munson** and his wife, Nancy, center, skipped down the RIT brick road in a 2024 welcome video for incoming students. The Tin Man carries the ax Munson made when he played the role in a theatrical production years ago.



# That's a wrap!

## Munson's movies mark an RIT era

**R**IT's 10<sup>th</sup> president will be remembered for many things after he retires June 30—construction of the SHED, completion of the 2025 Strategic Plan, creation of the Performing Arts Scholarship program. But a key piece of David Munson's legacy is the six playful and sometimes wacky videos that welcomed

students each year to RIT.

"It was refreshing that a president of this big institute came in with a sense of humor," said RIT student Karla Torres. She fondly remembers the video made for her incoming class that featured Munson as a flannel-clad college student trying to fit in.

In the videos, Munson and

his wife, Nancy, rapped, went back to school, solved age-old mysteries, and skipped down the RIT brick road. They wore costumes and bedazzled orange-rhinestone sneakers.

Munson used the videos to make himself approachable and to distinguish RIT from other universities. He never anticipated the reaction.

"Students saw us in the videos and then they wanted to talk to us, and they wanted to have pictures, and they wanted to send pictures to their parents," Munson said. "That happened in a very major way. I almost couldn't go outdoors in August and September after we released one of these videos because I couldn't get across





Travis LaCoss

campus. Every 3 feet there would be another student who wanted to talk.”

The videos drew upon the Munsons’ background in musical theater and their love for the performing arts and reinforced the president’s legacy of technology, the arts, and design at RIT.

“I think the videos helped create an environment where

people are more open with each other and willing to have fun and not worry so much about what others think of them,” Munson said. “You can be your own person at RIT.”

Nancy Munson co-starred in the productions. She liked the inventive videos and supportive messages conveyed to students.

“Every video was unique, and

each class has had their own,” she said. “They were a gift to the students, and I think that’s what made them special. It was also a fun way for us to do something together.”

The Munson video series began in 2018 with the silent film, *President’s Pre-orientation Prep List*, shot by RIT’s University Creative Services.



### Fitting finale

Munson handpicked the cast, including Performing Arts Scholars Karla Torres, the Cowardly Lion; Benson Haley, the Tin Man; and Declan McHale, the Scarecrow.



The next two welcome-back videos focused on staple RIT themes—learn ASL, explore hidden gems both on and off campus, and show Tiger spirit. The final set of videos parodied movie trailers and introduced overarching messages about being a student at RIT.

"In *In the Brick of Time*, Dr. Munson goes back to school to earn his degree," said Daniel Swinton '04 (film and animation), assistant director in University Creative Services. Swinton, who wrote and directed the last four videos, worked closely with videographer (and Munson stuntman) Boris Sapozhnikov '23 MS (media arts and technology) and producer Tristan Walker.

"Dr. Munson wore the costume (a flannel shirt and jeans) underneath his gown at new student convocation, and then he took the gown off," said Swinton. "It was his idea to tie it together and make the transition from video to the stage. The students went crazy."

*In the Brick of Time* was a hit. The next year, Swinton created *Raiders of the Golden Brick* followed by *The Wonderful Wizard of RIT*.

Torres, a third-year student in the School of Individualized Study and one of Munson's Performing Arts Scholars, played the Cowardly Lion in *The Wonderful Wizard of RIT*. Munson handpicked Torres for the part and selected students for the Scarecrow and Tin Man roles after seeing them act in campus productions.

*The Wizard of Oz* is Munson's favorite film, and he once played the Tin Man in a theatrical production. It seemed to be a fitting finale, Swinton said.

*The Wonderful Wizard of RIT* proved to be the most ambitious movie Swinton and his crew made for Munson. It required a large cast in the quiet month of July, many props, complicated special effects, and a script that reassured students there is "no place like RIT."

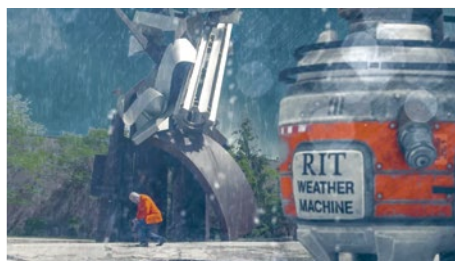
The layering of details extended to the musical score. Colin O'Brien,



## IN THE BRICK OF TIME

### Back to school

In the 2022 video, *In the Brick of Time*, President Munson learns that being a student again is more challenging than it looks.







## Presidential welcome

In this 2021 video after the COVID-19 pandemic, the Munsons encourage new Tigers to explore the campus.

## The videos

- > *President's Pre-Orientation Prep List* (2018)
- > *Things to Do at RIT* (2019)
- > *A Presidential Welcome to a Record-Breaking Class* (2021)
- > *In the Brick of Time* (2022)
- > *Raiders of the Golden Brick* (2023)
- > *The Wonderful Wizard of RIT* (2024)

**Note:** The Munson video series paused in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions.



[rit.edu/munson-videos](https://rit.edu/munson-videos)





**The video that started it all**

President Munson had a list of things to do to help make sure campus was in perfect condition in this 2018 silent film.

**President's  
Pre-Orientation Prep List**

- ☐ Beautify campus
- ☐ Train to move in students
- ☐ Practice high fives for Tiger Walk
- ☐ Write welcome speech







a fourth-year film and animation major, set Swinton's lyrics to his original composition.

"I know when new students arrive on campus, as well as their parents, there is a lot of apprehension," Munson said. "Can I cut it? Am I going to make friends? Do I belong here?" And Nancy and I wanted to make the statement that, 'Yes, there is no place like home, and home is going to be RIT.'"

The Munson videos replayed at open houses for prospective students and their parents and circulated on social media. They also reached the wider RIT community and leadership at other universities.

Munson met with alumni at a "fireside chat" in Boston hosted by Jim Salzano '87 (accounting), CEO of Jones & Vining Inc. Salzano presented Munson with a pretend Oscar award for his accomplishments at RIT.

"Dr. Munson made himself accessible through his videos and that gave students permission to feel vulnerable at RIT. That's a great leader," said Salzano, the 2023 Distinguished Alumnus from Saunders College of Business.

Vulnerability is part of the learning process and leads to growth. It's an important message for students, said Salzano, who sits on the RIT President's Roundtable and chairs the Saunders College of Business National Council.

"If you're not vulnerable, you're not going to ask questions in class," Salzano said. "You're not going to say you need help with your studies. You're not going to delve into something outside your comfort zone." 🐾

**Susan Gawlowicz '95**



### Action-packed adventure

A new era of creativity and innovation is about to dawn at RIT, and the Munsons help unlock the secrets of an ancient legend in this 2023 video.

### The Munson Years

Learn how RIT evolved during President David Munson's tenure at [rit.edu/presidentsreport2025](http://rit.edu/presidentsreport2025).





Professor **Christy Tyler**, left, and environmental science graduate students **Jay Kucharek** and **Paige Arieno** use LittaTraps to collect and study plastic debris from Rochester's storm drains.



# Tackling the **macro problem** of microplastics

**A** plastic snack wrapper misses a garbage can and floats to the ground. It is then carried by the wind and rainwater into a storm drain, eventually making its way into a nearby lake. After time, this large piece of plastic breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces—so small that it now has the ability to enter a fish that can be caught and become someone's dinner.

To understand the impact microplastics have on the ecosystem, scientists must first know how plastics enter the environment, how they break down, and what their chemical components are. RIT is part of a team that received nearly \$10 million in funding since 2020 to be at the forefront of this research.

Microplastics come from various sources of plastic pollution, most commonly from food wrappers, bottles, bottle caps, bags, straws, and cigarette butts. Waste enters the environment through a number of ways, such as littering, and can be carried to a lake through stormwater. When the materials break down into particles less than 5 millimeters in size, now known as microplastics, they become difficult to detect and mitigate.

With more than 20 percent of the world's surface freshwater in the Great Lakes, in addition to many smaller lakes, streams, and rivers, the Rochester area is a prime location to try to figure out where most people are exposed to microplastics in the environment.

Matthew Hoffman, professor in RIT's School of Mathematics and Statistics, used applied mathematics for weather forecasting in the Chesapeake Bay area during his Ph.D. and post-doc years.

After coming to RIT in 2011, he became interested in new research about plastic pollution in the Great Lakes.

That interest resulted in several papers with fellow professors and Ph.D. students. He estimated that about 22 million pounds of plastic enters the Great Lakes every year, and a lot of it ends up on the shorelines and at the bottom of the lakes.

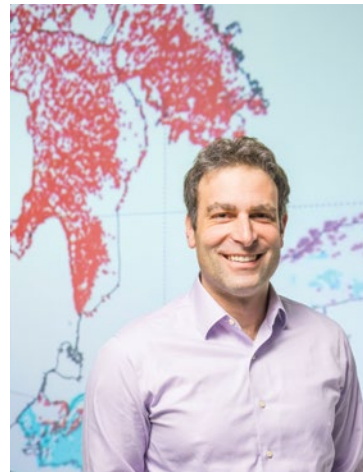
"As I became more and more involved in the plastics community, there were so many things that we don't know, like how plastic changes and how it interacts with the ecosystems," said Hoffman. "But these are questions I am not equipped to answer as a mathematician."

At RIT, Hoffman has taught a climate change class with Christy Tyler, professor in the Thomas H. Gosnell School of Life Sciences, whose background is in ecology of coastal systems. Coincidentally, the two are also neighbors and their children are friends.

It was a natural collaboration for the two to partner on microplastics research.

"Plastic pollution was a new field, and you need to know a little bit about a lot of things, so we tried to create a group that could fill that gap and try to answer questions that were out of reach for a single person," said Hoffman.

RIT was the perfect place to tackle this interdisciplinary problem. Hoffman and Tyler added André Hudson, dean of the College of Science; Nathan Eddingsaas, associate professor in the School of Chemistry and Materials Science; and Steven Day, professor in the Department of Biomedical Engineering, to their team. Hudson specializes in biochemistry and microbiology, Eddingsaas examines particles to decipher their chemical makeup, and Day focuses on fluid mechanics.



**Professor Matthew Hoffman stands in front of a map showing simulated plastics distribution in the Great Lakes.**





The strength of the team was recognized immediately with grants and funding, starting with a grant in early 2020 from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) New York Sea Grant College Program to examine how plastics are transported, how they are transformed, where they end up, and how they affect the ecosystem of the Great Lakes.

## Funding casts a wider net

The COVID pandemic halted a lot of research. Fortunately, having members of the plastics pollution team living in the same neighborhood—and some in the same house (Tyler and Day are married)—allowed the research to continue.

"We're super lucky, we managed to do a lot of work in smaller lakes and ponds we had access to," said Tyler. "It turned it into much more of a field project than we had intended."

The team originally planned to focus only on Lake Ontario but shifted to looking at a number of different types of waterbodies in the Lake Ontario watershed because of restrictions due to the pandemic. According to Tyler, this turned out to be fortuitous because they found that where plastic enters the environment is important in determining what happens to it and how much risk might be incurred.

Those pandemic findings led to two NOAA Marine Debris Program grants where the team studies how plastics move through communities, waterways, and ecosystems. Using filter devices called Seabins and LittaTraps, the team captures debris in stormwater runoff. The contents are then collected, dried, sorted, and categorized.

The team started by installing nine LittaTraps in the Rochester area and sampling them once a month. Paige Arieno '23 (environmental science), '24 MS (environmental science) has been working with the LittaTrap sampling and documentation for more than two years as both an undergraduate and a graduate student.

"I use an instrument that identifies polymers of plastic," explained Arieno. "There are many polymers. That helps us determine how the different plastics will degrade in the lakes and what effect they will have on animals."

With support from the National Sea Grant Office and a targeted debris interception program supported by NOAA's Marine Debris Program, more than 70 new LittaTraps will be installed. The funding also helped build partnerships with local organizations and municipalities to deploy the collection devices around the city of Rochester, leading to the formation of the Community Action for Stormwater Clean-Up and Debris Elimination (CASCADE) program.

"We can work on the pollution issue by working with kids and have them develop solutions that they think are going to work in their neighborhoods," said Tyler. "Education is empowering, and it's connecting people with nature and showing how they are connected to the bigger ecosystem and are part of the water cycle."

Even more collaborations came in 2024, starting with the formation of the Lake Ontario Center for Microplastics and Human Health, a research center backed by \$7.3 million in funding from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and the National Science Foundation.

The Rochester-based center is co-directed by Tyler and Katrina Korfmacher, professor of environmental medicine at the University of Rochester. The collaboration combines RIT's emphasis on the impact of plastic pollution with UR's focus on preventing health problems caused by microplastics.

For sustainability Ph.D. student Sydney VanWinkle '19 (environmental science), '21 MS (environmental science), the plastics problem is personal. After spending a year in Madagascar as a Fulbright scholar where she evaluated the impact of community-based conservation, she found that RIT was the perfect place for her to continue her academic career.

"I'm from Rochester, where our freshwater resources are so vast and so important, and they're threatened," said VanWinkle. "All the knowledge that I've gained, and how this touches the community, it all really came together. You're really given the opportunity to be creative and pursue what you think is important through research here at RIT."

In September, the RIT team was recommended for nearly \$1 million in NOAA funding to continue its research intercepting





Sustainability Ph.D. student **Sydney VanWinkle '19, '21MS** checks a thermometer in the corral. The corrals provide a controlled environment to study the breakdown of plastics across changes in temperature and time.

The **plastic pollution research team** is using corrals to study how plastics degrade in different climate scenarios. This prototype was used in the 60-acre lake at Tait Preserve at RIT.



and removing marine debris before it reaches waterways. The team is expanding its storm drain filter research into the neighboring Great Lakes cities of Buffalo and Syracuse.

“Plastics are a way to understand how humans have impacted the Earth. It’s extremely powerful,” said Hoffman. “Making connections in communities that may not be looking at the water, but are connected through stormwater systems, out into the environment, and out into the lake—it’s good for understanding.”

Jayson Kucharek '23 (environmental science), '24 MS (environmental science) began working on the project as a student and is continuing as project manager. He said the community outreach aspect is one of his favorite aspects of the research.

“It’s super cool to have a connection with the community and to be able to study these complex issues in a way that’s easy for the public to understand the severity of it,” said Kucharek. “Just one person can make a difference.”

In RIT’s labs, interdisciplinary experts are continuing the work to pinpoint exactly how and where plastics enter the water system. Chemists are also looking at the small particles to determine how plastics break down and what they become. Armed with this information, scientists will then be able to see how microplastics affect human health.

“Microplastics are accumulating in the environment to the point that we can’t ignore it anymore,” said Tyler. “Plastic is in everything we do, everything we touch. Look around. I’m sure there’s probably a lot of plastic right there. It’s everywhere, and we’re exposed to it all the time.” 🐾

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**Mollie Radzinski**

## Learn more

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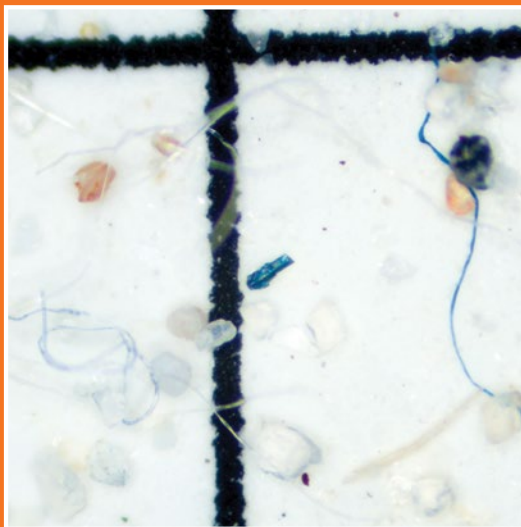
For more on how RIT is studying plastics in the environment, go to [rit.edu/plasticpollution](http://rit.edu/plasticpollution).







Environmental science master's degree students **Paige Arieno**, left, and **Jay Kucharek** routinely sort, identify, and catalog debris found in the many storm drain catch basin filters that they place around Rochester.



A look at a microplastics sample through a microscope.



# Virtually endless possibilities

RIT researchers push boundaries  
with immersive technologies

Researchers at RIT are using extended reality (XR) to expand experiences. They have made it possible to virtually print *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* on a historic printing press and take the stage in a virtual theater. RIT experts are also using XR to study blindness and making sure the technology is accessible to all.

Immersive technologies have been studied at RIT for more than 20 years. Today, students and faculty continue to embrace XR as the developing technology grows more powerful, gets physically smaller, and companies make it more cost effective.

In 2016, the university formed a collaborative community and annual symposium for XR enthusiasts called Frameless Labs. In addition to games, the projects include scientific research, experiences, and narratives.

For the last three years, Animation Career Review has ranked RIT one of the top 10 AR/VR colleges in the country. Most recently, students started a Virtual/Augmented Reality club with more than 100 members.

"We've been at the forefront of this technology and our students get it—they know it's here to stay," said Susan Lakin, professor in the School of Photographic Arts and Sciences and director of Frameless Labs. "As more people get these devices, we want to be ready with interesting applications."

Read about four RIT projects on the pages that follow.

## What's the difference?

### Extended reality (XR):

Umbrella term for any technology that adds digital elements to the real world.

### Virtual reality (VR):

Immersive experience within a computer-generated simulated world.

### Augmented reality (AR):

Technology that combines real and computer-generated content.

### Mixed reality (MR):

A hybrid environment blending physical and digital elements.

### Metaverse:

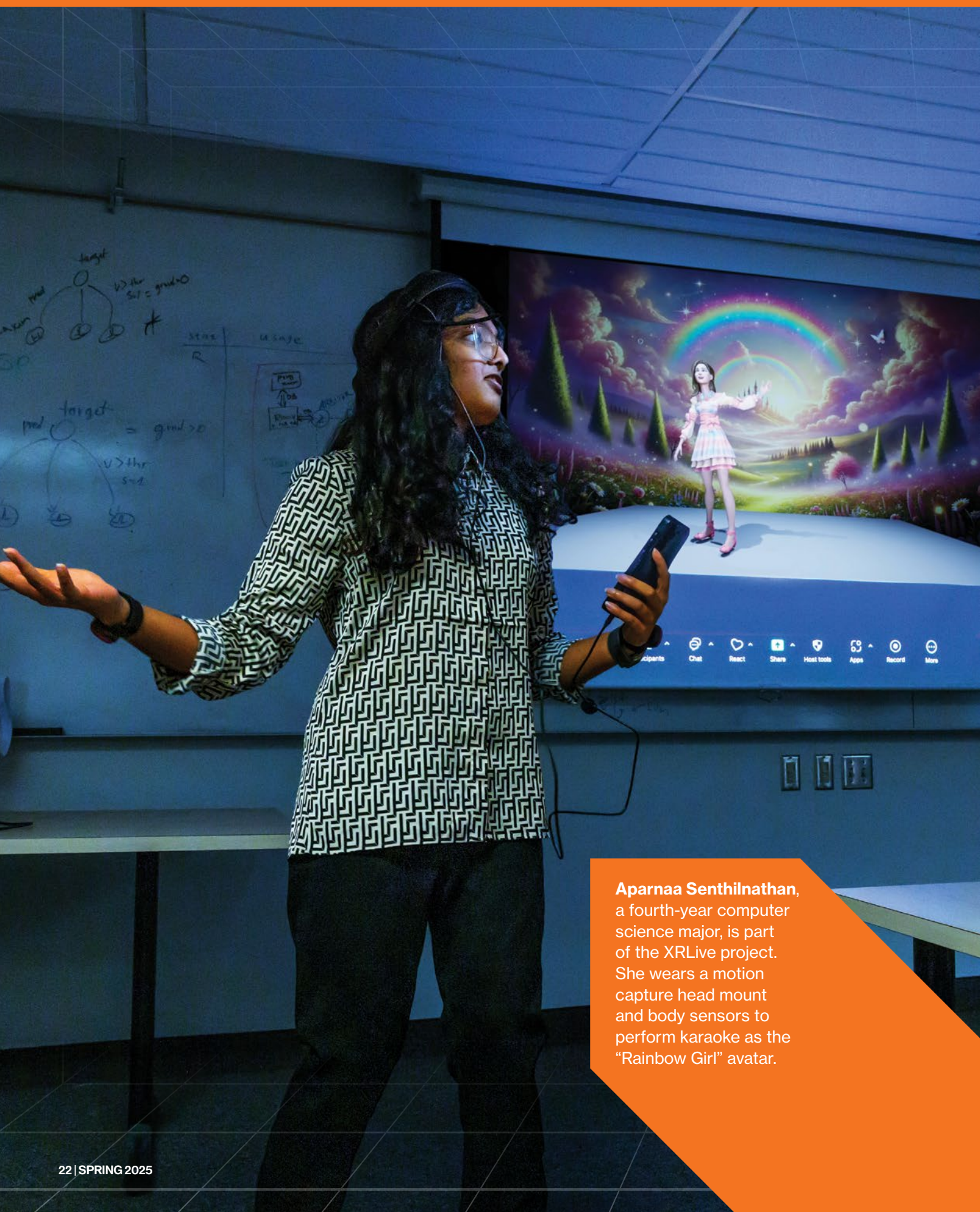
A network of immersive digital spaces.





**RIT experts** are developing unique applications for XR. One team is producing live VR karaoke, where performers can transform into different avatars, including “Rainbow Girl,” to sing their hearts out.





**Aparnaa Senthilnathan**, a fourth-year computer science major, is part of the XRLive project. She wears a motion capture head mount and body sensors to perform karaoke as the “Rainbow Girl” avatar.



## Transporting the audience with mixed reality theater



**Joe Geigel**

Professor of  
computer science

For Joe Geigel, professor of computer science, all the world's a stage—especially the virtual world.

In college, Geigel was working backstage for a student players group. While setting up lights for *Cabaret*, a friend asked, “Wouldn’t it be cool if we could do all this on the computer?” From that point on, it became Geigel’s dream.

At RIT, Geigel began working with Marla Schweppe, a now Emeritus Professor of 3D digital design. In 2004, the interdisciplinary duo published a paper on theatrical storytelling in a virtual space. The paper led to an NSF grant to make it happen.

“When you put on that headset and you’re in a 3D world, it becomes an impressively immersive experience that you don’t get through 2D video,” said Geigel. “Using XR in the theatrical process opens new avenues for artistic expression and allows us to create effects that would be difficult or impossible to achieve on a physical stage.”

Since then, Geigel has worked on more than 15 performances and productions with XR,

with several taking place in RIT’s MAGIC Spell Studios. “Been Set Free” was one live dance interpretation of a song. It was set on a virtual stage with participants in different physical locations. The audience used headsets to watch a dancing avatar, whose motions were guided by a live performer outfitted with a full-body motion capture system.

“Next, we’re looking at applications in facial motion capture,” said Geigel. “This has been a hard problem for a long time—it’s even expensive for movie makers. But now, the tech is getting to the point where you can do good facial capture with your smartphone.”

Geigel and seven student researchers are now creating avatars for live performances of virtual karaoke and skits. It’s called the XRLive project, and it’s run through RIT’s new Vertically Integrated Projects research program for undergraduate and graduate students.

Rafa Davis, a first-year game design and development major, started XRLive on the acting side. Davis joined the student-

run theater club RIT Players to make new friends and ended up volunteering for an XR performance of the comedy routine “Who’s on First?”

“You’re wearing motion capture bands on your wrists and ankles and a bike helmet with a phone filming your facial expressions, but you eventually forget that it’s all there,” said Davis, who is from Oakland, Calif.

Davis is researching the technical side as well, creating open-source tools and technical support for the live XR-enhanced performances. The team works to integrate and sync motion capture systems with Unreal Engine. Davis said the challenge comes from using different technologies that have never been connected before.

“It’s a win-win because I really like the people on the XR project and this will give me practical experience for my major,” said Davis. “We can create all kinds of full experiences that engage your senses using XR. I think it’s the future.”

**Scott Bureau ’11, ’16 MBA**



# 19<sup>th</sup>-century printing press

## comes to life



**Shaun Foster**

Professor of  
3D digital design

**R**IT students and faculty are using a new technology to capture an old experience.

Their VR app simulates printing on a 19<sup>th</sup>-century cast-iron hand press once owned by British designer William Morris.

The app, published earlier this year on the Steam gaming platform, gives virtual life to the Kelmscott/Goudy Albion printing press, a prized object in the Cary Graphic Arts Collection at RIT.

The cast iron hand press had noteworthy owners—including Morris, leader of the British Arts and Crafts movement; Frederic Goudy, American type designer and typographer; and Melbert B. Cary Jr., the RIT special collection's namesake. Its storied past makes the press a destination for cultural heritage enthusiasts around the world, said Steven Galbraith, curator of the Cary Collection.

Galbraith sees a growing role for VR technology in libraries and museums.

"Simulating a rare artifact like the Kelmscott/Goudy Press helps expand teaching and research possibilities to more people," said Galbraith. "It triggers imagination and curiosity."

The student-led project

grew from a collaboration between Galbraith and Shaun Foster '01 MFA (3D computer animation), professor of 3D digital design.

"Creating novel uses for access to archival and historical objects for learning is an interest of mine," Foster said.

Several RIT students contributed to the virtual printing press in its various stages of development.

Boyu Xu '18 MS (media arts and technology) built the initial 3D model for the Cary Collection. Aidan Grant '23 (3D digital design) built the VR experience. Grant gamified the hand press using Epic Games' Unreal Engine, a 3D graphics software tool, for use with HTC Vive VR hardware.

"My job was basically to take the model, trim it down, because it was ultra-high definition, and make it interactive in VR to guide a user through it," said Grant, who is now a VR software engineer at TRU Simulation, located near Tampa, Fla.

Epic Games featured Grant's work in the 2023 Unreal Academic Partner Student Showcase. Another student, Hunter Ostrander '24 (3D digital design), later added menus and sound effects.

The VR application includes

haptic feedback in the controller to mimic sounds and tactile pressure of inking a roller or pulling a handle. The software also features diegetic interfaces as a new element within VR to enable pop-up credits and prompts, Foster said.

The software creates a digital twin of the Kelmscott/Goudy press that preserves the experience of printing on the machine.

Users can simulate the physical process of putting paper on the press, inking a brayer, and rolling it over the set type. Prompts within the app direct them to turn the "rounce" handle and pull the bar to make a printed impression.

The result is a virtually printed proof sheet from *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, the most famous book published by Morris' Kelmscott Press, Galbraith said. The work includes *The Canterbury Tales*.

"Books such as the 'Kelmscott Chaucer,' as it is more commonly called, influenced generations of fine-press printers who expanded the art of the book and aspired to the highest design standard," said Galbraith.

**Susan Gawlowicz '95**





**Omolayo Olawuyi**, a second-year graphic design major, uses an RIT-developed VR app to learn how a famous cast iron printing press works. The app is now free to download on Steam.





Associate Professor **Gabriel Diaz**, left, and imaging science Ph.D. student **Arianna Giguere**, right, use a VR headset and steering wheel to study how cortical blindness affects the ability to drive.



# Rehabilitating vision loss

## with virtual reality



**Gabriel Diaz**

Associate professor of  
imaging science

In RIT's Chester F. Carlson Center for Imaging Science, study participants use VR gear and a steering wheel to drive a simulated vehicle on a road that winds through fields and forests.

Associate Professor Gabriel Diaz is using VR to study the effects of cortical blindness on the processing of visual information used to guide behavior.

Cortical blindness is a condition caused by damage to the brain's occipital cortex that often results in the loss of vision across half of the visual field. It affects hundreds of thousands of stroke patients each year.

For those suffering from cortical blindness, navigating turns and reacting to objects along the roadway can be dangerous. The vision loss can also drastically impact independence.

Diaz has created the VR simulation to see how visually impaired individuals

react while navigating a road. Studying how cortical blindness affects a real-world action like driving provides new insight to examine how the loss of vision impacts a person's quality of life.

"Virtual reality gives us the ability to systematically manipulate variables in a controlled context," explained Diaz. "It allows interactivity in a way that was never really possible before in a practical manner."

Diaz's current work is funded by an award from the Research to Prevent Blindness organization and is in collaboration with Krystal Huxlin and Matthew Cavanaugh from the University of Rochester.

Imaging science Ph.D. student Arianna Giguere is also part of the research team.

"VR is incredibly beneficial in studying behavior because we can look for fine details and changes of where people are looking or how they are

looking, depending on how much vision loss there is and the unique characteristics of their vision loss," said Giguere. "We would like to use what we learn to develop a training program to help rehabilitate their vision. Our approach is to try to address the root of the problem."

The use of this technology opens up new ways for scientists to investigate problems, especially in research areas where real-world applications are necessary.

In the future, Diaz hopes to continue to use VR simulations to research other visual impairments, all with the goal of improving quality of life.

"We're trying to use this general approach to understand other issues with low vision and how they affect daily life," said Diaz. "Long term, we want to develop ways to help reduce the effects that low vision has on the quality of life."

**Mollie Radzinski**





Ph.D. researcher **Sanzida Mojib Luna**, left, conducts user studies as people play AR mobile games, including *Angry Birds AR: Isle of Pigs*.

## Ph.D. student aims to make

# AR more accessible

**P**okémon Go is popular. The augmented reality mobile game has been downloaded nearly 630 million times.

However, RIT computing and information sciences Ph.D. student Sanzida Mojib Luna thinks that number should be even higher.

Luna is studying how diverse user groups—including people who are deaf and hard of hearing—use AR mobile games. With those findings, she hopes to enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of AR experiences for all people.

“It took mainstream TV more than four decades to include closed captioning, and we don’t want to make that mistake with AR,” said Luna. “We don’t want to eliminate people with any disability from this emerging technology. We’re building a future, why not build it for everyone?”

As an undergraduate in Bangladesh, Luna enjoyed working on accessibility

projects, including an Internet of Things-enabled home security system for people who are blind. When searching for graduate programs, she noticed work from Assistant Professor Konstantinos Papangelis, who runs an RIT lab focused on location-based games. They first connected through a Reddit post and found that their research interests aligned.

Now working in the Niantic x RIT Geo Games and Media Research Lab, Luna is researching how deaf and hard-of-hearing people communicate, collaborate, and coordinate in co-located collaborative multiplayer AR environments. She creates user studies to observe as participants play through different AR mobile games.

Her research has found that AR game designers should be providing communication options across multiple modalities—including verbal, visual, and haptic. To improve the experience, designers can also empower deaf and hard-

of-hearing users to customize presentations by including options for adjustable captions, movable floating icons, player-placed map beacons, and camera feeds of fellow participants’ faces and hands.

“We also noticed that deaf and hard-of-hearing participants were more concerned about the external physical environment than their hearing peers,” said Luna. “For example, they may rely on vibrations and haptic feedback from the game in order to stay safe while playing.”

With her findings, Luna hopes to build comprehensive accessibility guidelines for AR designers that could be used for any AR application. In the future, the research could be expanded to create more guidelines, for users who are low vision or with cognitive or motor impairments, to make the technology more inclusive for all. 🐾

**Scott Bureau '11, '16 MBA**



**Sanzida Mojib Luna**

Computing and information sciences Ph.D. student



# COAST<sub>TO</sub> COAST<sub>RIT SOLIDIFIES ITS PLACE IN LA</sub> CONNECTIONS

**O**n a warm Saturday in November, Paige McKenna went surfing at Venice Beach with Jeff Ho, founder of the Z-Boys and a surfing and skateboarding legend. Earlier that week, she was at Shepard Fairey's studio documenting new artwork featuring another skateboarding icon, Greyson Fletcher.

McKenna, an avid skater aiming for a career in action sports marketing, said these opportunities came from her internship at *Juice Magazine*.

"Making connections with all these legends was so fulfilling," said McKenna, a fourth-year humanities, computing, and design major from Webster, N.Y. "It felt like a great way to jump into the industry."

Action-packed weeks like this weren't uncommon for McKenna and other students who made up the third cohort enrolled in the RIT in Los Angeles (LA) program.

Each fall semester, RIT in LA students attend classes and gain work experience while living on the West Coast. Students come home with foundational experiences that will help pave the way to a career in the entertainment industry.

Increasing RIT's presence in LA was a natural step forward, according to James Myers, associate provost for International Education and Global Programs.

In addition to a large community of alumni in the area, RIT's School of Film and Animation is gaining more visibility as one of the top film schools in the country, according to 2024 rankings released by *The Hollywood Reporter* and *TheWrap*.

By bringing students to where the "magic" happens and facilitating connections with accomplished alumni and industry experts, students can dive in headfirst and find their own success.

"The fusion of disciplines at RIT can really make an impact in a city like LA that is being transformed by technology. Many of our alumni are pushing these innovations forward," said Myers. "We hope that we can help our students emerge as new leaders in sci-tech entertainment."





Students Paige McKenna, left, and Carson Munn relished the hands-on creative opportunities available to them while living in Los Angeles.

“Coming to LA gave me a first-hand experience that revealed my creative potential as a filmmaker and led to worthwhile connections.”

**CARSON MUNN**

third-year film and animation-production option major from Amsterdam, N.Y.



“

Being able to learn in an enriching, hands-on way gave me hope for my future.

”

**OWEN BAUMAN**

fourth-year individualized  
program major from  
Underhill, Vt., far right







## Increasing impact

RIT in LA is led by Tom Connor '11 (film and animation), assistant provost and professor of practice at RIT. The former Disney executive offers students his insights gained from over three decades of working in the entertainment industry. His goal is for students to see firsthand what possibilities are waiting for them in LA.

"It's an enriching experience to talk to an Academy Award-winning sound designer in class, or to hear from somebody who has won an Emmy," said Connor. "This is who the students aspire to be, so to be able to learn from them is really something that they can't get anywhere else."

The vision for RIT in LA has been around for years and was brought to life by many people across the university, on both the East and West coasts.

In 2022, the first cohort of 16 students traveled to LA for an immersion in the film industry. After two successful semesters, the program expanded its offerings to include two tracks: one in film and animation and one in transmedia storytelling, which explores other multifaceted careers in the entertainment industry.

This academic year, the program welcomed 30 students based in the College of Art and Design, College of Liberal Arts, Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences, Saunders College of Business, and the School of Individualized Study.

From studying under palm trees to exploring studio backlots, Joseph Yasuda knew he had to get these LA experiences when planning his third year at RIT.

"Down the hill from our apartment, we had Universal Studios on our left and Warner Bros. on our right. We truly felt like we were right in the thick of it," said Yasuda, a film and animation-animation option student from Fremont, Calif.

Yasuda started each week with classes on Monday and Tuesday, where he learned about the entertainment business, transmedia storytelling, and LA history and culture. On Fridays, he and the other students enjoyed excursions to sites like Walt Disney Animation Studios, the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, and even the set of *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*

The rest of his time was spent exploring the city and working as a 3D animator for his co-op at CATMONKEY—a nerdy transmedia storytelling company founded by Hal Hefner '97 (illustration) that caters to clients like Netflix, Ubisoft, and the NFL.

## WHAT IS TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING?

It is a multidisciplinary approach to entertainment that tells a single story across multiple formats. It includes everything from film and television, to games, sports, immersive experiences, consumer products like toys, and more. The Marvel and Star Wars franchises are good examples of this.

Yasuda said that his professors—Connor, Hefner, and David Simkins—were some of the greatest resources for him in LA. He also appreciated the many guest speakers they brought into the classroom.

"Hearing writers, animators, and producers talk about their experience truly invigorated my passion for filmmaking," said Yasuda.

Hefner and Simkins bring a combined 50 years of industry experience to the classroom. Simkins, a veteran screenwriter who has worked with the program since 2022, said his motivation for staying involved is supporting students as they find their footing in the industry.

"When I first moved to LA, I was lost," said Simkins, program director of the film and animation track. "My job is to open doors for students so they can learn, and that's made possible through the connections I've made over the years."

Hefner, a marketing strategist and storyteller, was eager to offer current students the toolsets to drive innovation in an ever-changing industry.

"One of the most important things that I tried to teach them is to have a hungry, humble, and smart attitude. Because if you're hungry, humble, and smart, then opportunity will always come to you," said Hefner, program director of the transmedia storytelling track.

## Working and learning

Ryker D'Angelo embraced this attitude with great success. D'Angelo, a fourth-year English major from St. Augustine, Fla., completed a co-op at Metric Talent and Literary Agency, where he reviewed and gave feedback on scripts for the company.

Despite not having prior experience, D'Angelo channeled his strengths and opened himself up to new opportunities. His time at Metric Talent allowed him to experience the inner workings of the entertainment industry and taught him to be more of an innovative thinker.

From left, Joseph Yasuda, Nathan Armstrong, Ariel Haak, and Owen Bauman sit outside Griffith Observatory, one of many sites the students visited while studying in LA.



"My co-op was my favorite part of being in LA," he said. "I worked with Troy Kotsur and Deanne Bray, who are very well-known actors in the industry and the Deaf community, and it's been such a wonderful opportunity."

The work experience was also a highlight of the semester for Joshua Michaels, a third-year marketing major from Far Rockaway, N.Y. He was a marketing intern at Synapse Virtual Production, which specializes in virtual production (VP) for film, television, and music videos; LED stage builds and integration; education; consulting; and VP stage rentals.

"My experience at Synapse taught me how ambitious I am, and it taught me how to adapt and learn new things," he said.

Michaels also found a mentor in Aaron Gordon '13 (film and animation), the chief operating officer of Synapse and founder of Optic Sky, a Rochester-based video production company. Gordon said that supporting education is a major element of the company's ethos.

"Mentorship is a funny word. People think it means a master and apprentice mentality, but it's important to think about the reverse of that," said Gordon. "For as much value as our staff can give, our RIT student interns tend to bring a lot of value along with them."

In addition to hosting interns, Synapse also collaborated with RIT and RIT's MAGIC Spell Studios to offer a four-day VP master class in October. The class, which targeted working industry professionals and current RIT in LA students, offered an opportunity to learn more about the innovative techniques that bring VP to life.

Looking toward future years, Connor plans to bolster RIT in LA's offerings and increase the number of enrolled students by recruiting from other relevant colleges and programs across the university.

In 2025, the program will offer a new track focused on games, and the curriculum will expand to reflect student interests in entertainment.

Connor and other RIT partners will continue to nurture industry and alumni connections to increase and diversify opportunities for guest speakers, co-ops, and excursions.

He also teases at growth in applied research opportunities. By leveraging the varied disciplines on campus and collaborations with MAGIC Spell Studios, he aims to connect with companies and drive change on the technical side of the entertainment industry.

This includes leaning into RIT alumni working at companies like Netflix, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Universal, and others to create formal research partnerships.


"Students want to come to LA to have those professional experiences, learn about the industry, and grow while they're here," said Connor. "Our long-term vision is to grow with them."

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**Felicia Swartzberg '19**





A young man with curly red hair and glasses, wearing a blue hoodie, is sitting and gesturing with his hands while speaking. In the background, there is a white vase and a gold-colored decorative object on a dark surface.

Ryker D'Angelo said that his co-op taught him to be more innovative and gave him the confidence to navigate the entertainment industry after he graduates.

A young man with dreadlocks and sunglasses on his head, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt, is sitting on a brown couch. He is holding a black folder or tablet and looking off to the side. A large window with a grid pattern is in the background.

Joshua Michaels, right, learned directly from the C-suite by having regular meetings with Aaron Gordon '13, chief operating officer at Synapse Virtual Production.



# WEST COAST WORK

There are few places better than LA to seek out work experience in the entertainment industry. This year's RIT in LA cohort completed co-ops and internships at a variety of companies, including Echo Bend Pictures, *Juice Magazine*, and Ace Entertainment.

Here are snapshots of three students' work experiences in LA.





# 1

## LILY OCQUE

Marketing intern  
Atlas Lens Co.

Third-year film and animation–production option, Ontario, N.Y.

Lily Ocque loves the hands-on experience RIT’s film programs offer, and working at Atlas Lens Co. gave her even more freedom to spread her wings in the industry.

Atlas Lens Co. is an anamorphic lens maker that distributes products internationally. During her co-op, Ocque worked on short-form content for social media, edited videos, and helped with a weekly telecast.

“I’ve learned a lot about myself and what I want for my career,” said Ocque. “Going into film production can be a little scary and uncertain, but learning about these people and their careers gave me more confidence.”

Ocque said the networking opportunities were plentiful, especially during the weekly Wednesday Lens Day events, where local filmmakers were invited to test equipment. Ocque met many industry professionals there, and one even asked her to help on a film set for a weekend.

“I have a feeling that these connections I made here will stem into something really cool in the future,” said Ocque.

# 2

## JOSHUA MICHAELS

Marketing intern  
Synapse Virtual Production

Third-year marketing,  
Far Rockaway, N.Y.

Before coming to LA, Joshua Michaels hoped to work at an advertising agency after graduation. Completing an internship at Synapse Virtual Production helped him discover new ways he could apply his expertise in marketing and entrepreneurship.

“Synapse exposed me to the entertainment industry in a way that I’ve never seen it before,” said Michaels. “It gave me the tools that I really wish I had when I was first starting out in marketing.”

Michaels describes Synapse as “the future of cinema.” It’s an alumni-founded virtual production studio that recently secured two MTV Video Music Awards for its work on Eminem’s “Houdini” music video. The video was nominated for a 2025 Grammy Award.

Michaels assisted with day-to-day duties related to branding and public relations, social media content planning and posting, and research regarding potential client collaborations.

“There are so many different industries in LA. If you take advantage of coming here, you can meet some people that can perhaps change your life,” said Michaels.

# 3

## OWEN BAUMAN

Game writer  
CATMONKEY

Fourth-year individualized  
program, Underhill, Vt.

Owen Bauman crafted his degree around multimedia narrative design. When presented with the chance to get experience with transmedia storytelling through RIT in LA, he applied immediately.

“This is where all the jobs are and I can actually see people working in their natural habitat,” said Bauman. “It’s nice getting that real perspective. It’s been eye opening for me.”

He worked at CATMONKEY, a company that specializes in multimedia storytelling with a focus on “nerd” content. CATMONKEY helps clients—which include Netflix, the NFL, Universal, Ubisoft, and others—with marketing strategies, creative concepts, and other creative needs. During his co-op, Bauman worked with a team to develop a transmedia video game.

As a game writer, he crafted the characters’ dialogue and the narrative design of the overall story arcs.

“My co-op with CATMONKEY was the first time I actually felt like I was part of a company. It kind of removed that façade of a job in LA being this unattainable goal,” said Bauman. 🐵





## Alumni Updates

From left, **Sean Malony '12**, **Max Lopez '12**, and **Cami Kwan '15** recently launched their new series, *Ruff Ruff Danger Dogs*. The series leans into the trio's earnest approach to animation, which they credit to the minor in philosophy they all completed at RIT.





A woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a yellow sweater, is smiling and working on a craft project. She is wearing a red and blue beanie. The background is a workshop with various tools and materials.

# Earnest approach to animation leads to success for alumni trio

Friendships formed at RIT helped lay the foundation for Apartment D, an alumni-owned indie stop-motion animation studio. By leaning into their authentic approach to the craft, Sean Malony '12 (film and animation), Max Lopez '12 (film and animation), and Cami Kwan '15 (film and animation) carved out their niche in the industry.

Named after the apartment and pseudo-studio Lopez and Malony shared when they moved to Los Angeles, Apartment D specializes in content that packs a visual punch and evokes the unbridled joy of watching Saturday morning cartoons. Located in Burbank, Calif., the studio has served clients like Nickelodeon, Warner Bros., Mattel, *Game Grumps*, and *Good Mythical Morning with Rhett & Link*.

Lopez, partner and CEO, said that starting their own studio and stepping into a creative leadership role wouldn't have been possible without the interdisciplinary education they received at RIT.

"I took a lot of wood and metalworking classes. I also had a philosophy minor and even took physics and calculus classes," said Lopez. "It's not just our creative skills that got us here. There's a whole set of skills around your craft that turn out to be just as important as the craft itself."

Becoming their own bosses wasn't easy, but as the studio grew, they gained the resources, expertise, and network needed to pursue their own creative projects. Apartment D's first original series, *Ruff Ruff Danger Dogs*, premiered in December 2024.

*Ruff Ruff Danger Dogs* is a kids' series that tells the story of five once-abandoned pets—the "goodest dogs"—who must learn to put their differences aside, work as a team, and become

heroes to save the world from Galactic Evil.

Working in kids' entertainment wasn't always the goal for the studio.

"The more the three of us worked together, we realized that we are incredibly earnest, and that doesn't always play well with adult animation," said Kwan, partner and creative producer. "The stories that we love are Saturday morning cartoons and shonen anime. Stories like that are more kid-focused, so it just matched with our voice."

Kwan's favorite client projects have celebrated this approach to animation. One of her most meaningful moments was creating an animated series for Corinne Tan, the 2022 American Girl Doll of the Year and the company's first Chinese American doll.

A Chinese American herself, Kwan used her personal experiences to inform an accurate portrayal of Tan's household, even down to small details like making sure the doll didn't wear shoes in her bedroom.

Another lesson gained from their time at RIT is the importance of supporting other young creatives as they learn to thrive in a scrappy industry. Many of Apartment D's current employees are fellow RIT alumni. They also open the doors of their studio for students participating in the RIT in LA program, appear as guest speakers for animation classes, and have RIT student interns.

"It's fun seeing students grow as artists and develop their styles," said Malony, partner and creative director. "So much of where I am now is because of the people and artists who came before me. If I can help keep that energy flowing to the next generation, I absolutely want to do that."

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Felicia Swartzenberg '19



# Grad's job

## is all FUN and GAMES

Even though he graduated from RIT more than a decade ago, Rohit Crasta is still amazed that one of the last classes he took on campus has inspired his career making casual games that appeal to the masses.

Crasta, who was among the second cohort of game design and development program graduates in 2013, is lead game designer for *The New York Times*, helping to create digital puzzles that have quickly become conversation starters in break rooms and on social media. He is tasked with developing game play mechanics for popular brainteasers, like *Strands*, that are the basis for the handcrafted puzzles.

"Time well spent is our mantra," said Crasta, who is originally from Rockville Center, N.Y., but now lives in Rochester. "The goal every day is to build thoughtful puzzles that promote curiosity. We want people to feel good about the time they're spending playing our games and forging connections with others in workplaces and in group chats. To me, casual games are about promoting conversation and social interaction."

As a student, Crasta was impressed with the array of accessible labs and tools at his disposal, in addition to his professors' commitment to teaching fundamentals like programming and art and design concepts. He also credits his instructors' honesty for his drive to succeed.

"From day one, our professors were upfront with us about the competitiveness of the games industry," Crasta said. "But they assured us that with lots of hard work and diligent use of the resources that were available, our chances for success would increase exponentially."

After graduating, Crasta worked as a programmer for a museum and a textbook company, which he said allowed him to use playfulness to solve design problems. He was also lead game designer for the mobile game *Wordscapes*.

A decade later, he continues to use his creativity within the games division of *The New York Times* and is happy to be a part of the long legacy of the media giant's games. Its first crossword published in 1942.

"The crosswords were included in the newspaper during a time when people needed a break from the heaviness of World War II," he explained. "So, even back then, puzzles and games were used as a way for people to destress and have fun, if only for a short while. I'm so pleased that I'm able to help further this mission."

In Rochester, Crasta runs the non-profit ROC Game Dev, a local platform for game creators to learn and collaborate in all aspects of building games. He also spends time meeting with students, sharing what he's learned, and encouraging them to reach their full potential.

Ironically, although Crasta enjoys puzzles, he doesn't consider himself an expert puzzle constructor. Instead, he's thrilled to be surrounded by master puzzlers, gravitating toward innovators, risk takers, and those moving the games industry forward.

"A common misconception is that you have to be really great at playing games to design games," said Crasta. "But that's not quite true. I'm here to create unforgettable experiences for game players and that's my unique skillset."

---

Vienna McGrain '12 MS





**Rohit Crasta '13**

(game design and development) is lead game designer for *The New York Times*.





Provided by Keurig Dr Pepper

**Anna Valentine '17**  
(packaging science)  
designs and develops  
packaging for Keurig Dr  
Pepper and helps with  
product development.

## Alumna brews success at Keurig Dr Pepper

Creating a soft drink involves teamwork. A diverse set of skills, from packaging to product development, is essential for success in the consumer products industry.

Anna Valentine '17 (packaging science) is acquiring a rich package of skills in that industry as a principal scientist on the Research and Development (R&D) Break-through Development team at Keurig Dr Pepper, based in Frisco, Texas.

"About a year ago, I transitioned into product development, where I now focus on the beverage inside the package. We research and create various product concepts, collaborating closely with our R&D peers to conduct consumer testing and technical validation before these products reach the market," said Valentine, who has been with the company for seven years. "This position has allowed me to leverage my background in packaging, process, and strategic upfront thinking while gaining new knowledge around ingredients and beverage types."

Her journey to that world began as an RIT undergraduate, where Valentine combined her passion for math and art in a program that emphasizes building technical, communication, and design skills needed to produce a packaged product.

This program also provided her with an understanding of logistical details related to manufacturing, transportation, and distribution. Her varied roles and responsibilities within Keurig Dr Pepper are taking advantage of that skillset.

She started her career working on secondary and tertiary packaging, focusing on the design and assessment of Keurig K-Cup cartons. In 2018, Keurig Dr Pepper formed, and Valentine transitioned from her R&D role to supply chain and primary packaging.

"It was a great experience to work directly with production lines and understand how the packages we create impact operations, line speeds, and change overs," said Valentine.

The experience was beneficial, allowing

her to see how design choices affect downstream processes and emphasizing the importance of bringing the full team together earlier to enable speed and success.

Now as a principal scientist, Valentine does both packaging and product development.

Packaging is more than a box or a bottle. Graduates can apply their skills in various industries, from food and beverage to healthcare or toys, she said.

"I have peers at Keurig Dr Pepper working in materials science, sustainability, and packaging design and development. I have even ventured into product development. All of these roles are needed at companies."

In the next few years, Valentine hopes to add new leadership responsibilities that will further her role at Keurig Dr Pepper.

"I believe that a key to success is maintaining a growth mindset and eagerly embracing new opportunities."

---

**Michelle Cometa '00**



# Why I Give

**Beth Bogart '19** joined the Sentinel Society to provide current students with support and opportunities that will prepare them to make a positive impact on the world.

Beth is inspired by the work coming out of the College of Science and imaging science and is proud to share their successes.

**Join Beth in making an impact on the next generation of RIT Tigers.**

**Invest in the future of RIT and make a difference today.**



585-475-5500  
sentinelsociety@rit.edu  
[rit.edu/Beth](https://rit.edu/Beth)

**RIT** | Sentinel  
Society



I benefited so much from my time at RIT in the College of Science and in imaging science. I want to be part of helping these programs not just survive but thrive and grow. It's rewarding to see the students emerge as well-rounded scientists, engineers, and people who can solve problems in the world.

**I know the importance of giving and once you start giving, it becomes a habit.**

I want to get in the habit now of giving back to the community. Especially to the College of Science, where I know that my gift is going toward something I hold dear."

**– Beth  
Bogart '19**



## Alumni Updates

Sustainability Ph.D. student  
**Katie (Masaryk) Malarkey**  
'04 (physics) is researching  
agricultural plastics.







# Ph.D. student channels her resilience into solutions

**K**atie (Masaryk) Malarkey '04 (physics) uses her good days for good. It's a simple ethos that guides her life.

As an undergraduate at RIT, the Windsor, N.Y., native balanced roles as a resident adviser, lead editor for *Reporter* magazine, and member of choir and a cappella groups. Her first act after graduation aligned with her major, working as a thin film coating engineer for Newport Corp.

"I used to tell people I made rainbows for a living," Malarkey joked, reflecting on her five-year career creating diffraction gratings.

Despite her success, something wasn't right. After years of daily migraines, overwhelming lethargy, and painful physical changes, Malarkey was diagnosed with acromegaly, a rare condition caused by a pituitary tumor that produces excess growth hormone.

She considers that day one of the best of her life because she finally received a diagnosis for all her mysterious symptoms.

After subsequent and ongoing years of treatment, including radiation and brain surgery, she adjusted her priorities.

"My time as an engineer taught me to think critically and solve intricate problems," she said. "But my health struggles taught me the value of perspective. If you can find the little joy in every day, it makes life a beautiful experience."

Malarkey returned to RIT to tackle complex environmental issues. As a Ph.D. student at Golisano Institute for Sustainability, her research focuses on agricultural plastics—a largely overlooked contributor to environmental pollution.

"We rely on plastics for so much of our food production, from mulch films and irrigation tubing to greenhouses and horticultural containers," she

explained. "Yet we don't even know how much plastic is being used, let alone how to recycle the majority of it."

Her study, funded by a \$15 million National Science Foundation grant, provides a comprehensive quantification of plastics used annually in U.S. agriculture. Her work also aims to address the end-of-life challenges for these materials.

Many agricultural plastics, contaminated with dirt and organic matter, are nearly impossible to recycle and often end up in landfills. Their breakdown releases microplastics into soil and water, potentially entering the food chain.

Malarkey hopes to help identify and mitigate those obstacles to create circular economy solutions.

"Katie has what we call that 'secret sauce,'" said Callie Babbitt, professor of sustainability and Malarkey's research adviser. "She has the intellectual curiosity, creativity in her approach, and the grit to overcome obstacles. She's balancing so much in her life, but you wouldn't know it because she shows up every day with a positive attitude."

That balance includes juggling her responsibilities as a mother of two children and her work in the community. She is co-president of Parenting Village, a Rochester-based nonprofit that offers free support to local caregivers and families and hosts an annual Family Fest that draws thousands.

To Malarkey, sustainability is more than policy—it's about fostering relationships on every level.

She embraces it all with gratitude and determination.

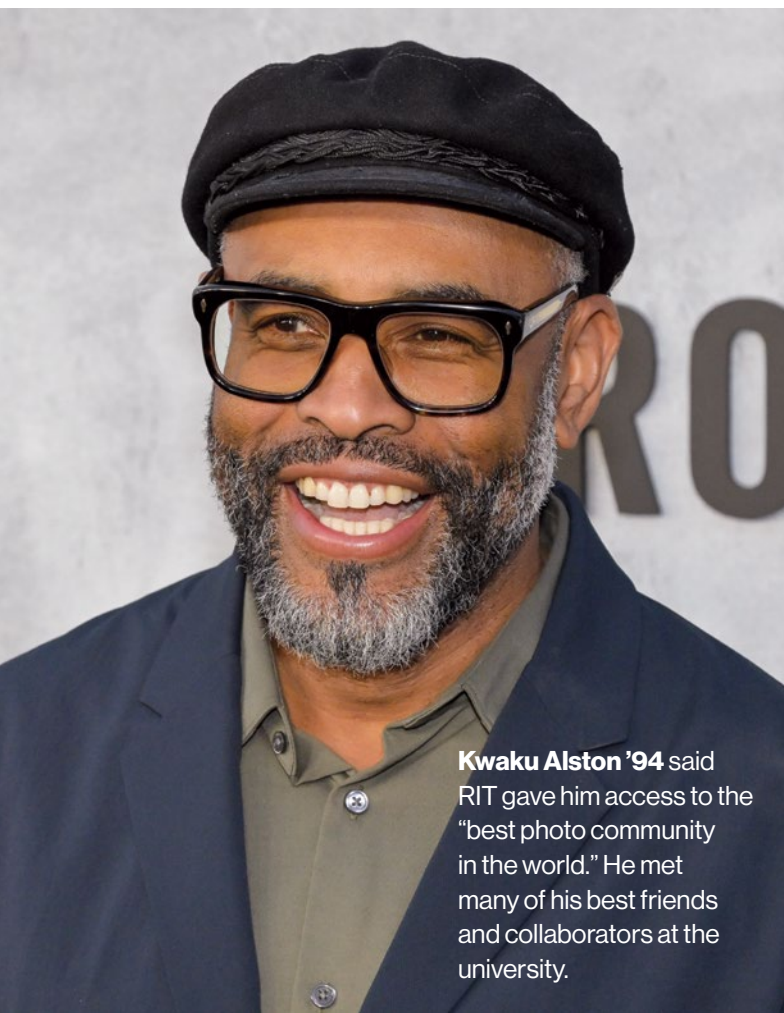
"Coming back to school at this stage of life isn't easy," she said. "But the support I've found at RIT and from my family has made all the difference."

**Nathaniel Smith**

Traci Westcott



## Alumni Awards



Billy Bennight

**Kwaku Alston '94** said RIT gave him access to the “best photo community in the world.” He met many of his best friends and collaborators at the university.

## Kwaku Alston named Outstanding Alumnus

**K**waku Alston '94 (photography) has been named RIT's Outstanding Alumnus for 2024-2025. Established by the Office of the President in 1952, it is the highest honor RIT can bestow upon a graduate.

“To receive this award is an honor and it reaffirms that I’m

on the right path,” said Alston. “It also comes with a responsibility and great opportunity to do something incredible and leave my mark here. Not just for me, but for the students who have come after me.”

Alston is a photographer and director based in Los



Photos by Kwaku Alston

Angeles who specializes in celebrity, editorial, and advertising portraits. After graduating from RIT, Alston got his start in New York City working with major magazines and ad agencies. Today, his many and diverse clients include *The New York Times Magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *The New Yorker*, Apple, Amazon Studios, Disney, Sony Music, Netflix, and HBO.

When it comes to his portrait subjects, Alston has photographed some of the “most famous faces” of our time—including Barack and Michelle Obama, Beyoncé, Willie Nelson, Chadwick Boseman, Brad Pitt, and a host of other Oscar and Grammy winners.

His portrait of actress Betty White inspired the 2025 United States Postal Service's Commemorative Forever Stamp. (Read more about the stamp on page 47.)

Alston always carries a camera with him in anticipation of being inspired by things happening in everyday life. The key to success in a creative industry, he says, is for artists to stay dedicated and in tune with their heart and gut instincts.

“I don't have much time to sit back and reflect on each photo I've taken. When I look back, it's all a blur and feels like a dream,” said Alston. “Surviving for this long and flourishing in this industry is incredible. I just keep moving and keep pushing forward, and I'm grateful that people keep hiring me to do what I love.”

The award will be presented to Alston during Academic Convocation on May 9.

**Felicia Swartzenberg '19**



# 2024 – 2025 Distinguished Alumni AWARDS

## CEOs, chief financial officers, and chief technology officers are among the 12 alumni honored with Distinguished Alumni Awards.

Distinguished Alumni Awards are presented annually by each of RIT's nine colleges, the Graduate School, and the School of Individualized Study to alumni who have performed at the highest levels of their profession or who have contributed to the advancement and leadership of civic, philanthropic, or service organizations.



**College of Liberal Arts**  
**Julie Tibbitt Feldman '00** (social work), chief, Reasonable Accommodations

and Accessibility Services with the federal government; and **Shane Feldman '00** (professional and technical communication), CEO of Innivee Strategies. The two champion career opportunities for deaf individuals and children of deaf adults.



**National Technical Institute for the Deaf**  
**Jeffrey McCaw '89** (business administration accounting), chief financial officer of Source America.

McCaw has a distinguished career in fiscal management, leading financial functions that include accounting; financial planning and analysis; tax, treasury, and grant accounting; and compliance.



**College of Art and Design**  
**Chris Wairegi '14** (cinematography and photography), cinematographer with Blacker Berry Films. Wairegi is a four-time Gold ADDY Award winner and recipient of the Kodak Vanguard Award for creating 600 Black Women, a group to help unify Black women in the film industry.



**College of Science**  
**Louis Cantolupo '93** (biotechnology), vice president of Business Development and Marketing at Primrose Bio. Cantolupo is a researcher and entrepreneur with over 20 years of experience in gene therapeutics and biologics.



**Saunders College of Business**  
**Dorothy Cole Farris '73** (business administration), senior consultant at AchieveUnite. Farris is a pioneer saleswoman in technology with more than 40 years of executive sales leadership experience.



**College of Engineering Technology**  
**Mark Chaney '83** (machine tool technology), president and CEO of WineCab. Chaney is a serial entrepreneur

recognized for integrating new technologies into manufacturing platforms to help drive efficiency and growth. He is the founder of Calvary Robotics.



**Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences**  
**Robert Moore Jr. '91** (computer science), partner championing Cloud and Digital Strategic Markets at PwC. Moore is a leader in cloud solutions and digital transformation, with a career spanning telecommunications and technology startups.



**School of Individualized Study**  
**Ryan Rich '13** (arts and sciences), chief technology officer at Haekka and co-founder of Workstreet. Rich specializes in security, compliance, and software development. Rich previously served as chief product and security officer at Datica.



**College of Health Sciences and Technology**  
**JoAnne Ryan '04** MS (health systems administration), president and CEO of Ronald McDonald House Charities

of Rochester. Ryan brings a unique blend of medical expertise and leadership to her role, having transitioned from clinician to healthcare administrator and now a nonprofit leader.



**Kate Gleason College of Engineering**  
**Fernando Silva '82** (electrical engineering technology), '87 MS (electrical engineering), president and CEO of Wild

Fork Mexico. Silva is a seasoned leader in global business development. He has a proven track record of driving innovation in retail and manufacturing, with six U.S. patents that helped create many jobs.



**Graduate School**  
**Erich Hernandez-Baquero '00** Ph.D. (imaging science), vice president of Space Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance at

Raytheon. Hernandez-Baquero is a retired U.S. Air Force colonel with a career in defense and intelligence that includes roles at the National Reconnaissance Office, U.S. Air Force, and Raytheon.



# Class Notes

## Abbreviations

### CAST

College of Applied Science and Technology (now CET)

### CAD

College of Art and Design

### CCE

College of Continuing Education (now SOIS)

### CET

College of Engineering Technology

### CHST

College of Health Sciences and Technology

### CIAS

College of Imaging Arts and Sciences (now CAD)

### CLA

College of Liberal Arts

### COS

College of Science

### FAA

Fine and Applied Arts (now CAD)

### GAP

Graphic Arts and Photography (now CAD)

### GCCIS

Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences

### KGCOE

Kate Gleason College of Engineering

### NTID

National Technical Institute for the Deaf

### SOIS

School of Individualized Study

### SCB

Saunders College of Business

### SVP

NTID "Summer Vestibule Program"

## About Class Notes

Class Notes are edited for space, clarity, and style. Share information by going to [rit.edu/alumni/class-notes](http://rit.edu/alumni/class-notes).

1970



**Steve Vandewater '70 (CIAS)** is a photojournalist who has been in contact with many famous people during his career. He met and photographed President John F. Kennedy shortly before his assassination. Other celebrities include George Jessel, Kenny Rogers, Charlton Heston, and President George H.W. Bush. He was also in the Vietnam War as a photographic reconnaissance photographer. He was awarded the Commendation Medal and Conspicuous Service Medal for outstanding work there. Vandewater's photographs and history are archived at RIT and the University of Rochester. He is pictured with **Susan (Young) Vandewater '68 (CAST)**.

1971



**Robert Kiss '71 (CIAS)** has a new website—[bobkiss.com](http://bobkiss.com)—comprised of more than 50 years of photography. It covers his earliest creative efforts—two decades as a fashion, celebrity, and advertising photographer—and the past 30 years of fine art and personal photography in Barbados. Andy Warhol is pictured from the 1980 Resident Aliens portfolio.

1972



**Howard Hall '72 (CIAS)** became an Adobe Certified Expert in both InDesign and Photoshop while at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the immediate office of the director. It was here that he created communication designs supporting public health emergency responses, including the COVID-19 pandemic and Ebola epidemic.

1973



**Rick Colson '73 (CIAS)** is excited to announce the formation of a new nonprofit art resource in the Pioneer Valley of Central Massachusetts. Different from most galleries, Human Scale Art Space focuses on educational workshops that expand the definition of art to encompass a wider range of art forms.

1974



**Eric Wickfield '74 (CIAS)** received the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award. Captain Wickfield, left, was presented with the airman's FAA Blue Ribbon package and the

distinctive Wright Brothers Master Pilot plaque.

1976



**Michael Bradbury '76 (COS)** has moved to the Orlando area and started a one-man consultant operation to

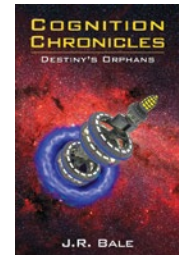
provide faculty development for medical schools, along with advice on basic science curricular change and active learning strategies.

1977



**Rick Giammaria '77 (CLA)**, senior staff photographer, is celebrating 35 years of working for Pepco. To celebrate his dedication and years of service, more than 50 of Giammaria's photographs were on display in the Pepco Edison Place Gallery in Washington, D.C., in 2024. This photo is from Georgetown.

1981



**J.R. Bale '81 (CIAS)** published his third novel, *Cognition Chronicles: Destiny's Orphans*.



**Lynne Damianos '81 (CIAS)** published the book *Solitude, Community, Hope: An Anthology*. It is a collection of poetry, prose, and images to

help end the pandemic of loneliness. From the pain of loneliness, to the joy of voluntary solitude, to the building of community, and the hope for a better future, the contributors to this compilation explore a diversity of emotions and perspectives.

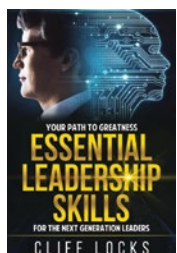




**Steve Knobler '81 (CIAS)**

celebrated the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of North Seattle Community Acupuncture

in Seattle. After more than 20 years as an engineer, he switched to Eastern medicine with no regrets. He stays busy with his career and writing novels, including *A Community Acupuncturist's Tale*.



**Cliff Locks '81 (CIAS)**

published his seventh book, *Your Path to Greatness: Essential Leadership Skills for the Next Generation*

*Leaders*. The comprehensive guide empowers emerging and seasoned leaders with the tools, strategies, and confidence to excel in today's ever-evolving business world.

**1983**



**Gerard Kiernan '83 (CAST)** and his wife, Kim, celebrated their 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.



**Joel Kwiatkowski '83 (CAST)** is proud to be an RIT alumnus. The classroom lectures, lab studies, and staff were all helpful and beneficial to

creating a hands-on learning experience. Along with the co-op program, he was able to decide on a career direction.



**John Letteney '83 (CLA)**

retired from the policing profession after 43 years in law enforcement

in New York, Georgia, and North Carolina. He also accepted a position as assistant town manager for the town of Morrisville, N.C.

**1987**



**Tom Harvey '87 (CIAS)** won a Best of Category award and a Best of Show First Runner-Up award at the 2023 Image City Photography Gallery Exhibit titled "Photographers' Journey." Pictured is *Cheder Boy*.

**1994**



**Frances Drew '94 MFA (CIAS)** is the winner of the Best Self-Produced CD in 2024. Drew will compete in the 2025 International Blues Competition in Memphis, Tenn.



**Erin Malone '94 MFA (CIAS)** has a new book, *In Through the Side Door: Fifty Years of Women in Interaction Design*, released on Oct. 15, 2024, by MIT Press.

**1996**

**Dana Marlowe '96 (NTID), '98 (CLA)** received a \$100,000 donation from Starbucks to support her nonprofit, I Support the Girls, after being selected as the 2024 Good Neighbor of the Year by *The Kelly Clarkson Show*.



Kwaku Alston



**The Forever Stamp, illustrated by Dale Stephanos, is based on a portrait taken by Kwaku Alston '94 (photography) in 2010.**

## Grad's photo inspires Forever Stamp

When Kwaku Alston '94 (photography) photographed Betty White, his impression was that she was "100 percent real and authentic." Over a decade later, his portrait of the actress inspired the United States Postal Service's new Betty White Commemorative Forever Stamp.

Artist Dale Stephanos created an illustration of White using Alston's photo as reference. Originally taken for her book, *If You Ask Me (And of Course You Won't)*, Alston says the energy in White's eyes is what sets the portrait apart.

"The artist has a beautiful way of illustrating. It was a great collaboration because he retained that sparkle in her eye that I captured, elevated it

to the next level, and gave it some extra magic," said Alston, a Los Angeles-based photographer and director. (Read more about Alston on page 44.)

His photograph becoming a piece of American history is not only an honor, but a full-circle moment for Alston's life and career. His father, who passed away shortly before White, worked for the Postal Service.

"At this point in my career, the accolades are more about what they signify in our culture," said Alston. "I feel like my father is up in heaven with Betty White toasting and sprinkling stardust on me. I couldn't ask for more."

**Felicia Swartzenberg '19**



## Tiger Love

One thing that brings **AJ Incorvaia '85**, far right, and **Stacey Incorvaia '83**, second from right, together is their love of skiing. Ski trips are now cherished memories with their three children, from left: Alexa, Daniel, and Michael.



## Tackled by Cupid

For Stacey (Wolff) Incorvaia '83 (retail management), love meant taking the long way—literally. As a student, she would walk past the residence hall room of AJ Incorvaia '85 (computer science) hoping for a glimpse.

"I used to walk to the farthest water fountain just to see him," Stacey said.

Along RIT's Quarter Mile, AJ noticed, too. "She was so cute in that blue suit."

This connection seemed unlikely at first. He spent hours buried in his studies. She commanded rooms with her vibrant

personality. Cupid had a plan, and a snow-filled football game in 1982 during Cold Hands & Warm Hearts Winter Weekend provided the spark.

With snowballs flying after the game, AJ saw an opportunity and tackled Stacey.

"My mother told me to never let anybody get the better of me, and I wasn't going to allow him to," Stacey recalled, describing how she knocked AJ to the ground in retaliation.

What began as playful banter blossomed into a dynamic partnership spanning four decades. RIT played a pivotal role,

cultivating their bond through a blend of support and encouragement, which sustained them through life's challenges.

"AJ was my rock when it came to math classes," Stacey said. "I couldn't have passed stats without him."

"She was my social manager and alarm clock," AJ added. "Left to my own devices, I'd have stayed in the dorms, but Stacey made sure we had fun. I think that's what made the experience special."

Their bond was tested with distance. Stacey's co-ops took her to Chicago and Boston,

and she embarked on a retail career in New York City while AJ stayed to finish his degree. The pair wed in 1989, and their careers took them to Northborough, Mass., where they currently live.

"We didn't have cell phones or the Internet back then," AJ said. "Maintaining a long-distance relationship took effort and commitment, but she was worth it."

Another hurdle? Skiing. Stacey began skiing at 3 years old, a central part of her upbringing.

"My mother grilled AJ about skiing the first time he came





The couple's relationship began in 1982 with a football game during Cold Hands & Warm Hearts Winter Weekend.



RIT provided the foundation for AJ and Stacey Incorvaia's relationship.



Balance, independence, and shared experiences have kept the couple together for more than 40 years.

home with me," Stacey said. "She didn't ask about his major or career plans—she asked if he could handle Vermont slopes."

At the time, AJ had only been skiing twice, but he was determined to impress Stacey and her family. Trips to Vermont, Utah, and Western Canada are now cherished memories with their three children, now ages 33, 30, and 28.

"It's something that brought us closer as a couple and as a family," AJ said. "Even today, when we hit the mountain together, it feels like the perfect blend of adventure

and connection."

Today, AJ works as a senior vice president at Siemens, while Stacey runs a knitting shop and serves on local boards. Reflecting on their relationship, they stress the value of balance through independence and shared experiences, and the daily choice to love.

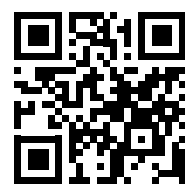
"Every day, you wake up and decide to keep choosing each other," Stacey said. "That choice, and the effort you put into it, is what builds a lasting partnership."

**Nathaniel Smith**



## Connect with more RIT content

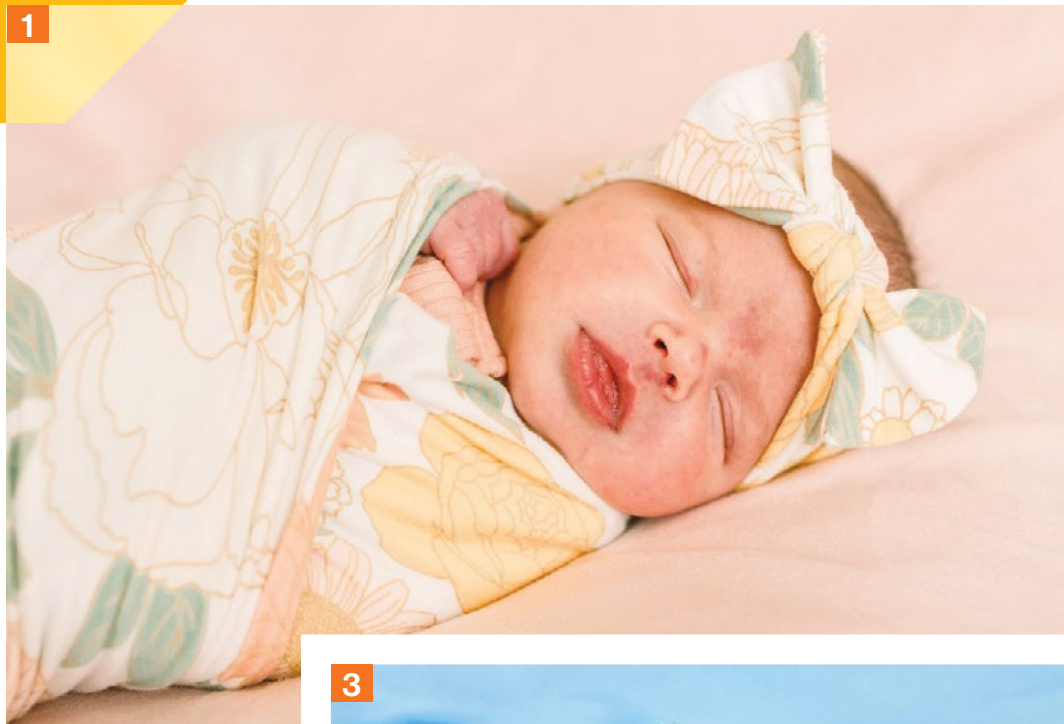
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touch with RIT?  
**Follow the university  
on social media**



[rit.edu/socialmedia](https://rit.edu/socialmedia)



## Tiger Cubs



**1** **Edward Wolf '09 (KGCOE)** and Elizabeth Ihidoy are proud to announce the birth of their daughter Eliza Amaia Ihidoy Wolf.

**2** **Emily Bogle '11 (CIAS)** and **Tom Sciotto '11 ME (KGCOE)** welcomed their son, Alexander, in the summer of 2024.

**3** **Alicia (Wyble) Stenglein '18 (CLA)** and her husband, Zack, welcomed their first child, a baby girl named Harper, in April 2024.





**Eric Rakov '96 (CIAS)** was the February 2025 featured artist at St. Augustine's Butterfield Garage Art Gallery. At his exhibit, he gave an artist talk to share his journey and discuss his technique. He is an award-winning collage artist who primarily uses recycled magazines as his palette to create vibrant impressionistic artwork.

1999

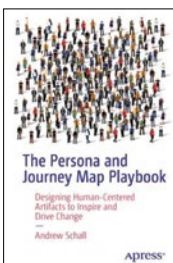


**Kelly Cheattle '99 (CIAS)** is excited to announce her candidacy for Rochester City Council in 2025. Supporters can follow her campaign by visiting her official website, [VoteforKelly.com](http://VoteforKelly.com).

2003



**Lisa Kachigian '03 (CIAS)** and **Joshua Doolin '11 (KGCOE)** tied the knot on Oct. 1, 2024, at the Cliffs of Moher in Doolin, County Clare, Ireland. They were surrounded by family and many of their RIT friends.



**Andrew Schall '03 (GCCIS)** published his new book, *The Persona and Journey Map Playbook*. While serving as senior director of experience

design research at Mayo Clinic, he pioneered a new strategy for creating personas and journey maps to deeply understand user needs and guide product and service experience roadmaps.



High Alpha Innovation

**Ryan Larcom '07, managing director and innovation executive at High Alpha Innovation, helps businesses bring to market life-changing products.**

### Alumnus combines engineering and design to launch startups

**R**yan Larcom was once described in a profile by the Industrial Designers Society of America as a “designer trapped in an engineer’s body.” Far from trapped, his companies High Alpha and High Alpha Innovation collectively launched more than 60 startups and raised more than \$400 million in venture capital during the last several years.

Larcom '07 (mechanical engineering), '07 ME (mechanical engineering, industrial design) combined academic degrees and career opportunities. His multidisciplinary skills are an ideal fit for High Alpha Innovation’s venture studio approach for launching startups, even within established companies and organizations.

“Why I loved those two degrees is designers inherently understand who they are designing for, what the unmet needs of humans are, and how to create delightful experiences,” said Larcom, managing director and

innovation executive at High Alpha Innovation. “Mechanical engineers know how to take those requirements and turn them into reality. What I realized when I hit the real world of large corporations is you are on one side or the other. You don’t get to do both, which was frustrating.”

He channeled that frustration into solving a problem, and he developed a career that evolved from the traditional to the contemporary.

As an undergraduate in mechanical engineering, he spent a summer in Milan at the Design Continuum, an international industrial design firm.

The nontraditional co-op expanded his idea of how to create products well beyond mechanics.

After graduation, he worked on research and development teams for automotive and engine giants Honda and Cummins. At Honda in Ohio,

his work on vehicle interiors—structure and usage—won national design awards. He later relocated to Indianapolis to join Cummins, designing the world’s largest high-speed diesel engine, and eventually training with Cummins’ Corporate Strategy division.

The jobs helped Larcom understand the role innovation could play in a company—and how he could influence that innovation by seeking to influence how companies designed products by first building the business case for them. It became an inspiration for him to seek a position with High Alpha in 2015.

Larcom helps large corporations go from investment thesis to launching a new startup in 18 weeks. He leads partnership teams that work with corporate innovation executives to identify new growth opportunities for businesses. His teams develop investment pitches, some of them chosen by the corporate partners to launch as new startups. They structure investments and hire founders, among other resources.

“I’ve designed my career because I didn’t like what was available in the corporate world, just like I designed my education at RIT,” he said. “I’m more than willing to credit the school for not only giving me that start, but also the mindset of if you don’t see it, make it.”

**Michelle Cometa '00**



2004



**Patrick Applegate '04 (CAST)** is retiring from military active duty. After 21 years as an Air Force officer and B-52H

aviator, it is time to transition to the next phase of life and career.

2008



**James Rowe '08 (GCCIS)** published thoughts on artificial intelligence (AI) in the book *AI Primer for Business Leaders: Demystifying Generative AI*.

2009



**Justin Baum '09 (CLA)** was appointed chief of police at Syracuse Hancock International Airport.

2010



**Joshua Myers '10 MS (CLA)** was named senior director of development and foundation relations at Barry University in Miami.



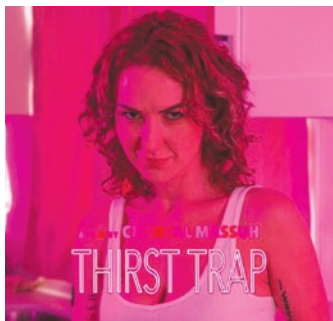
**Mehwish Nasir '10 MBA (SCB)** was recognized for expertise in business technology and consulting on July 15, 2024. Nasir is an executive board member at the Organization of Pakistani Entrepreneurs (OPEN) Global in San Jose, Calif. Nasir was inducted as a Marquis Who's Who Honored Listee in America (2024-2025), Marquis Who's Who of Professional Women Honoree (October 2024), and Distinguished Worldwide Humanitarian Honoree (August 2024).

2012



**Branden Jaquays '12 (CIAS)** became a New York state licensed funeral director in fall 2024 and works at Frary Funeral Home in Tupper Lake, N.Y.

2014



**Marie Chantal Massuh-Fox '14 (CIAS)** directed the award-winning thriller *Thirst Trap*. The feature film was signed by Echelon Studios and is available to watch on Tubi.

2015



**Dina Johnson '15 (CHST)** graduated from the University of Rochester with a degree in marriage and

family therapy and is now working as a mental health provider at St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center. In 2020, she founded the nonprofit organization Monroe County Family Coalition, where she served as founder, president, and CEO. She is launching a for-profit venture, DJ Collaboratives LLC, which will focus on mentoring young girls and adults.

2016



**Derrick Lee '16 (NTID)** graduated with a bachelor's degree from Arizona State University. He has been a

cottage counselor for three years and is pursuing a master's degree in Deaf education.



**Valerie VanHoesen '16 (CIAS)** and former Tiger **Calvin González** were married Oct. 5, 2024. The couple met on the RIT track and field team and started dating in 2015. They have been inseparable ever since.

2018



**Michael Lynch '18 (GCCIS)** and **Sara (Jacobus) Lynch '18 (GCCIS)** announced their marriage in August 2024. They were surrounded by RIT alumni and friends.

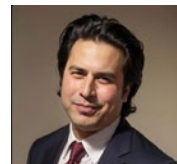


**Taylor Rakocy '18 (CAD)** and **Conor McKaig '19 (KGOE)** met at RIT in April 2016 and were married in Rochester in April 2024. They were surrounded by incredible friends from school as they celebrated their long-awaited union at the Harro East Ballroom.

2023



**Velvet (Howland) Holtby '23 (NTID)** married Nathan Holtby at Fair Haven Beach State Park on Sept. 1, 2024. It was a lovely day and many members of the RIT women's rowing team came to support them. RIT alumnus **Michael DeFranco '24 (CAD)** captured their day on video.



**Vikas Motwani '23 MBA (SCB)** recently joined Zycus as a program director.

2024



**Chris Banas '24 (GCCIS)**, second from right, and **Patrick Curley '24 (GCCIS)**, right, recently had their daily puzzle app, Puzzlit, featured in Times Square. They make up the development team of Puzzlit and are proud of their achievement after a year of developing the app.



# RIT Alumni Benefits

As a proud member of the Tiger alumni family, you have access to a variety of **exclusive perks** designed to support your personal and professional life.



## Insurance Savings

Enjoy exclusive discounts on auto, home, life, and pet insurance through the **Alumni Insurance Program**. Protect what matters most while saving even more.



## Fitness Access

Stay active with discounted memberships to RIT's premier recreational facilities, including the **Gordon Field House, Aquatics Center**, and the **Hale-Andrews Student Life Center**.



## Taste of Bordeaux Wine Cruise

Set sail with fellow alumni from **August 28 to September 4, 2025**. Explore Bordeaux's renowned vineyards and savor world-class wines in one of France's most beautiful regions.



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**[rit.edu/TigerBenefits](https://rit.edu/TigerBenefits)**



# In Memoriam

## Alumni

### 1945

**Frank Costanzo '45**  
(KGCOE)  
Oct. 12, 2024

### 1946

**Jean (Belmont)  
Hinton '46 (COS)**  
Aug. 1, 2024

### 1947

**Jacqueline (Parry)  
Bailey '47 (FAA)**  
Aug. 29, 2024

### 1948

**Edna (David)  
Pearson '48 (COS)**  
Sept. 9, 2024

### 1949

**Joan (Voyer)  
Fitzgerald '49 (FAA)**  
Sept. 1, 2024

**Edward Lastowski  
'49 (GAP)**  
Sept. 6, 2024

### 1953

**Carolyn (Lifeber)  
Brisbane '53 (SCB)**  
Nov. 4, 2024

**John Humphries '53**  
(GAP) Sept. 26, 2024

### 1954

**John Timmons '54**  
(CCE) Aug. 2, 2024

### 1955

**Edward Maruggi '55**  
(CCE) Nov. 3, 2024

### 1958

**Charles Reiner '58**  
(GAP) Sept. 28, 2024

### 1959

**Donald Ruch '59**  
(SCB) Nov. 1, 2024

### 1960

**Lawrence Coyle '60**  
(KGCOE)  
Oct. 22, 2024

### 1961

**Thomas Michaels '61**  
(KGCOE)  
Aug. 17, 2024

**Robert Sarro '61**  
(FAA) Nov. 13, 2024

### 1962

**Gary Alger '62 (COS)**  
Sept. 5, 2024

**George Gifford '62**  
(KGCOE)  
Sept. 16, 2024

**Justin Vent '62 (CCE)**  
May 30, 2024

### 1963

**Lawrence Downs '63**  
(SCB) Nov. 10, 2024

**John Duggan '63**  
(SCB) Aug. 20, 2024

### 1964

**Edward Heineman  
'64 (SCB)** Oct. 4, 2024

**Arthur Wright '64**  
(GAP) Sept. 14, 2024

### 1965

**Leigh Stewart '65 MS**  
(GAP) Aug. 21, 2024

### 1966

**Clair Brickler Jr. '66**  
(CCE) Sept. 7, 2024

**Richard Hansen '66**  
(KGCOE)  
Oct. 23, 2024

### 1967

**Leroy Burlew '67**  
(KGCOE) Nov. 2, 2024

**Alexander Howe '67**  
(CCE) Oct. 2, 2024

### 1968

**Thomas Mylott '68**  
(SCB) Sept. 8, 2024

**Robert Scheffer '68**  
(CCE) Aug. 7, 2024

### 1969

**Paul Baron '69 (GAP)**  
Sept. 30, 2024

**John Brando '69**  
(KGCOE) Aug. 8, 2024

**Gerald Volk '69 MS**  
(CCE) Aug. 22, 2024

### 1970

**Mark Dougherty '70**  
(COS) Aug. 23, 2024

**Billy Fisher '70 (GAP)**  
Sept. 2, 2024

### 1971

**Phillip Grein '71**  
(NTID) Oct. 20, 2024

**James Strong '71**  
(CCE) Nov. 1, 2024

### 1972

**Walter Carr '72 (CCE)**  
Sept. 3, 2024

**Richard Decker '72**  
(KGCOE) Nov. 1, 2024

**Vincent Favale '72**  
(GAP) Oct. 13, 2024

**Robert Gates '72**  
(CCE) Aug. 21, 2024

### 1973

**Stephen Albano '73**  
(SCB) Sept. 1, 2024

**Paul Maurer '73**  
(CCE) Nov. 5, 2024

**Thomas Ward '73 MS**  
(CCE) Sept. 7, 2024

### 1975

**Warren Behrens '75**  
(KGCOE)  
Aug. 22, 2024

**Paul Spindler '75**  
(KGCOE), '82 MBA  
(SCB) Dec. 16, 2024

### 1977

**Larry Ayers '77 (SCB)**  
Oct. 10, 2024

**Deborah (Valentine)  
Kelly '77 (SCB)**  
Oct. 2, 2024

### 1978

**Dora (Iannopollo)  
Benedetti '78 (SCB)**  
Sept. 10, 2024

**Michael Connelly '78**  
MBA (SCB)  
Sept. 23, 2024

**James Hart '78 (CCE)**  
Oct. 19, 2024

**William Lawler '78**  
(CLA) Oct. 5, 2024

**Maria (Frumento)  
Pilipczak '78 (COS)**  
Oct. 25, 2024

### 1979

**George Allen '79 MS**  
(CAST) Aug. 6, 2024

**James Dettman '79**  
MBA (SCB)  
Oct. 5, 2024

**James Holt '79**  
(CAST) Oct. 9, 2024

**Susan (Tyldesley)  
Reason '79 (COS)**  
Sept. 21, 2024

### 1980

**Jacqueline  
Christman '80 MBA**  
(SCB) Oct. 12, 2024

**Barbara Friedman  
'80 MS (CAST)**  
June 27, 2024

### 1981

**Howard LeVant '81**  
MS (CAST)  
Aug. 16, 2024

### 1982

**Theodore Colucci '82**  
(CCE) Aug. 31, 2024

**Ken DeLong '82**  
(CAST) Oct. 10, 2024

**Cynthia Jack '82**  
(SCB) Aug. 21, 2024

**Stephen Turner '82**  
(FAA) Nov. 2, 2024

### 1984

**Scott Aronson '84**  
(KGCOE)  
June 29, 2024

**Michael Sheehan '84**  
(CAST) Aug. 21, 2024

### 1988

**Linda Schiltz '88**  
(NTID) Nov. 5, 2024



**1989**

**Jean Mitchell '89 MS (CLA)** Dec. 9, 2024

**1990**

**Joy Garrett '90 (GAP)** Oct. 25, 2024

**1993**

**Robert Bush '93 MBA (SCB)** Aug. 2, 2024

**1997**

**Thomas Morgan '97 (CAST)** Oct. 17, 2024

**1998**

**Paul Dittman '98 (CAST)** Aug. 31, 2024

**2002**

**Christopher Vereb '02 (KGCOE)** Sept. 2, 2024

**2003**

**Colleen McCarthy '03 (CLA)** Aug. 14, 2024

**2004**

**Brandon Betts '04 (CIAS)** Aug. 10, 2024

**2005**

**Benjamin Card '05 (SCB), '08 MBA (SCB)** Aug. 28, 2024

**2006**

**Christina Lim '06 (SCB)** Sept. 3, 2024

**2007**

**John Healy '07 (NTID)** Sept. 28, 2024

**Nicolas Shayko '07 (COS)** Oct. 27, 2024

**Ryan Wood '07**

**(CIAS)** Aug. 16, 2024

**2013**

**David Hostetter '13 MS (CAST)** Aug. 20, 2024

**2018**

**Philippe Haussmann '18 (GCCIS)** Aug. 20, 2024

**2021**

**George Verhagen '21 (COS)** Oct. 2, 2024

## **Faculty and Staff**

**Esma Climer,**

retired staff member, Aug. 16, 2024

**Roy S. Czernikowski,**

retired faculty member in computer engineering, Nov. 13, 2024

**Gene DePrez,** former

staff member and adjunct faculty member, Jan. 24, 2025

**Willie Davis,**

retired staff member from Facilities Management

**Robert Gascon,**

retired staff member, Nov. 7, 2024

**John H. Humphries,**

retired faculty member and assistant dean in the College of Liberal Arts, Sept. 26, 2024

**James Kersting,**

retired staff member from NTID Counseling and Academic Advising Services, Nov. 5, 2024

**Gustav T. Kovalik,**

retired staff member, Oct. 14, 2024

**Michael Lawrence,**

retired staff member, Sept. 12, 2024

**Edward Maruggi,**

NTID Professor Emeritus, Nov. 3, 2024

**Joanne Meininger,**

retired staff member, July 6, 2024

**Edward C. Miller,**

retired College of Art and Design faculty member, Sept. 1, 2024

**Robert Morgan,**

retired faculty member, Oct. 23, 2024

**Dawn Murley,**

retired staff member, Nov. 27, 2024

**Thomas Pray,**

Professor Emeritus, Jan. 1, 2025

**Robert Snyder,**

Kate Gleason College of Engineering Professor Emeritus, Nov. 27, 2024

**Anne G. Young,**

retired professor of physics, Nov. 10, 2024



Peter Todd coached at RIT for 32 years.

## **Remembering Peter Todd**

Longtime RIT cross country/track and field coach Peter Todd died on Nov. 2, 2024. He was 87 years old.

Affectionately nicknamed "The General," Todd guided the men's program from 1964 to 1996. Todd mentored 49 All-Americans, including two-time national champion Mark Stebbins, who won the 400 hurdles in 1976 and 1978. Thirteen Todd-era program records remain today.

In 1968, Todd organized an eight-man relay that carried a torch nonstop from Washington, D.C., to Rochester to commemorate the opening of the present RIT campus.

When RIT celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1979, Todd and a group of 11 current and alumni runners completed a 2,846-mile, nonstop coast-to-coast relay in just over 14 days that was recognized as a world record by the *Guinness Book of World Records*.



## Archives



**Wilson McDade '24**, left, and student **Kasim O'Meally** created a map and a catalog of the tunnels under the residence halls.

*The Tiger*, above, is one of the oldest accessible murals from 1976, painted by R. Bergmann, L. McDermott, and B. Oliveira.

# TunnelVision celebrates student culture



Photos by Traci Westcott

Fifty years of murals in the residence hall tunnels reflect the values, imagination, and school pride of generations of RIT students. A recent alumnus and a current student are making sure they aren't forgotten.

The online catalog and map TunnelVision: RIT's Overlooked Art Museum started as a class assignment for Wilson McDade '24 (computer science) and grew into a passion project. McDade, who lived in Computer Science House, found a kindred spirit in classmate Kasim O'Meally, a resident adviser and a fourth-year web and mobile computing major. Together, they documented the murals that lined their route to the Corner Store, laundry facility, and dining halls.

"Sometimes the murals disappear," McDade said. "They're ephemeral. People will replace their mural or put up a new one overnight. It was interesting to me that there was no kind of documentation."

McDade and O'Meally photographed and tracked down details about the 250 extant murals. They pieced together information from an existing snapshot inventory, mural application forms, and mock-ups found in the Center for Residence Life. In the RIT Archives, they uncovered a 1976 newsletter from the Residence Hall Association announcing the winners of a mural painting competition.

In 1970, the residence hall tunnels became a canvas for semi-sanctioned graffiti.

Art students needed an outlet during the tense political climate and Stanley McKenzie, late English professor and provost emeritus, suggested they use the tunnel walls. Few of the original murals survived.

Elizabeth Call, university archivist, proposes that RIT consider student-made murals as culturally significant art.

"By granting historic designation to select murals—pre-dating 1977 or more than 50 years old—we aim to preserve this student legacy for future generations and integrate it into the narrative of campus history."

McDade and O'Meally formed a student club, Tunnel Visionaries, to continue their work.

"We're tapping into the curiosity students have about the murals so other students who come after them can see there's a long history that represents how students at the time might have felt and what the campus was like back then," O'Meally said.

**Susan Gawlowicz '95**

### Wanted: mural painters

Did you paint a mural in the RIT residence hall tunnels? You can share your memories with Tunnel Visionaries at [tunnelvision@csh.rit.edu](mailto:tunnelvision@csh.rit.edu).



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A gift of any amount to RIT enriches the student experience and creates a lasting legacy for future generations of Tigers. **By including RIT in your estate plans, you can make an even greater impact and help ensure RIT continues to be a hub for transformative education.**

**Bob Witmeyer BS '71, MS '76** feels a deep connection to RIT, motivating his dedication to supporting scholarships and creating opportunities for future Tigers to thrive.

Thoughtful estate planning allows you to care for your loved ones, support the causes that matter to you, and ensure your wishes are fulfilled.



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# Why I Give



**Including RIT in my estate plans is my way of giving back to a community that shaped my life. Alumni support is critical to ensure future Tigers have the same opportunities we did.”**

**– Bob Witmeyer BS '71,  
MS '76**

**RIT | Planned Giving**





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**October 17-19**  
..... 2025

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