

RIT

University Magazine

Spring 2026

SCIENCE without borders

Also inside:

- Medicine meets its mirror
- Got big ideas?



Traci Westcott '18

RIT President Bill Sanders, far left, and other university leaders cut the ribbon on the new Research Building. Creating world-changing research is part of RIT's Strategic Framework.

RIT University Magazine

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A shared framework for RIT

In my first year as president, it quickly became clear that RIT is a special place—one that has always charted its own path on the journey to excellence.

Our momentum has never come from imitation. It comes from being intentional about where we focus, embracing what makes us distinctive, and confidently operating at the intersection of technology, the arts, and design.

Today, we are navigating headwinds on many fronts. Changing demographics, technological disruptions, and national and global challenges require us to be nimble and calculated. Yet, RIT is uniquely positioned to lead. We turn disruption into opportunity. This moment calls for bold thinking and decisive action. Today's urgent challenges are matched only by the scale of tomorrow's opportunities.

After more than a year of thoughtful, community-driven work, I am proud to share an important milestone: the completion of RIT's Strategic Framework for the next decade, titled "Transforming Lives Through Creativity and Innovation." Shaped by listening sessions, surveys, concept papers, and collaboration across colleges, governance groups, and partners, this framework reflects the wisdom, creativity, and ambition of our entire university community.

Rather than a prescriptive roadmap, the Strategic Framework provides a flexible structure—one that allows us to remain agile in a rapidly changing world while staying rooted in our mission. At its core are four guiding pillars:

- **Transformative Student Experiences and Success** affirms our unwavering commitment to student-centered education. It challenges us to expand access, strengthen pathways to degree

completion, and ensure that every RIT student is prepared to succeed in careers that are continuously evolving.

- **World-Changing Research** recognizes RIT's growing influence as a research university. By deepening interdisciplinary collaboration and accelerating discovery, we will translate ideas into solutions that address global challenges and drive economic and societal progress.
- **A Culture of Well-Being and Belonging** underscores a simple but powerful truth: People are what drive RIT. This pillar centers on creating an inclusive, supportive environment where students, faculty, and staff can thrive—academically, professionally, and personally.
- **Global Reach and Mindset** reflects both our expanding international footprint and our responsibility to prepare students to lead across borders and cultures, while remaining deeply connected to Rochester and our local community.

Our history of adapting to technological change for nearly two centuries positions us to lead in this era. Our purpose is clear: to educate and empower the next generation of leaders, innovators, creators, and problem-solvers, who will advance society and enhance knowledge and innovations that contribute to the greater good.

Cordially yours,

William H. Sanders, President
sanders@rit.edu

To review the 2035 Strategic Framework, go to rit.edu/strategicframework.



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Sustainability leaders

Students Jade Lewis, Jennie Wiley, Matthew Henderson, and James Halt explore what sustainability looks like in real life at Agape Haven of Abundance in Rochester.

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Wiedman Professor Charles Bachmann, sitting, uses the wetland area of RIT's Tait Preserve for remote-sensing research with imaging science Ph.D. students Andy Freeman, left, and Serena Flint during a data collection event open to the public.

Photo by Carlos Ortiz

Carlos Ortiz



New building opens doors to next-generation research



RIT's new Research Building has 19 labs.

Pete Schuck

In one state-of-the-art lab in RIT's new Research Building, National Technical Institute for the Deaf Professor Matt Dye, director of RIT's cognitive science Ph.D. program, and a multidisciplinary team of cognitive scientists will examine the human brain and how it allows people to learn, reason, speak multiple languages, and recall moments from decades past.

In another, Steven Weinstein, the Harvey J. Palmer Professor in Chemical Engineering, and his team will develop new two-dimensional polymers that are extremely strong yet lightweight, with tiny pores that make them ideal for batteries and filtration.

The labs are two of 19 in the 39,000-square-foot building that will be filled with the tools—and a collection of researchers and scientists from across the university—to enhance RIT's position as a leading research university.

"In many ways, the RIT Research Building represents the next step in our journey, from a university known for innovation in teaching and

technology, to one equally recognized for research that changes lives and moves the world forward," said RIT President Bill Sanders during a ribbon-cutting ceremony in December.

According to Vice President for Research Ryne Raffaele, research awards as well as national funding sources for economic development have increased to record levels at the university, prompting the need for more research laboratory space on campus.

With the renovation of Brown Hall, spaces freed up when the SHED was built, and the construction of the new Research Building, 55 new labs and nearly 60,000 square feet of additional research space were created in just three years.

The labs in the new building are reconfigurable, designed to accommodate a wide spectrum of research, including in the areas of high-speed computing, artificial intelligence, wet chemistry, cognitive science, advanced manufacturing, neuroscience, and more. The spaces will also support new programs and enable the stra-

tegic recruitment of faculty researchers across disciplines.

The cognitive science lab, directed by Dye, will be outfitted with an electroencephalogram to measure brain activity, eye-tracking technology to reveal how people think and reason using vision, and augmented reality and virtual reality devices. He is looking forward to using his lab to create an environment that is diverse, welcoming, accessible, and a place where students can bring their questions, find answers, and thrive.

"The creation of these labs allows us to train deaf and hard-of-hearing students in cutting-edge research facilities within a fully accessible environment. That's something no other university in the world can match," said Dye.

Weinstein's lab will house a state-of-the-art machine to continuously create long and wide sheets of 2D-polymer films under controlled environmental conditions. The machine is scalable to larger and faster industrial machines, so the lab will allow companies to develop and prototype a wide range of 2D-polymer materials suitable for manufacturing. An adjoining wet lab will allow for novel materials to be formulated, created, and studied on the benchtop prior to implementation on the adjacent machine.

"To my knowledge, RIT is the only place in the world with the expertise, equipment, and facilities to enable industry partners to translate novel benchtop 2D-polymer films to commercially viable scales," said Weinstein. 🐾

Vienna McGrain '12 MS

From left to right, Savannah Tellander, a cognitive science Ph.D. student; Matt Dye, NTID professor and director of the cognitive science Ph.D. program; and Triya Belani, an imaging science Ph.D. student, will work together in the new cognitive science lab.

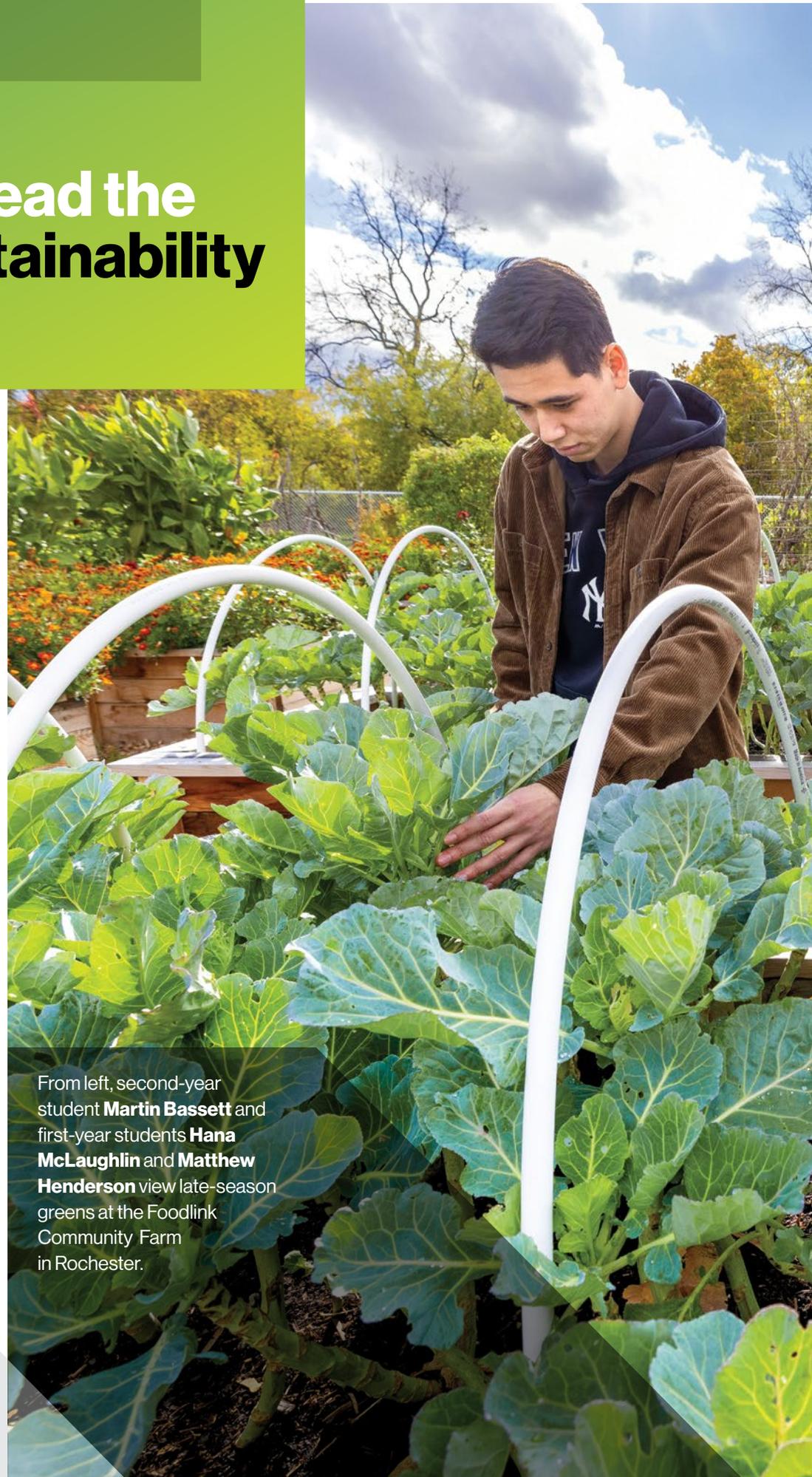
Students lead the way in sustainability

A group of students crossed a bridge overlooking Rochester's iconic High Falls, stopping occasionally to snap photos and take in the scenery. The excursion last fall was part of the Climate and Sustainability Leadership Program (CSLP), which helps undergraduates explore how history, ecology, infrastructure, and community all shape what sustainability looks like in real life.

Second-year student Isaac Othuon, an electrical engineering major, remembers scanning the landscape and realizing how much he had overlooked when he first joined the program.

"All I thought of sustainability was recycling and green energy," he said. "Over the last year, I've realized that's just a part of it. I'm learning that much of it is social connection."

That shift in mindset is exactly what the program was designed to spark. Launched as a pilot program in 2024, CSLP gives students a place to explore sustainability and leadership as a foundation for their own careers. The program blends campus discussions with immersive field experiences that highlight local organizations addressing food access, environmental justice, waste reduction, energy, and community resilience.



From left, second-year student **Martin Bassett** and first-year students **Hana McLaughlin** and **Matthew Henderson** view late-season greens at the Foodlink Community Farm in Rochester.



The program began with an idea—give new students a structured way to think broadly about sustainability before they think narrowly. The pilot year included visits to community farms, nature preserves, and public parks, paired with discussions about how global challenges take shape in local spaces.

Today, nearly 140 students are participating in the program, representing majors from computing, engineering, design, business, and liberal arts.

“Our goal is to help students understand sustainability by seeing it in practice,” said E Turpin, program specialist for Sustainability and Strategic Planning. “They learn from conversations, from community partners, and from each other. We’re showcasing RIT as a living laboratory for sustainability.”

The excursions also help students discover surprising intersections of their personal interests and the world of sustainability.

During a trip to Lexington Avenue Community Farm, for example, second-year mechanical engineering major Martin Bassett found himself talking with organizers about waste reduction in urban agriculture. This was an unexpected bridge to his work with Goodbye, Goodbuy!, a decade-long campus reuse initiative.

Bassett said the conversations on site helped him see how engineering, behavioral economics, and community engagement fit together.

“Experiences like that helped me understand sustainability in a more holistic way,” Bassett said. “You start to see how many different paths there are to get involved.”

Environmental science major Jade Lewis said the program’s strength lies in how it brings students together at a pivotal moment in their RIT experience. Many come into the program uncertain about what sustainability means or what role they might play within the ecosystem. The experiences help shape their perspective.

“Listening to people’s stories, whether they’re local leaders or other students, helps you understand the real challenges behind sustainability,”





1 Excursions like this trip to Rochester's High Falls help program members gain insight into how urban development and community identity shape the region.

2 From left, first-year students Sarah LeRoux and Michala Boehm share a laugh with second-year student James Halt.

3 From left, second-year student leaders Thomas Wills II and Isaac Othuo participate in an activity with Thomas Minahan, Rochester Ecology Partners educator.

said Lewis. "It also helps you understand yourself a little better."

The program's growth has also allowed students to play a bigger part in guiding activities and welcoming new members. Paid student leaders, called catalysts, are second-year members of the program who help facilitate discussions and trips, while also coming up with ideas to improve the program in the future.

Turpin sees this as a natural evolution for a program that introduces students to sustainability through experiences rather than lectures.

"The learning that happens on these trips is powerful," Turpin said. "Students are connecting history, community, and the environment in ways that help them think critically about their own work and future careers."

The results of that learning often surface months later, as students take on roles in campus projects, join community organizations, or build sustainability considerations into their academic work.

For example, second-year computer engineering major Thomas Wills II visited Rochester Greenovation, a local nonprofit that buys and sells secondhand items. Inspired by the experience, he maintained a relationship with its leadership and remains an active volunteer. 🌱

Nathaniel Smith



Well-rounded students

The Climate and Sustainability Leadership Program is one of several at RIT designed to help students build meaningful connections early in their college experience.

ArtEx, offered by RIT's College of Art and Design, is a four-year program that invites students of all majors to explore creativity through bite-sized workshops, field trips, and artist demonstrations. Sessions range from blacksmithing and woodcarving to papermaking and illustration. More than 350 students have participated since the program officially launched in 2023.

The Performing Arts Scholarship program provides supplemental scholarships to incoming students who want to perform or work behind the scenes while pursuing any major at RIT. They play or sing in musical ensembles and design, manage, crew, or perform in theater and dance productions. They also attend performances in the Rochester area. Since its launch in 2019, the program has supported more than 2,900 students.



Students race toward

Sam Stone made a strategic pitstop to the Hexcel company table during RIT's fall University-Wide Career Fair. As part of RIT's Formula SAE Racing Team, the third-year mechanical engineering student used Hexcel's composite materials to build part of the team's sleek race car.

"That got me in the door for an interview," said Stone. "When I told them I was using their products, they were super stoked. They were excited to see a student-based team getting experience with a real-

world aerospace product."

The Hexcel company is best known for using the lightweight composite materials to produce commercial and defense aerospace equipment. Stone used the same materials to help design the Formula team car's rear wing, an aerodynamic element required for balance when making tight turns.

Testing new systems and designs takes place on and off campus, including at the annual Racing Fun Day at Monticello Motor Club professional track in Monticello, N.Y.

The day is hosted by RIT/NTID alumnus and Board of Trustees member Andrew Jacobson '90 (hotel management), '96 MS (service leadership and innovation), an avid racer, to encourage cross-team projects.

It's a challenging backdrop for three of RIT's biggest performance teams—Formula, Baja SAE, and Hot Wheelz Solar Racing—to test their vehicles and build team spirit.

RIT also fields a clean snowmobile team, multiple rocket teams, an e-motorcycle team, and an aero flight team for yearly



Trustee **Andrew Jacobson '90, '96 MS** hosted RIT's performance teams at Monticello Motor Club, providing groups like Formula SAE Racing, shown here, important track time before race season.



rit.edu/monticello

real-world success

collegiate design competitions. Between 30 and 50 students participate on each team from all of RIT's colleges. They incorporate the latest technology into race vehicles, testing the skills that could position them for co-ops, then careers.

"RIT's employer partners value hands-on experience. They are particularly interested in students who are involved in clubs, where they can enhance their technical skills and work within a multidisciplinary team," said Kate Caliel, senior associate

director in the Office of Career Services and Cooperative Education. "Participation on an RIT performance team allows for students to showcase the skill sets that are highly sought after by our industry partners."

Performance team alumni work in companies as varied as SpaceX, General Motors, L3Harris, and NASCAR.

Stone began his co-op with Hexcel in January. He is working with its manufacturing engineering division, the group that specializes in building engine nacelles

(casings around the engine block) and helicopter blades.

Stories by Michelle Cometa '00

Learn more about how three of RIT's performance teams give students a competitive edge on the next two pages.

Formula SAE Racing

In 2019, RIT Formula SAE Racing transitioned from building a competitive car with a combustion engine to an all-electric vehicle.

Automotive technology is steadily being driven by electrical systems and adapting was a challenge. But it was one that RIT Racing committed to and found early success with when the team placed first overall at one of the biggest SAE Formula events of the 2024 season.

“A lot of people did not even

realize that we had moved to an all-electric vehicle. It was a change in culture for us, and to win at Michigan in 2024 was the biggest accomplishment for so many of us,” said Jason Mendola, a fourth-year electrical engineering student and project manager.

The team also changed how it powered the car, moving from a single inboard motor to in-wheel motors so power was distributed over the vehicle’s four wheels to provide more

balance and better control.

In-wheel motors are becoming more popular in e-vehicles being built by car companies today. RIT Racing has consistently pushed its vehicle designs over the years, testing sophisticated systems that often align with auto industry technologies.

As one of the oldest and largest teams, RIT Racing has represented the university on some of the most competitive tracks in the U.S. and

internationally.

Each year, more than 80 students in engineering and engineering technology programs, as well as those from business, art and design, and computing, participate on the team.

Alumni can be found on NASCAR teams and in multiple fields beyond automotive industries.

The team will compete June 16-20 at Michigan International Speedway.



Dom Schmieder, a fourth-year mechanical engineering student, worked on a co-op at GE Vernova Generator Manufacturing.

Hot Wheelz Solar Racing

Hot Wheelz is a story of how teams defy the odds.

The team that started as a sporty go-cart winning a campus event in 2012 is now competing among experienced national and international collegiate solar car teams.

The original team members had a lot of interest in building a race car, something they had never done before. After several

years and multiple versions of a vehicle, they entered the Formula Hybrid race in New Hampshire in 2016 and placed third. They won the event in 2017.

Four years ago, they shifted gears and set out to build a solar car—relying on their history of building something new.

RIT had a solar car in the 1980s, but the technology has evolved significantly since then. Current team members

sought information about solar technologies from experienced faculty members. They attended national solar car races and interacted with collegiate teams to get design tips.

They spent several years building the more than 15-foot chassis covered with solar cells that they race today.

They entered the American Solar Challenge and Formula Sun Grand Prix event in

Kentucky for the first time in July 2025.

“This year, our car is going to be even bigger and have new electrical systems,” said Amaris Rodriguez, a fifth-year mechanical engineering student and the team manager for the 2025-2026 season.

She is leading a team of 50-plus students as they prepare for the 2026 event this summer. 🐾



Jason Mendola, a fourth-year electrical engineering student, completed co-ops at MOOG Aircraft Systems and GM Controls.



Baja SAE Racing

Baja racing is not for the faint of heart as teams challenge daring rock crawls, sled pulls, hill climbs, maneuvering over rough terrain, and closing competitions with a tough, four-hour endurance race.

RIT's Baja team has been successful in all those competition races, consistently placing—and winning—in U.S. and international races in its 30-year-plus history.

"This year's team built another

strong car and is coming off a successful spring and summer season with Top-10 placements overall in our three events this year," said Dominique "Dom" Schmieder, a fourth-year mechanical engineering student and the 2025-2026 team manager.

Schmieder began work on different component sub-teams, getting experience in frame fabrication, drive-train components, and engine systems.

Each year, team members manufacture precision gears, shocks, and brake systems in-house. All are designed and fabricated on equipment in university labs.

Over time, they earn roles as sub-team leads and later take on overall leadership positions. Team members voted for Schmieder to be team manager, which means coordinating all seasonal events and personnel logistics.

Anthony Guglielmo, a fifth-

year mechanical engineering student, is overseeing the technical build process as project manager.

SAE International, the organization sponsoring collegiate Baja competitions, seeks universities to co-host these multiday events.

Every third year since 2004, RIT has welcomed international teams to RIT's Gordon Field House and Hogback Hill in Palmyra, N.Y. The event will be in Rochester again June 11-14.



Amarisse Rodriguez, a fifth-year mechanical engineering student, did a co-op at GE Vernova Hitachi Nuclear Energy.





Got **big** ideas?

Gap Year fellows do.

Hridiza Roy '25 (individualized program, computer science) made building a business in the entertainment industry part of her college education.

Roy followed a summer internship at Disney Studios in Burbank, Calif., with a fall position in the Gap Year Entrepreneurial Fellowship. The RIT program gave her a block of time and a stipend to advance her passion project—Painterly, an animation software tool.

Roy created Painterly to give artists a tool for rendering objects with the appearance of brushstrokes. Getting the tool in the hands of artists is where the Gap Year Fellowship came in.

Roy is one of four Gap Year fellows this academic year—the seventh cohort since the program began in 2018. Each fellow receives a \$20,000 stipend as well as business coaching, this year through a partnership with Upstate Venture Connect, a network of business professionals.

RIT trustee Austin McChord '09 (bioinformatics) started the competitive program for students in the School of Individualized

Study who want to launch a business while working on their college degree.

As a student himself, McChord didn't have access to a similar program and left RIT to build his company, Datto, a global provider of data protection.

He later sold the business to Vista Equity Partners for around \$1.5 billion. He now runs a venture capital firm and is the CEO of Casana, a healthcare technology firm that started at RIT.

"I am an experimental philanthropist, and the fellowship is one of many different pieces of that," McChord said. "The people who are part of the Gap Year Fellowship say it's working well, so I think that's exactly what we're looking for."

McChord funded the program with part of a \$50 million gift he made to RIT. He also funded the makerspaces in the SHED, where Gap Year fellows and students from across campus explore ideas. Since 2018, the Gap Year program has supported 28 fellows.

The fellowship enabled Roy to share Painterly with artists in the entertainment industry at LightBox Expo 2025 and to get feedback on

the product. She hopes to one day see Painterly become an industry standard and an umbrella for her related stylization tools.

In the meantime, Roy's fellowship segued into a job at Pixar Studios as a software engineer on the visualization team further developing a specialized rendering framework called Hydra. She started in February.

"Learning how to research new animation techniques, along with developing skills to work with both artists and technologists, has really helped me hone the skills needed for Pixar," Roy said.

Roy has long had her heart set on working at Pixar. In high school, she learned about the company through an online computer graphics class called "Pixar in a Box." That's when she got hooked.

"I still can't believe that my first job out of college is my dream job," Roy said. "It has been absolutely surreal."

Stories by Susan Gawlowicz '95

Keep reading to learn about where some of RIT's first Gap Year fellows are today.

The current class of Gap Year fellows shared their product ideas with alumnus **Austin McChord '09**, who created the fellowship program. From left are **Hridiza Roy '25**, **Jonathan Bateman**, **McChord**, **Aidan Makinster**, and **Michael Norton**. Roy used her fellowship to work on an animation software tool. Bateman created Real Recognizes Real AI (realxreal.ai) to prevent wire fraud, deepfakes, and AI impersonation scams. Norton launched RoCln Industries to build underwater drones. And Makinster designed a multiposition mountain bike stem and started Raize Industries.



Gap graduate finds gaming success

The new genre-bending video game *Australia Did It* has an RIT connection to the Gap Year Fellowship program.

Independent game developer Rami Ismail hired former Gap Year fellow Sam Magnolia '20 (individualized program) and their cofounders at Aesthetician Labs (AeLa)—Noah Magnolia '20 (game design and development) and Aidan Markham '19 (game design and development)—to lead the development and production team for *Australia Did It*.

"Noah and Aidan were the primary two programmers for the game, and I handled the wrangling of 12 contractors," Magnolia said. "I interfaced with our publishing team on a daily to weekly basis. It was intense."

Magnolia used their Gap Year Fellowship, from May to August 2019, to get their independent video game studio off the ground. The team started AeLa in 2018 following the success of a game they made during a 48-hour game jam at RIT. *Crazy Platez* won a New York state competition and grant money to incorporate the studio.

"The Gap Year Fellowship was a perfect fit for what I needed because the first two to three years of getting credibility for existing and finding financing for the business was really tough," Magnolia said. "The fellowship had a lot of the resources I needed in order to learn how to do my job

effectively in terms of a skill set. And being able to work for the business over that summer was integral to getting our feet under ourselves before we graduated."

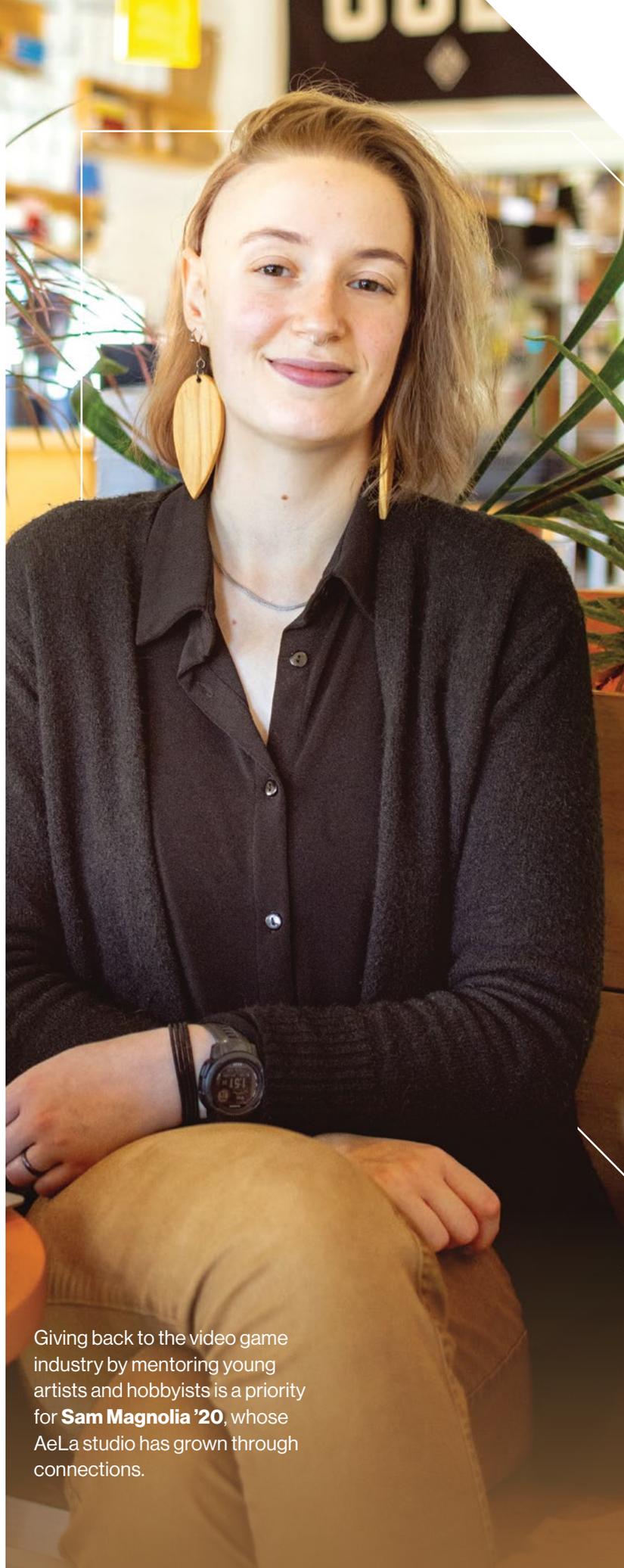
Magnolia had nearly quit college to focus on the company when a mentor at RIT's MAGIC Spell Studios steered them toward the School of Individualized Study. They tailored an undergraduate degree around operations and project management for running a studio and found financial and professional support through the Gap Year Fellowship.

"I think the concept of the program serves to give students more opportunities to really use their minds and their hearts for good things," Magnolia said.

They organized AeLa as a worker-owned video game collective with a focus on financial stability over individual profit. Their business approach has helped them choose interesting projects, pay themselves, donate to local charities, and weather a volatile industry.

Australia Did It paired the AeLa team with their mentor and popular game developer and has broadened their network in the industry.

"We haven't scrambled for work in nearly two years because our network has grown so profusely that when we become available, people are coming to us with work opportunities," Magnolia said.



Giving back to the video game industry by mentoring young artists and hobbyists is a priority for **Sam Magnolia '20**, whose AeLa studio has grown through connections.



The thrill of launching and expanding companies pulled **Brandon Hudson '19** away from his childhood dream of working for the FBI and into business ventures.

First fellow drives growth at **wellness** business

Entrepreneur Magazine this year named Project LeanNation one of the hottest health-and-wellness franchises in the United States. Brandon Hudson '19 (individualized program) is leading the expansion of the business that blends prepared meals and weight-loss solutions.

A serial entrepreneur, Hudson was RIT's first Gap Year fellow in 2018. Even before that, Hudson had a knack for business. He began "Click" as a first-year student living in the Computer Science House and sold wristbands for the then-new Apple Watch.

Later, Hudson partnered with a team to form Connexus Controls and develop energy efficient heating and cooling.

He transferred into the School of Individualized Study (SOIS) and designed a degree program that allowed him to "build my business as a major." Then, SOIS Dean James Hall invited him to test-run the new entrepreneurial program.

"The Gap Year Fellowship is like a co-op for yourself," Hudson said. "It gives you an opportunity to work for yourself, knowing that you can still come back to the classroom and keep going."

After five years with Connexus, Hudson joined a health-and-wellness start-up and learned about the technological needs of an existing company, Rochester, N.Y.-based Project LeanNation.

Hudson joined Project

LeanNation after experiencing the product, a combination of healthy food and personalized nutrition counseling, and losing 75 pounds. He started in late 2019 to form the franchise development team.

"When I came in, we had one location here that was the flagship and three licensed locations that were proof of concept," Hudson said. "Fast forward, and we've got 34 open today and another 50 on the way."

Hudson, a partner in the business and head of growth, leads technology development, marketing, and operational and strategic planning.

The software systems Hudson built have powered Project LeanNation as an emerging franchise. They

prioritize customer experience, train teams, report sales data, and communicate through an integrated platform like Slack.

Hudson and Project LeanNation founder and CEO Tim Dougherty are launching their spin-off company Franstrata Inc. in 2026 to make the software tools available to other franchises and brands.

Hudson's successes led to an invitation to join the SOIS national advisory council.

"I was the first Gap Year fellow, and I also have a lot of knowledge on the business side and where the world is headed, but I'm also really young," Hudson said. "So, I think I offer a fresh perspective that bridges the gap for college students."



Tired of “naked” pasta and red sauce, **Janessa Steenberg ’23** whipped up a vegan version of Parmesan cheese for dinner one night and the idea for Panacheeza was born.

From Gap Year to **grocery** stores

Panacheeza is a plant-based alternative to Parmesan cheese with an international backstory and a product launch readied during a Gap Year Entrepreneurial Fellowship.

Initially, founder Janessa Steenberg ’23 (individualized program) created the original recipe for herself to bridge a culinary gap between her vegan diet and the Italian-Maltese cuisine from her Toronto childhood and her grandmother’s kitchen.

Making vegan food is Steenberg’s hobby. She perfected the “cheese” blend of spices, cashews, and nutritional yeast and made batches at the request of friends and family.

“Whenever I would run out, I’d make it again, and every time I did that, I learned something

new about the ingredients,” Steenberg said. “Over time, I learned how to keep it drier when blending it, how to keep it whiter, how to boost the flavors. Back then, I just called it ‘my cheese.’ It had no name.”

When Steenberg relocated to the Rochester area to be closer to her future husband, Ryan Steenberg ’17 MFA (medical illustration), she brought her nondairy cheese with her. He encouraged her to enroll at RIT and start a business.

Steenberg transferred her college credits to RIT and enrolled in the School of Individualized Study (SOIS). A minor in entrepreneurship gave her space to develop her business idea. A mentor in SOIS suggested Steenberg apply for a Gap Year Fellowship.

Because she had a finished product to launch, Steenberg spent her fellowship in 2023 at RIT’s Venture Creations incubator. There, she had access to mentoring, resources, and office space. She settled on a name for her product, Panacheeza—borrowed from her youngest son—and officially launched her business on May 15, 2023, with a first run of 2,000 shakers.

Panacheeza graduated from Venture Creations in 2024 after Steenberg returned to the classroom for her final semester.

“Because of the Gap Year fellowship, I finished my last exam, closed my laptop, and I went straight to my office to work,” Steenberg said. “There was no time in between where I’m looking for a job or trying to

figure it out. It was a dream.”

Today, Steenberg’s headquarters and fulfillment center are in a business park about 10 minutes from the RIT campus. On average, her company sells more than 3,600 units of Panacheeza per month.

Panacheeza (original, spicy, and truffle flavors) is available on Amazon, at Panacheeza.com, and in Whole Foods stores in the northeast.

This year, Steenberg anticipates introducing a non-allergen Panacheeza made with pumpkin seeds instead of cashews.

“RIT and the Gap Year Fellowship were instrumental in the business getting set up so quickly,” Steenberg said. “It’s been this whirlwind, beautiful experience.” 🐾

Give back to move **RIT Forward**



Now more than ever, Tigers are channeling creativity, furthering innovation, and charting their own course to a bolder and better future. This is RIT's time, and your investment in our future can help us go further than ever before.
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“Philanthropy is the scaffolding which supports the social, emotional, and financial needs of an individual and I believe our Tigers deserve it all.”

– Krystle Jones-Ellis
'09, MS '15



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SCIENCE without



Research engineer
Timothy Bauch
gets a drone ready
to collect data during
ROCX 2025.



borders

RIT turns public participation into global impact

In a lab thousands of miles away from RIT at Ben-Gurion University in Israel, Professor Stanley Rotman is using hyperspectral data to find very small objects in images.

In Denver, citizen Baba Karthik Kalapatapu studies spectra from distant galaxies to satisfy his personal interest in astrophysics and cosmology.

Both Rotman and Karthik Kalapatapu are building on research collected at RIT. When universities make data available to everyone, it not only accelerates research but also fosters education, trust in science, and worldwide collaboration.

“Many of the questions we face today are so wide-ranging in scope that they demand diverse perspectives and meaningful public involvement,” said André Hudson, dean of RIT’s College of Science. “Because science directly affects people’s lives, citizens should be part of the process. When they are, discovery becomes more innovative, more equitable, and more responsive to the needs of society.”

Last fall, the Digital Imaging and Remote Sensing (DIRS) Lab at RIT hosted one of its largest data

collections open to the public at RIT’s Tait Preserve in Penfield, N.Y. The goal of the two-week experiment, called ROCX 2025, was to provide data to the global community for educational and research purposes.

The event took years to plan and attracted the attention of people from all over the world, including Rotman.

More than 60 researchers used commercial satellites, aircraft, drones, and ground instruments to acquire remote sensing data coordinated over a defined area for a defined period, making sure the images gathered were properly calibrated and accurate. The full data set will be sorted and disseminated by this summer to help researchers in a range of fields, including surveillance, mine detection, agriculture, and environmental biology.

Using a combination of collection techniques makes the DIRS Lab data unique, said organizer John Kerekes, a research professor in RIT’s Chester F. Carlson Center for Imaging Science.

“There is much earth-observing data out there, but it’s not always coordinated with knowing what’s on the ground,” he said.

RIT researcher **Nina Raqueno**, left, prepares for a day of experiments open to the public with **Amanda Ziemann ’11, ’11 MS, ’15 Ph.D.** during ROCX 2025 at RIT’s Tait Preserve.

Crowdsourcing the universe

Amanda Ziemann '11 BS/MS (applied and computational mathematics), '15 Ph.D. (imaging science) is a scientist in the Space Remote Sensing and Data Science Group at Los Alamos (N.M.) National Laboratory. She helped with a previous DIRS Lab collection event as a student in 2012 and was excited to return to RIT for ROCX 2025.

Her student experience made her well prepared for her career, and she will now use the new data in her job. She observed patterns of life perspectives that she can then compare against temporal hyperspectral imaging data to develop algorithms to advance the field.

"Having a data set that's open, that's well vetted, calibrated, and labeled makes it so that it's easier for us to communicate our technical advancements to the community," Ziemann said. "There aren't very many ground truth public remote sensing hyperspectral data sets. We can make good use of the data for our research needs, and that's what we're excited about."

Other RIT researchers are engaging the public in their work to study the evolution of galaxies.

Astrophysical sciences and technology Ph.D. student Sadie Coffin received funding through the Future Investigators in NASA Earth and Space Technology program to continue work on Redshift Wrangler, which was started by her adviser, Professor Jeyhan Kartaltepe.

Redshift Wrangler is a participatory science project where people from around the world are trained to look at data to study galaxies and their spectra. By looking at the light galaxies give off at different wavelengths, volunteers are helping researchers put together a full timeline of how a galaxy forms, grows, interacts with other neighboring galaxies, and changes over billions of years.

"There's certainly not just one route to science," said Coffin. "There are a lot of advantages to having human eyes on our data. Volunteers can take our data, ask their own questions, and do their own science that we can't do as one person or a small team of people."

What is citizen science?

Citizen science is public participation in scientific research, where volunteers help by observing, recording, or analyzing data, making science more collaborative, inclusive, and accessible.

"Having data available to the public is extremely important," said Karthik Kalapatapu, who is an associate project manager for a renewable energy company.

"You either learn how to read research papers or trust researchers who are giving talks about it, but for me, I need to understand the data. The fact that I can sit in my apartment, open a laptop, and study wavelengths of light from billions of years ago to understand the evolution of the cosmos is pretty neat."

Coffin also noted that the Redshift Wrangler community, made up of diverse ages and backgrounds of people from all over the world, shows that community science benefits not just individual projects but scientific research as a whole.

"I think it makes people a lot more likely to have trust and understanding of why science is so important," she said.

Astrophysical sciences and technology Ph.D. student **Sadie Coffin** is using NASA funding for the Redshift Wrangler project, which enlists public volunteers to study distant galaxies.



One foot at a time

Back down on earth, Elle Barnes, an assistant professor in the Thomas H. Gosnell School of Life Sciences, is using citizen science as part of a bigger group looking at and teaching about biodiversity.

One Cubic Foot first came to Rochester in 2015. It is a Smithsonian-backed project started by photographer and environmentalist David Littschwager. Littschwager travels the globe and uses biocubes (one-cubic-foot frames) to document the vast ecosystem inside a small area.

He partnered with the Seneca Park Zoo in Rochester in 2015 to look at the Genesee River and returned last summer to check on its revitalization 10 years later.

Barnes, with her background in genomics and environmental DNA (eDNA), joined the project to help collect samples and then to retrieve eDNA from the water to determine all the organisms living in the ecosystem, including those that cannot immediately be seen.

The goal of the ongoing project is to get people to collect samples that are then sent to Barnes's lab. The more eDNA samples there are, the better understanding of biodiversity in the Rochester ecosystem.

"If you continue to sample over time, and you employ citizens who are excited to go out and study the health of the river, you'll have a much better understanding about the fruits of your conservation labor," said Barnes. "I also think that it's critical to the scientific field that you take the time to talk to the people that directly benefit from your work."

Rotman, a professor of electrical and computer engineering, has been using RIT's data sets for nearly two decades. At a small university with small funds, he said, getting hyperspectral data is difficult. He is impressed with how well the data is presented and how easy it is to access.

Get involved

ROCX

The full data set will be available this summer at rit.edu/dirs/ROCX2025.

Redshift Wrangler

Study spectroscopy at zooniverse.org/projects/jeyhansk/redshift-wrangler.

One Cubic Foot

Learn about outreach opportunities at megalabrit.weebly.com.

Assistant Professor **Elle Barnes**, center, biology student **William Goyette**, left, and biotechnology and molecular bioscience student **Lilly Rennie**, right, examine environmental DNA to learn more about biodiversity in the Genesee River.

The data from ROCX 2025 will help him not only with his own research, but also with educating the next generation to follow in the field of remote sensing and hyperspectral imaging.

"I can't have undergraduate classes and undergraduate projects unless I know I have the data available," said Rotman. "This is reliable data, and RIT does it beautifully." 🐾

Mollie Radzinski





Medicine meets its

mir

Professor **Linwei Wang '09 Ph.D.** is leading research to create hybrid AI digital twins of a patient's organs and disease. The work could dramatically shift approaches in healthcare.

roor

Researchers are fusing physics and AI to transform healthcare

During surgery to correct an abnormal heartbeat, doctors rely on a mix of imaging and inference. Still, many critical details remain hidden.

At RIT, artificial intelligence (AI) researchers want to arm clinicians with something more powerful and accurate.

Experts in the Computational Biomedicine Laboratory are developing physics-integrated digital twins of patients' organs, including the heart and the liver. Building these AI-enhanced mirrors requires a careful merging of physics-based models and neural networks, called hybrid AI.

This pioneering approach is led by Linwei Wang, the Bruce B. Bates Endowed Professor in Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences. Her research has been supported by more than \$10 million in funding from the National Institutes of Health and National Science Foundation. Her lab currently has nine Ph.D. students, and she has mentored dozens of graduates who have gone on to work in the AI industry and academia.

The hybrid AI approach works because it is more interpretable and adaptable than traditional AI. For doctors and patients, that means more accurate models, increased personalization for each patient, better generalization to a heterogeneous population, and less invasive medicine.

"Hybrid AI is about integrating what we already know scientifically with what we can learn from data," said Wang. "Healthcare is a field where both matter, and we want systems that are powerful, interpretable, and personalized."

The goal is to combine human knowledge with AI. The experts hope their technology can someday be used in predicting the trajectory of health and disease, testing the potential outcome of interventions, and supporting lifesaving decision-making.

Photo by Traci Westcott '18

It's not black and white

When Wang arrived at RIT, she was among the first students in the new computing and information sciences doctoral program. It was 2007—a few years before IBM's Watson would win *Jeopardy!*

While earning her master's degree in Hong Kong, Wang developed a fascination with using scientific human physiology and physics knowledge to better understand data.

"In physics, we actually know quite a bit, like how waves propagate and the elasticity of a material put under stress," said Wang. "I wondered, how can we use all this existing knowledge to enhance what we learn from an individual's electrocardiogram, or other medical imaging and scans."

After defending her dissertation, Wang stayed at RIT to continue researching as a faculty member. Her work quickly gained attention, as she earned a National Science Foundation Faculty Early Career Development award and then the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers.

Meanwhile, the AI boom was starting. Powerful neural networks could be used to uncover patterns unimaginable to the human brain. However, not understanding why AI makes certain decisions can be a problem. Plus, AI hallucinations could perpetuate false information.

"Physics knowledge and deep learning each have their own pros and cons," said Wang. "We can use one to help the other and eventually get to the point where they work together."

That vision has become the foundation of hybrid AI. The researchers are finding a middle ground between fully transparent physics systems—which they call white-box models—and pure data-driven AI systems—which can be as opaque as a black box.

A gray-box modeling approach provides better insight into a system's internal workings, while resolving imperfect knowledge with data. In healthcare

applications, the goal is to create a new neural network that is informed by physics and trained on personalized medical data.

Casey Meisenzahl '19 (computer science), '23 MS (computer science) is helping to create this new neural network.

While working on his master's degree, Meisenzahl became a research assistant in Wang's lab. Now, as Meisenzahl works on his doctoral degree, he is combining AI with the physics of motion. One day, his work could assist with surgical navigation.

"The goal is to have a real-time, personalized digital twin of the patient's liver," said Meisenzahl. "You have the real liver and the digital twin, and we want to keep them in sync."

The virtual replica of a patient's liver could be helpful for surgeons planning a tumor biopsy, a resection, or laparoscopic surgery. Using MRI imaging, clinicians may be able to see part of the liver, but hybrid AI can help recreate the rest—even as the liver moves around in the body.

"On average, there are about 6 millimeters of error in a physics liver simulation," said Meisenzahl. "With hybrid AI we have been able to cut the error rate in half."

Currently, Meisenzahl is working to refine how the model interprets new geometries, shapes, and deformations of the liver. He also wants to make the digital twin dynamically adaptive to live data from patients.

To advance surgical guidance technologies, RIT is collaborating with Vanderbilt University experts who are pushing biophysical simulation to its limits in the pursuit of smarter, more capable medical devices and systems.

"Can AI learn the complicated physical effects that elude our current modeling capabilities?" said Michael Miga, professor and director of the Vanderbilt Institute for Surgery and Engineering (VISE). "It's an intriguing question for this field and one that we are actively pursuing together."



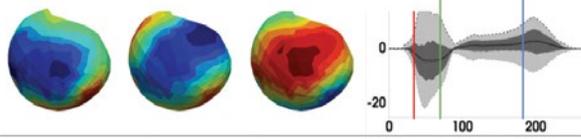


Ph.D. students **Casey Meisenzahl '19, '23 MS**, left, and **Sumeet Atul Vadhavkar '23 MS** are part of the team in Wang's lab. Meisenzahl's work will lead to real-time digital twins of the liver, while Vadhavkar is improving AI models that could assist with heart surgery.

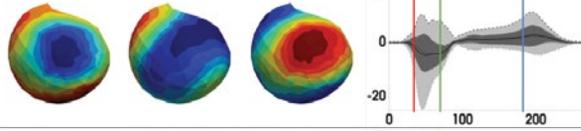
About endowments

Donors help support bold research at RIT. In 2025, Linwei Wang was named the Bruce B. Bates Endowed Professor, one of 54 endowed professorships at the university. Endowments create a source of funding in perpetuity to support and retain cutting-edge, award-winning teaching and research faculty.

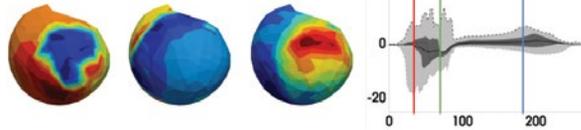
Initial estimate
(physics-based model)



Hybrid AI prediction
(physics + data)



Ground truth
(verified data)



Time



In the heart, hybrid AI models of cardiac electrical activity can improve upon physics-based estimates. Here, images represent how electrical signals propagate across heart muscles, while waveform plots show how the timing and shape of the electrical signals differ between the physics-based model, the hybrid AI model, and the real-world data.

Trusting a digital twin

Ph.D. student Sumeet Atul Vadhavkar is working to improve digital twins of the heart. He said the key element is that clinicians and patients need to trust the AI that he builds.

It's also personal for Vadhavkar '23 MS (computer science) because both his parents and his brother are medical doctors.

"I feel like people don't have a very positive outlook on AI when it comes to their health," said Vadhavkar. "They would rather trust a human being who has done it thousands of times than some black-box AI model. With hybrid AI, we'll know exactly what it's doing and why, and we can prove that it is accurate. Then, perhaps, people will be able to trust it."

Vadhavkar's aim is to help doctors with ventricular tachycardia (VT) ablation—a complex procedure that uses catheters to destroy specific heart tissues that are causing abnormal rhythms.

"During the surgery, doctors must first map the arrhythmia source, which can take hours," said Vadhavkar. "With a digital twin that replicates the electrical activity of the heart, doctors could do the mapping and diagnosis beforehand, making it less invasive."

For the heart research, RIT is collaborating with the University of Pennsylvania. Medical experts explained that this re-

search could meaningfully improve ablation strategy by guiding access, depth, and lesion extent without added procedural risk.

"What is most intriguing about the hybrid AI approach is the paradigm shift from trying to directly find and define a VT isthmus (while attending to patient's hemodynamic needs and overcoming anatomic obstacles and boundaries) to inferring its 3D structure as a hidden cause of observed ventricular activation," said Dr. Saman Nazarian, director of the Arrhythmia Imaging Research Laboratory and professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

Vadhavkar is currently building a methodology that is more adaptable from one patient to another. He said this is critical because today's AI models already use a lot of energy and take a lot of time to operate.

Maryam Toloubidokhti '25 Ph.D. (computing and information sciences) was also attracted to Wang's lab because of her interest in both medicine and computer science.

While searching for Ph.D. programs, Toloubidokhti, who is originally from Iran, found Wang's webpage. She was hooked once she saw how gray-box modeling could be applied to a clinical domain.

"This hybrid AI work felt like a really good bridge for me," said Toloubidokhti, who considered going to medical school.

She also saw hybrid AI as a good bridge for clinicians, because it's a type of AI that they could actually trust. Toloubidokhti explained that hybrid AI retains interpretability and reliability because physics guides the neural network, while AI fills in gaps where physics models fall short.

"Even an electrocardiogram with 12 leads on the body has information loss and noise," said Toloubidokhti. "Hybrid AI can be used to fill in the gaps and create a better reflection of what's happening in the heart."

As a student, Toloubidokhti published 18 papers on her work, including one at the International Conference on Learning Representations, the premier gathering of deep-learning professionals.

Now, she is working as an applied researcher at the AI startup Articul8. There, she uses her expertise in deep learning to build large-scale generative AI systems for enterprise applications across a range of industries.

"It's exciting to think that my research can contribute to how hybrid AI methods are being developed for medical applications," said Toloubidokhti. "Given the rate of change in AI, I hope to see people use this in practice someday." 🐾

Scott Bureau '11, '16 MBA



Research Minute video: Hybrid AI



As a student, **Maryam Toloubidokhti '25 Ph.D.** sought to model complex systems, including electrical propagation in the heart, by merging physics-based methods with deep learning. Now, she's putting her expertise to work at an AI startup in New York City.

Behind the scenes with tech expert

Katie Linendoll

When Katie Linendoll '05 (information technology) is scouting out new technology to share on the *Today* show, she is on the lookout for gamechangers.

"With millions of viewers, I feel a big responsibility for the things I focus on to be exciting and practical," said Linendoll. "But it also needs to be technology that can really impact people's lives for good."

Linendoll has been on The Weather Channel, SiriusXM, *Inside Edition*, ESPN, and other national media outlets sharing news stories about cutting-edge science and technology for more than 15 years. However, she is quick to note that her public-facing role as a consumer technology expert is just one aspect of her career.

In 2013, she started her own media production and consulting company, Katie Linendoll Productions. With her team, she works with clients across the world to craft special projects, social media strategy, and rebranding campaigns; shoot B-roll; and edit sizzle reels.

"People see the on-air part, but behind the scenes I'm working with producers to shoot and edit, build packages, and create

graphics," said Linendoll. "It's absolutely critical to be able to talk the talk and walk the walk across the field in production. That's something that was ingrained in me while working under the mentorship of Mark Fragale at *RIT SportsZone*."

She launched her television career on *RIT SportsZone* (now RIT Sports Network), where she learned the importance of being hands on and understanding every aspect of production. That led to a co-op at ESPN and a permanent position after graduation. She later won an Emmy Award for her work as an associate producer at *SportsCenter*.

"As a 19-year-old working at *RIT SportsZone*, I remember learning that you need to be able to do it all—that's what will set you apart," she said.

Linendoll's ability to operate seamlessly both on-camera and behind the scenes has made her one of the most in-demand keynote speakers and emcees for global technology events. She has helped Mercedes-Benz unveil new products at CES in Las Vegas and taken the stage at global conferences with IBM, Deloitte, EY, BMW, Comcast, and others. She even helped launch a new robotics engineer

Barbie with Mattel.

She also got to live out her personal dream of being a game show host when she hosted the Candy Crush All-Stars 2025 championship in Los Angeles. The fun outfit she wore at that event is one of many made for her by her mom, who is a costumer.

"I've played *Candy Crush* since its infancy," said Linendoll. "Then, I was on stage with the best of the best Candy Crushers.

Fifteen million entered the tournament and 10 were chosen from all over the globe—it was an amazing experience."

In addition to production, another big part of Linendoll's RIT journey was finding her place with the Catholic Newman Community. Today, she stays connected with the community and supports it by making videos for ROAR Day.

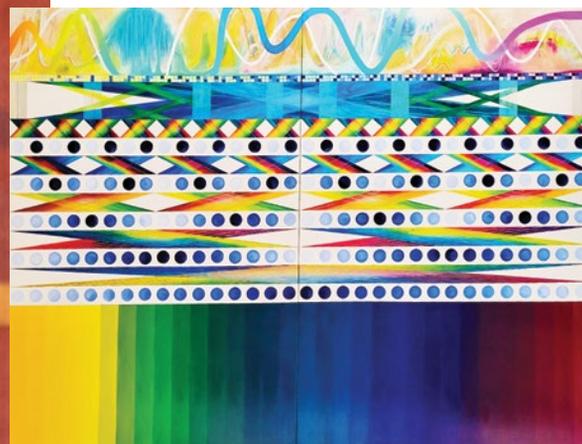
Scott Bureau '11, '16 MBA



When **Katie Linendoll '05** (information technology) isn't on TV or taking the stage, she is running her own media production and consulting company.

Juliet Fiss '09

(imaging science)
uses algorithms and
formulas to create
artwork.



Fiss created this artwork for the Chester F. Carlson Center for Imaging Science at RIT.

Art and science collide in alumna's artwork

The intersection of creativity and science is evident in the colorful, complex artwork of Juliet Fiss '09 (imaging science).

Fiss takes her passion for painting and her mind full of mathematical formulas to create intricate masterpieces, like one that greets students as they enter RIT's Chester F. Carlson Center for Imaging Science.

Her artwork featured in the building is

centered on the Fast Fourier Transform (FFT), which is an important algorithm in imaging science. As a visual person, Fiss always found it helpful to see algorithms and formulas in a different way.

"It's easy to think of it as a black box and not really think about what's going on under the hood," said Fiss. "It's interesting to think about how it works and what's really happening with the data. All

All the paintings in my FFT series are about the visual intuition of how the FFT works."

Imaging science was a natural fit for Fiss. Her father is an imaging scientist, and Fiss always enjoyed math and science. She transferred to RIT to be with her now husband, Xander Fiss '10 BS/MS (computer engineering), making the move from Minnesota to New York.

Fiss wrote visualization software as a student under the direction of Professor Roger Easton Jr., updating an older program to Java, the modern language of the time. The open-source software, SignalShow, is still being used in classrooms today.

After graduating from RIT, she earned her Ph.D. in computer science and engineering from the University of Washington, where she worked in a graphics and imaging lab.

It was during her graduate school years that Fiss faced a medical setback and rediscovered her love for art. Painting became a way to take a break from the countless medical appointments and the stress of her illness.

"Art is healing in many ways," Fiss said. "It's a form of escapism, but it's very healthy to have that. It's healthy to have that balance."

Painting and programming continues for Fiss as she is working on additional artwork for RIT and updates to SignalShow yet again, this time creating a web-based version, while living in Kirkland, Wash.

"For the imaging science students, I want to inspire them to learn about the Fast Fourier Transform," added Fiss. "To produce this body of work that will end up in the building is so cool. I'm going to keep painting and keep sending them. I'm really excited about it."

Mollie Radzinski



Ryan Lamon '17 (criminal justice) works for the Major Felony Bureau of the Monroe County District Attorney's Office. He also shares his expertise with the next generation of RIT students.

Grad thrives in the courtroom and classroom

Scott Hamilton '89

Experiences at RIT helped Ryan Lamon '17 (criminal justice) discover his passion for practicing law. Now, he's giving back to a new generation of students by bringing his learnings from the courtroom into the classroom.

"If you asked me who the most influential people were in my life, most of them would be teachers," said Lamon, who embraced a new role as an adjunct professor in RIT's College of Liberal Arts this academic year. "I owe a lot of my success to the different teachers, professors, and bosses who supported me along the way."

After graduating from RIT, Lamon, from Watertown, N.Y., earned his Juris Doctor degree from Pennsylvania State University. In 2022, he was hired by the Monroe County District Attorney's Office. Now, he is a special assistant district attorney for Monroe County's Major Felony Bureau. His duty is to prosecute violent felony criminal cases on behalf of the people of

Monroe County, where he currently lives.

Lamon always envisioned himself as a law enforcement officer, but his time at RIT—particularly an internship with the U.S. Marshals Service—altered that vision and changed his path.

"The biggest thing I loved about the internship was being in the courtroom. But I didn't know a lot about being a lawyer other than what I saw on TV," he said. "Now that I'm here, I can't really see myself doing anything else."

Learning to handle the pressure and high stakes of the courtroom helped pave the way for a new professional challenge: stepping into the shoes of a mentor and teacher.

In 2024, Lamon was asked to be an adviser for RIT's Mock Trial Association. He found joy in working with students in a mentorship capacity outside of his regular working hours. When the opportunity to teach a mock trial course arose, he was eager to continue to give back to the community that helped

him grow into a young professional.

"The people you mentor, especially in the Rochester legal community, will eventually become the people working alongside you. By giving back to your community, you're improving where you live," he said. "If I can play a very small part in supporting the next generation, I'm happy to help."

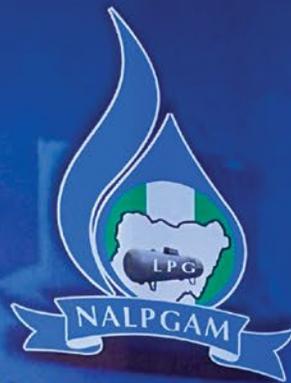
Being able to give back and provide that same support he benefited from as a student has been fulfilling for Lamon. He said learning is a two-way street in his classroom and that watching his students work inspires him.

"Seeing the way some of these students think is fun. The way they approach things is often different from what I was always taught. That doesn't mean my way is right or theirs is wrong; it's just different," he said. "It's impacted how I approach cases I work on, and it's helped me grow."

Felicia Swartzberg '19

Emeka Iheme '13

(chemical engineering),
'13 MS (public policy)
is a regular speaker at
international events such
as the 2025 Nigerian
Association of Liquefied
Petroleum Gas Marketers.



**NIGERIAN ASSOCIATION OF
LIQUEFIED PETROLEUM GAS MARKETERS**
a member of WLGA

**2025 INTERNATIONAL LPG
CONFERENCE
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**NIGERIAN ASSOCIATION
OF LIQUEFIED PETROLEUM
GAS MARKETERS**
a member of WLGA



**NIGERIAN ASSOCIATION
OF LIQUEFIED PETROLEUM
GAS MARKETERS**
a member of WLGA

CEO influences the energy industry in

NIGERIA

With an awareness of how quickly Nigeria is growing and changing, Emeka Iheme sought a way to provide his country with the means to meet modern energy demands.

As founder and CEO of Gasavant Africa, Iheme works closely with petroleum company executives and government leaders in Nigeria to produce the vital natural resource in-country and distribute it around the globe.

“Oil and gas are the dominant sectors in my country. And it is all over; it is almost inescapable. I had my mind set on this,” said Iheme ’13 (chemical engineering), ’13 MS (public policy).

Iheme has come a long way since starting at RIT in 2008 as one of the first students in the chemical engineering program. He was curious about how the industry worked and sought courses and opportunities to answer his questions about the supply side, as well as technical, manufacturing, and production aspects.

One of those opportunities came through co-op work with the engineers at Dresser Rand, an equipment provider for extracting natural gas.

When he returned to Nigeria after graduation, he used the public policy angle of his academic work as a consultant with a smaller gas subsidiary of Shell Corp. At the time, Shell was expanding sales of upstream assets to Nigerian companies and Iheme negotiated and advised the startups about providing needed resources.

“With each job that I took, it kept bringing me closer and closer to the companies that produce and explore the resources from the ground, like Shell and Chevron,” said Iheme. “I was basically in the room where those businesses were starting and that is when my entrepreneurial hunger exploded.”

Nigeria, a longtime member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), produces approximately 1.43 million barrels of oil per day and has an estimated 206.53 trillion cubic feet of oil resources not

yet tapped. As the sixth largest exporter of petroleum, according to the International Trade Administration, exporting and increasing production are key governmental initiatives.

Gasavant, established in 2021, provides gas storage infrastructure, advocates on behalf of the private sector for sale of natural gas and equipment, and works closely with the government about policies needed to move the industry forward, especially in Nigeria.

Furthering his country also means making connections across the globe, including partnerships with those at RIT. Iheme offered ideas for design projects for master’s students during a 2025 presentation when he received recognition as one of Kate Gleason College of Engineering’s distinguished alumni.

“I gave them 10 possible project problems that are nagging the industry today that, if solved, would each be a billion-dollar opportunity. We have to solve today’s problems for a better tomorrow.”

Michelle Cometa '00



Aaron Foss
'00 (information technology), '01 (MBA) volunteers at correctional facilities teaching entrepreneurship classes.

Grad finds purpose mentoring entrepreneurs

Aaron Foss '00 (information technology), '01 (MBA) remembers his first trip into a prison, nervously crossing the long, narrow bridge into New York City's infamous Rikers Island. As he followed corrections staff through a gymnasium where participants were gathering, he was met with surprising warmth.

Foss is, in his words, a retired entrepreneur. A five-time founder, he successfully created and sold companies, including Nomorobo, an award-winning service that has blocked millions of robocalls nation-

wide, and SideTour, a marketplace that helped people discover local activities.

But entrepreneurs never really retire. He is taking all the lessons learned and finding purpose in passing it on to a new generation of entrepreneurs.

He's spent the last decade volunteering and supporting Defy Ventures, a national nonprofit grounded in criminal justice reform through entrepreneurship. Through its programs, the participants move through a structured curriculum that covers simple business practices.

In correctional facilities, volunteers like Foss lead small-group sessions where participants workshop ideas, practice pitch presentations, and receive individualized feedback. The program's goal is to lower recidivism by offering a clear path toward legitimate work.

Working with incarcerated populations in the New York-Connecticut-New Jersey tri-state area, Foss spends his days fixing résumés and listening to pitches.

His introduction to Defy came through Techstars, an accelerator that guided an earlier venture. When Defy representatives visited a founders' conference in 2015, Foss immediately connected with their mission.

"They found me," Foss said. "We both believe that entrepreneurship doesn't care who you are, your background, your gender, your neighborhood. It just cares that you put in the work."

As soon as his company's acquisition was finalized and the funds cleared, he went right to work. Some moments have stayed with him over the years. At a women's facility in Connecticut, two participants sat down back-to-back during a rotating mentorship session. Both had worked fast-food jobs at McDonald's and Taco Bell. One of the women struggled to explain how she stood out until Foss flipped the page and found a list of responsibilities she'd taken on through a puppy-to-prison volunteer program.

"She coordinated visits from outside organizations and supervised peers," Foss said. "I told her, 'This is leadership.'"

In addition to in-facility mentoring, Foss also serves on Defy's investment committee. After release, the organization continues to support its participants through virtual mentoring and access to small grants, up to \$10,000, that help launch service-based businesses.

What has struck Foss most about his volunteer work is how openly he is received in facilities. Participants often thank him simply for showing up or for treating them with a level of respect they don't always experience. Those interactions, he said, reaffirm the importance of consistency, empathy, and direct human connection.

"There are a lot of good people who made bad choices," Foss said. "My job is the rehabilitation side, and being a part of that person's second chance is incredibly meaningful to me." 🐾

Nathaniel Smith

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 Art and Design
Sebastian Scripps '88

(interior and industrial design) worked in design, engineering, development, and manufacturing for companies including Cuisinart, American Tourister, and Kodak. He is currently an angel investor.



College of Liberal Arts
Kathi Westcott '91

(criminal justice) is deputy general counsel and senior director of legal affairs at The Pew Charitable Trusts, where she leads a team providing comprehensive legal support across more than 50 areas.



National Technical Institute for the Deaf
Charmaine Jacobs Hlibok '94

(professional and technical communication) retired as elementary school principal at the Maryland School for the Deaf. She has over 25 years of experience in Deaf education, language development, nonprofit leadership, and community engagement.



College of Engineering Technology
Richard Whitmore '01

(mechanical engineering technology) is president and CEO of Motivair by Schneider Electric, overseeing global operations and business development. Under his leadership, the company continues to advance its direct liquid cooling and thermal management solutions.



College of Science
Dr. Micheline Lubin '99

(biology) is a board-certified physician in internal medicine, anatomical pathology, and forensic pathology. She is an associate medical examiner at the Snohomish County (Wash.) Medical Examiner's Office.



Saunders College of Business
Jeannie Khaw '94

(business administration accounting), '95 (MBA) has worked at the International Monetary Fund since 2001. She started as an accountant and has been promoted to roles of increasing responsibility over the past two decades.



Andrew Whitmore '11

(mechanical engineering technology) is vice president of sales at Motivair by Schneider Electric. He has been instrumental in expanding Motivair's presence in high-performance computing and data center markets.



Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences
Arthur Deane '08

(electrical engineering) is vice president and chief information security officer at Discover Financial Services. He has worked at Capital One, Google, and Amazon. He serves on the GCCIS National Council and created an endowed scholarship for the college.



School of Individualized Study
Melissa Murphy '12

(applied arts and sciences) is a creative leader in experiential marketing. She has worked on events such as the Super Bowl, Coachella, and SXSW. She has partnered with clients including Disney, Amazon, Red Bull, Cash App, and Billboard.



College of Health Sciences and Technology
Christopher Palmieri '00 MS

(health systems administration) has served as CEO at six different healthcare companies over the past 30 years, two of which he grew to \$3 billion in revenue. He has been on the board of several health insurance trade organizations.



Kate Gleason College of Engineering
Alicia Scott '97

(microelectronic engineering) is director of strategic talent operations at Resideo. Her work has optimized complex operations across continents and streamlined talent processes. She also mentors young professionals and students.



Graduate School
Grant Tremblay '11 Ph.D.

(astrophysical sciences and technology) is an astrophysicist and head of external relations at the Center for Astrophysics | Harvard & Smithsonian and vice president of the American Astronomical Society.

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"

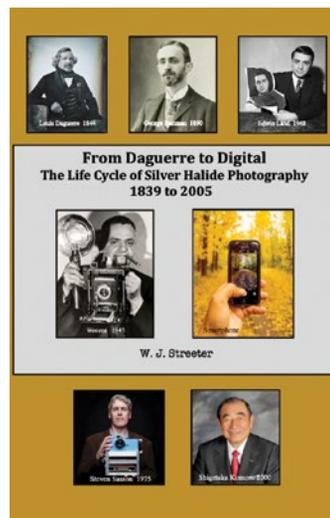
About Class Notes

Class Notes are edited for space, clarity, and style. Share information by going to rit.edu/alumni/class-notes.

1959

Stuart Oring '59 (FAA) has a website, understandingpictures.com, for anyone interested in art or photography. He has also just published a book, *A Creative Path to Understanding Pictures*, which follows his first book, *Artificial Intelligence and Photography*.

1960



Bill Streeter '60 (GAP) has a new book, *From Daguerre to Digital: The Life Cycle of Silver Halide Photography 1839 to 2005*, that is available in the U.S., the Netherlands, and on Amazon.com. This is a comprehensive presentation of the 166-year life cycle of silver halide photography.

1961

Martin Cooler '61 (GAP) graduated from RIT's former campus and remains in contact once a month with his Sigma Pi fraternity brothers.

1964

David Spindel '64 (GAP) is an acclaimed photographer whose six-decade career includes portraits of legendary athletes such as Joe DiMaggio, Willie Mays, Duke Snyder, Phil Rizzuto, Whitey Ford, Yogi Berra, Ralph Branca, and Bobby Thomson. He was commissioned in the early 1990s to create an eight-book series on Major League Baseball teams. His photographs have been published in several books from this photo session, including *The Summer of 1980*.

1970

Brian Nicholas '70 (GAP), '80 MBA (SCB) is retired after producing the Security Print Technology Workshops at RIT and is now enjoying time with his grandchildren in the Midwest. He has good memories of Theta Xi at RIT.

1971

Paul Gard '71 (SCB) retired after a 50-year career as a CPA in corporate and public accounting.



Tom Klinkowstein '71 (GAP) is creating an art project together with vice dean Barbara

Brownie at the Royal College of Art about his sub-orbital spaceflight with Virgin Galactic in 2027. He is president of Media A in New York and a tenured professor of new media design at Hofstra University.

1972

Margaret (Gabler) King '72 (SCB) contributed to the short story, "Who Killed Mother Teresa?" in the *Crime in the Old Dominion* anthology. She is the author of three mystery novels and numerous short stories.



AJ Zelada '72 (GAP) published *Mama Hummer and her family* about their front yard hummer and two generations of chicklets in Portland, Ore.

1973

Paul Capotosto '73 (KGCOE) and **Ruth Capotosto '75 (COS)**, members of the first co-ed residence hall at RIT, continue to reunite each year with their former Gibson A dorm-mates. The group includes **Bob '75 (GAP)** and **Eileen Kjeldsen, Dan '74 (COS)** and **Pat '76 (SCB) Mizerak, Corky Eckhardt '76 (GAP), Neil Borowsky '75 (GAP), Ken Corwin '76 (KGCOE)**, and remembered in spirit, the late **Dave Kinlein '75 (GAP)**.

1974

Charlie Abounader '74 (KGCOE) retired as president of Underwriters Laboratories and as general manager/vice president at GE.

1975

Rick Iekel '75 (CCE) attended RIT's annual Golden Circle breakfast, honoring those celebrating 50 years or more as alumni. He worked as director of aviation at Rochester's

Frederick Douglass Greater Rochester International Airport. In retirement, he has written a book about the airport's origin and development, *The ROC: Journey thru the 20th Century*.

Bill Truran '75 (GAP) is still shooting images for happy clients and plans to do so as long as the work is loved and appreciated. Now 71, Truran attended his Golden Circle 50th college reunion and thanks RIT for a great start.

1976

Gerald Isobe '76 (SCB) is a member of the Deaf community and a lifelong trailblazer. Isobe and his son co-founded the app, App MyEar, which helps deaf and hard-of-hearing people to fully converse with those around them.

Valerie O'Hara '76 (FAA) was awarded the Leo Dodd Heritage Preservation Award by Historic Brighton in November. The lifetime achievement award celebrates O'Hara's 60-year commitment to the art and preservation of architectural stained glass in Western New York.



Stephen Richards '76 (GAP), Kevin Richards '80 (GAP), and Mary Lawrence celebrated the 100-year anniversary of Richards Graphic Communications. Their father, **Harry Richards '48 (GAP)**, started the tradition at RIT.

1977

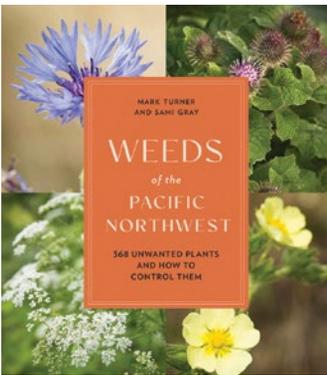
Alan Frohlichstein '77 (GAP) was interviewed for *Lazie Indie* magazine.



Kevin Hall '77 (FAA) had his *Smiling Sun* art appear on the nationally televised *CBS Sunday Morning* on Nov. 2, 2025.



Ruthanne (Schmeh) Orth '77 (CAST), Dennis Brannon '77 (CAST), Don Stein '77 (CAST), Jack Beadling '77 (CAST), and their spouses gathered in May 2025 in Brighton, N.Y., to reminisce and celebrate almost 50 years since their graduation. Pictured, from left, are Dennis Brannon, Don Stein, Kathy Beadling, Jack Beadling, Ruthanne (Schmeh) Orth, Richard Orth, and Pat Brannon.



Mark Turner '77 (CCE) is the author of a recent field guide, *Weeds of the Pacific Northwest*, which won the GardenComm Gold Laurel award for photography in the technical reference book category. The same book also received the 2025 Award of Excellence: Horticulture from The Council on Botanical and Horticultural Libraries.

Robert Whiteside '77 MFA (FAA) will exhibit recent works at the Dove Block Project along with other Wild Group artists in Geneva, N.Y. He was also one of the creators of The Wildroot Gallery in October 1978.

1978



Don Gala '78 (CLA) returned to judo training after a 49-year hiatus. In May 2025, he entered in the 2025 USA Judo Senior National Championships in Birmingham, Ala., and won first place (M9 100kg+).



Scott Ladin '78 (CAST), '87 MBA (SCB) has retired and is now a small business mentor with SCORE, helping hundreds of entrepreneurs to start, run, and grow small businesses. He also works with R-Community Bikes to distribute free bicycles to children and adults in Rochester. As an active cyclist, he continues to support not-for-profit events such as Tour de Cure and Bike MS to promote research and programs.

1979



Collette Fournier '79 (GAP) exhibited *Africa 24/7: The Legacy of Black Visual Culture*, a documentary series capturing

photographic images in Ghana over four visits, at Finkelstein Memorial Library, Spring Valley, N.Y. The work reflects the vibrancy and energy of everyday life, highlighting a country that works day and night to remain strong and independent.



Gregory Hafer '79 (GAP), Chuck Goodykoontz '79 (GAP), '86 MS (CAST), Hank Russo '79 (GAP), and Ted Skomsky '80 (GAP), '92 MS (KGCOE) took part in the Here Piggy Piggy Golf Tournament to benefit the ASPCA at Hidden Valley Golf Course in Pine Grove, Pa., last October. Pictured, from left, are Hafer, Goodykoontz, Russo, and Skomsky.

1980



Dan Dister '80 (GAP) retired after 37 years of federal service, including seven years in the U.S. Army, primarily in the field of cybersecurity, and 3.5 years as chief information security officer for the state of New Hampshire. He is happily back to practicing photography full time.

1981

Jim Bossert '81 MS (CCE) joined Oncor Electric Delivery as a continuous improvement lead.

Peter Newell '81 (KGCOE) is now the president of Speculator Lions Club.

1982



Daniel E. Holmes '82 (GAP) has served as an assistant district attorney for over 20 years in Pennsylvania and New Mexico. He is a graduate of Syracuse University College of Law and is proud to be a professional photo graduate of RIT.

Larry Martell '82 (CAST) just joined a fintech startup, Rational Exponent. Martell plans to revolutionize compliance and risk for banks.



Dave Schantz '82 MS (CAST) is president of the USS Springfield Bluejackets, a reunion organization for the ship he was on

when on active duty in the United States Navy. He printed a collection of sea stories by shipmates in a book titled *Sea Stories*.

1983

Gerard Kiernan '83 (CAST) is retired but began working part time as a ski instructor at Mount Snow. He has always loved skiing and now is helping others learn the sport.



John Reese '83 (SCB) is a licensed Medicare agent who assists clients, including retirees and individuals turning 65, in navigating Medicare options.

1984

Teresa Benatti '84 (CAST) retired and is planning trips with her husband in the future.



Bobbie (Venerus) Flintrop '84 (FAA) joined **Suzanne (Estep) Thorpe '84 (FAA)** and **R. Tod Thorpe '84 (KGCOE)** in celebrating the wedding of their eldest daughter on Oct. 10, 2025, in Raleigh, N.C.

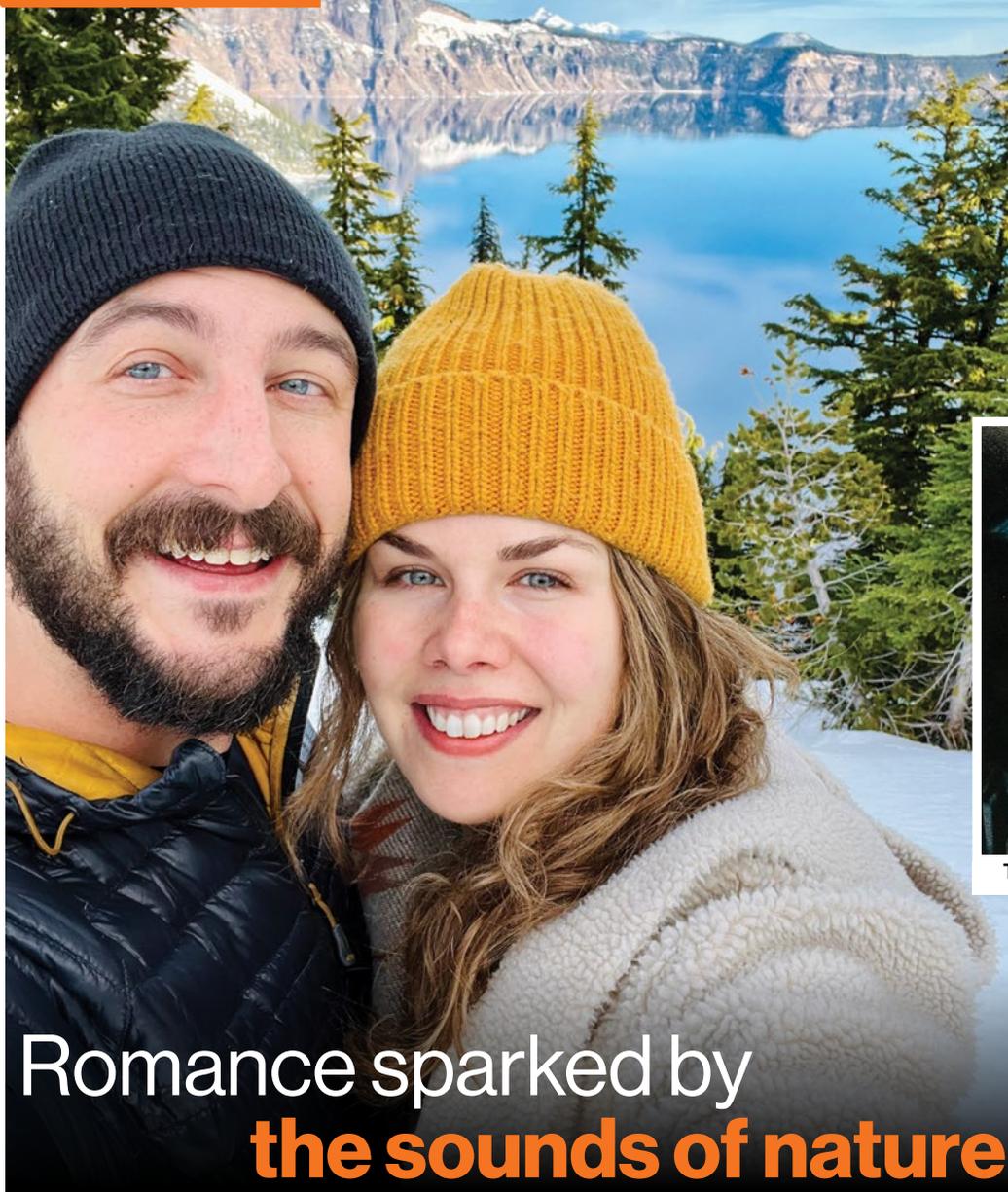


Keith Partington '84 (CLA) released a second novel, *Workforce Resolve*, a workplace inclusion story, during National

Disability Employment Awareness Month in October 2025.

Richard Strilowich '84 (CAST) retired after a 40-plus-year career in IT.

T.I. Weintraub '84 (GAP) positioned ATLAS Space Operations and Freedom Space Technologies for a successful merger and acquisition with York Space. He is now applying his RIT and military experience as an account executive for Amentum, working directly with the United States Space Force.



Romance sparked by the sounds of nature

Patrick Dillon '09 (film and animation) and Aeryn (Daboin) Dillon '09 (new media design) enjoy spending time in the outdoors near their home in Bend, Ore. They met in a sound recording class during their third year at RIT.

The varied tunes of nature are integral to the soundtrack of Aeryn (Daboin) Dillon and Patrick Dillon's love story.

During their third year at RIT, the pair unexpectedly enrolled in the same partner-based sound recording class. Patrick '09 (film and animation) asked Aeryn '09 (new media design) if she wanted to work together on a quarter-long project. The assignment provided a golden opportunity to learn more about each other while exploring the Rochester region.

"When telling stories through sound the possibilities are endless. We'd find ourselves in the middle of a cornfield at night recording the sound of crickets or hauling around a barbecue to record the sizzling noise," Aeryn said.

The project collaboration was a grade A start to their 18-year relationship.

A mutual passion for exploring nature has carried through every phase of their relationship. The first summer they spent together, shortly after they started dating, was in

Maine. Aeryn had plans to work there as a teaching assistant for the season and, rather than spend that time apart, Patrick secured an internship at the same workshop where Aeryn was working.

"It felt a little bit like we went to summer camp together in Camden. We were right by the ocean and spent all our free time swimming and hiking," Aeryn said.

Since graduating, Aeryn has worked as an advertising and marketing creative director in New York City and Los Ange-

les at agencies like Saatchi & Saatchi and companies like Honey, PayPal, and EarnIn. Patrick spent much of his career on the technical side of the film industry, working as a grip and lighting freelancer.

But, after years of working in these high-pressure, fast-paced industries, they both were eager for a change. Aeryn being diagnosed with cancer in 2020 gave them the final push to reflect



The couple at RIT's graduation in 2009.

on what they wanted the rest of their lives to look like.

"We did the whole big city thing for a while. We're grateful for those times, but we wanted more serenity and a little bit more of a laid-back lifestyle," Patrick said.

These days the couple calls the mountain town of Bend, Ore., home. Patrick works as a lift electrical tech at Mt. Bachelor Ski Resort and Aeryn, who has been cancer-free for more than four years, continues to work remotely as a creative director. This year, they'll celebrate their 10th wedding anniversary.

"We are very much a package deal of 'Patrick and Aeryn' because of how long we've been together, but we put a lot of work into ourselves as individuals so we can become the best versions of Patrick and Aeryn that we can be for each other," Patrick said.

Felicia Swartzberg '19

1985



Brad Hankin '85 (GAP) is the sales manager at Larson Tool & Stamping in Attleboro, Mass. Hankin enjoys traveling the world with family in search of new experiences.



Catherine Lane '85 (FAA) is the principal interior designer and owner of Luxe Interiors &

Home Design. As a licensed Florida interior designer, Lane founded her firm in 2025.



Bruce Morrow '85 (COS) continues to be an arts advocate and nonprofit leader. His lens-based

work was included in *The Truth As I See It*, a group show at Flushing Town Hall, Queens, N.Y., in June 2025.

Tom Turchioe '85 (KGCOE) is delighted to announce the arrival of his granddaughter, Natalie.

1986



Don McGrath '86 (KGCOE) has shifted his athletic focus from running to rock climbing. He won the gold medal in the 60-64 age group at the Huntsman World Senior Games in Saint George, Utah.

1987

Chris Brenner '87 (FAA) has retired after a 37-year career in technology, the last 19 of which was spent at Apple. He is looking forward to expanding hobbies in filmmaking, and spending time with his wife, **Marcy Brenner '87 (SCB)**; son, **Tom Brenner '16 (CIAS)**; and daughter, Amy Brenner.

1988



William O'Such '88 MS (KGCOE) is consulting on strategy and corporate development in embedded and edge computing. He has also found a passion for street photography in Paris and San Francisco.

1989



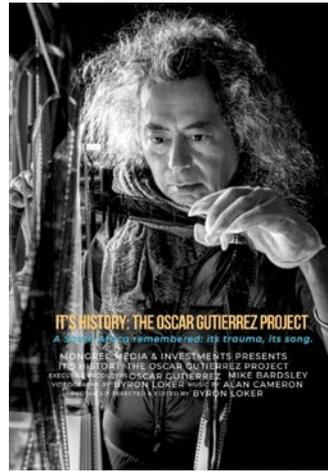
Bill Michaels '89 (CAST) is the owner of The Fly Creek Cider Mill & Orchard, which has been selected again as a top 10 cidery in the nation by the *USA Today's* Readers' Choice Awards.

1990

David Neff '90 (GAP) made a career change after 28 years as a photographer. He is now an L1 Juris Doctor candidate at New York Law School, Class of 2028, and is currently the oldest student enrolled.

Kim Young '90 (CLA) retired as of December 2024.

1991



Oscar Gutierrez '91 (GAP) will be hitting the film festival circuit with his short documentary, *THE OSCAR GUTIERREZ PROJECT*. The documentary follows Gutierrez as he reflects on a life spent documenting South Africa's turbulent history and vibrant cultural landscape.

1993



John Lawrence '93 (CAST) sold his construction business. Both of his children attended RIT: **Jared Lawrence '24 (CET)** and **John Lawrence Jr. '20 (GCCIS), '20 MS (GCCIS)**. Currently, he is managing the family office, traveling, and planning to launch another business in a few years, luxshade.com.

Linda Thompson '93 (GAP) and **Dave Thompson '94 (KGCOE)** just celebrated 30 years of marriage with two wonderful boys, Jack and Owen. Jack will be graduating with a master's degree from the physician assistant program at RIT. Linda is a career and technical education supervisor and Dave is a systems integration engineer in Massachusetts.



Bob Wagner '93 MBA (SCB) joined the University of Rochester as associate director of strategic communications.

1994



Stephen Mansour '94 (SCB) is an additive construction specialist and adviser with nearly two

decades of experience in the construction industry.



Atul Patel '94 (KGCOE) has turned his lifelong love of laughter into a career in stand-up comedy. His

new Minneapolis-based venture, Hahasala Comedy Productions, brings comedy to venues, corporate gatherings, and private events throughout the Midwest.

1995



Jeremy Sniatecki '95 (CIAS) was chosen as the winner of the design competition for the new official city flag of the history-rich North Tonawanda, N.Y., community.

1997



Kyle Bates '97 (CIAS) was promoted to clinical associate professor in the University of Maryland, Baltimore County Paramedic Program, where he

continues to serve as program director. Bates also stays active on the ice as the goalie coach for UMBC's Division III Club Hockey team.



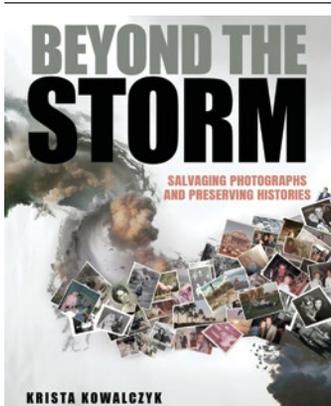
1
Alok Kapoor '93 (CAST) is celebrating the birth of his first grandson—perhaps a future RIT Tiger.

2
Ethan Feldman '07 (GCCIS) and his family are delighted to share the joyful news of the birth of their second daughter, Bexleigh. The Feldmans are excited to begin this new chapter together as a family of four.

3
Jessica Portilla-Mulvaney '12 (CCE) and Michael Mulvaney are pleased to announce the baptism of their son, Michael Hunter, on Oct. 26, 2025, at the RIT Interfaith Center.

4
Courtney (Tennant) Brazee '13 (SCB), '14 MBA (SCB), basketball alum, and **Brian Brazee '13 (SCB)**, baseball alum, had baby Carson Avery, who was born in August 2025. Carson joins big brothers Trevor and Baylor.

5
Katie (Schlag) Dominick '13 (CHST) and Ian Dominick '13 (KGCOE) have welcomed another baby into their family. Callum joined big brother Luke in April 2025.



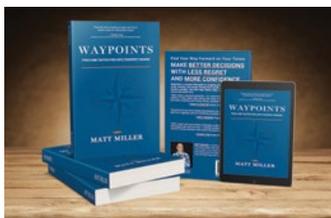
Krista Kowalczyk '97 (CIAS) is excited to share that her book, *Beyond the Storm*, was published in June 2025 by Library Tales Publishing, with distribution by Simon & Schuster. The book blends memoir and practical guidance on preserving photographs, inspired by her work helping families salvage photo collections after Hurricane Ian.

1998



Cindy Byer '98 (CAST), '99 MBA (SCB) published her memoir *Unmuted: How I Stopped Shrinking and Learned to Use My Voice*. The book traces her journey of finding her voice after years of silence and self-doubt and includes her time and formative experiences at RIT.

2000

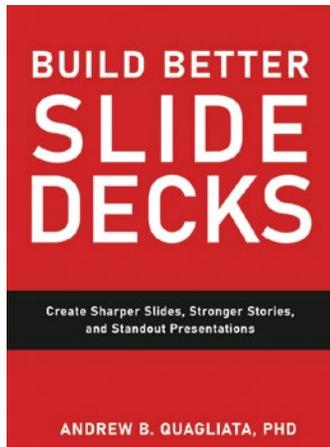


Matt Miller '00 (SCB) published *Waypoints: Tools and Tactics for Life's Toughest Choices*, a book that explores how people can make better decisions in work and life by applying practical frameworks and clear thinking. Miller is also the founder of Upleft, an independent advisory firm based in Port Angeles, Wash.

2001



Eliot Harper '01 MS (CIAS) has joined Salesforce as director of partner enablement. He is the author of five books on Salesforce and lives in Orange, New South Wales, with his wife and four children. He is pictured here with his family.



Andrew Quagliata '01 (CLA), '03 MBA (SCB) published *Build Better Slide Decks: Create Sharper Slides, Stronger Stories, and Standout Presentations*. Quagliata is a senior lecturer of management communication at Cornell University and founder of Ethos Communication Advisors. His book helps professionals create more compelling presentations and builds on more than two decades of teaching and executive education experience. Learn more at andrewquagliata.com/build-better-slide-decks.

Jennifer Walkowski '01 (CIAS) recently celebrated her first anniversary as capitol restoration coordinator for OGS Design & Construction. Walkowski works directly under the capitol architect to oversee the historic preservation and restoration of the New York State Capitol, the Empire State Plaza, and the Executive Mansion. She also supports other client agencies across the state.

2002



Sara Gould '02 (KGCOE) traded skiing in Tahoe for sailing in Bellingham, Wash. She continues to run In A Flash Laser, the digital fabrication business she founded 15 years ago.

Jen Spencer '02 (GCCIS), '06 MS (GCCIS), '23 EMBA (SCB) was recognized among the Top Women Leaders of 2025 by Women We Admire on Aug. 28, 2025.

2004



Jake Mathew '04 (GCCIS), '06 MFA (CIAS) is a freelance motion graphic designer

who worked on projects for Marvel Studios, Netflix, and animated the FUI (Fictional User Interface) for the film *Predator: Badlands*.

2005

Andrew Bernardi '05 (CIAS) led an advertising campaign that earned "Best in Discipline" at the One Show International Awards. The campaign, created for Heinz Mustard's collaboration with DJ Mustard, debuted with a television commercial that aired during the Grammy Awards.

2007



Kim Callender '07 (CIAS) launched a travel tech startup, Ella Travel. She is based in London, where she has received backing from Expedia and Citizen M hotels. Her company was named "Travel Startup of the Year" at the Bessie Awards.



Amir Figueroa '07 (CAST) accepted a position as the flow cytometry and cell sorting facility manager at

North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine.



Shqipe Neziri Vela '07 (CAST) has been included in the inaugural Women's Sustainability Power List 2025 by the Lean In Network for

her leadership in promoting transparency, energy governance, and sustainable development.

2009



Kurt Button '09 (SCB), '10 MBA (SCB)

was promoted to partner at MMB+CO and was just named a *Rochester*

Business Journal 40 Under 40 honoree.



Ray Mulgrew '09 MS (GCCIS)

is a leader in technology, empowering business through innovation.

2010

Dave Gerhart '10 (SCB) was honored with the Future Under 40 Award from the Pennsylvania Bankers Association. The award is given to emerging leaders who demonstrate exceptional dedication, innovation, and impact in the banking industry and their communities.



Isaac Holze '10 MFA (CIAS) and his streetball team, The Deep End, reached the playoffs at the historic NYC West 4th Summer Tournament again. He calls it the best basketball team he has played on since the NoonTime Warriors at RIT.



Desiree Matthews '10 (COS) has built a career in psychiatric nursing and mental health innovation.

She is the founder and clinical director of Different Mental Health Program, a telepsychiatry practice focused on integrative, accessible care.



Jay Ruzicka '10 (CIAS) has been promoted to head of communications for Providence Public Library.

2011



Mandi Tryanowski '11 (CIAS) and spouse have officially become foster parents and started their journey helping youth in need.

2012



Aurelkys Estevez Espinal '12 MS (CAST) was recognized for academic excellence as a professor at Universidad Católica Santo Domingo.



Muhamad H. Mohd Tahrir '12 (COS) took a leap of faith to grab a new opportunity as a Takaful advisor (Great Eastern Takaful) to strengthen sales and relationship-building skills, while continuing to explore areas to make a bigger career impact.



Nathan Reichert '12 (NTID) was promoted to finance manager at Duke University,

where he supports faculty, student groups, and staff in managing funds to ensure accurate financial tracking, compliance, and effective resource allocation.

2013



Jennifer Hungate '13 (CAST), president and CEO of Hungate Construction, had her

business certified as a New York state Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprise.

2017



Lacey Cook '17 (CAST) and partner Iván Quintero returned to the U.S. after six years living and teaching across Europe. They developed

the foundations of Move with Intention, a neuroscience and human-connection-based movement integrating emotional intelligence, mindset, and embodied learning. In 2025, they signed their first book deal for *The Power of Hope*.

2018



Emily Finn '18 (CHST), '18 MS (CHST) and **Jake Timmons '18 (KGCOE), '18 ME (KGCOE)**

celebrated their wedding with friends and family, including several RIT alumni, in November 2025 in Rochester.

2019



Grace Anne '19 (CAD) completed the grueling 886 km (560 mile) Camino de Santiago del Norte from Biarritz, France, to Santiago de Compostela, Spain.



Hayley (Richardson) Murdock '19 (KGCOE), '19 MS (COS) and **Connor Murdock '19 (KGCOE), '19 ME (KGCOE)** were married in May 2025 in Raleigh, N.C. They met the first week of fall semester 2014 when they lived on the same dorm floor and both joined RIT Crew.

2020



Tim Beal '20 (KGCOE) has been promoted to a level 2 process engineer at TTM Technologies after 2.5 years with the company. He continues to expand his expertise.

Matthew Collins '20 (SCB) purchased MacGregor's in Henrietta, N.Y., and has opened it up as The Shamrock Inn, which has brought back a special spot for all RIT Tigers, current and past.



Nicole (Cullen) Fowler '20 (CET) married **Paul Fowler '19 (CET)** on Oct. 11, 2025. They celebrated with nearly 30 other RIT alumni.

2021



Jared Gabriel '21 (SCB) is an ETL developer at ESL Federal Credit Union and is transitioning into cloud migration development to become a Boomi developer.

Shrey Gera '21 MS (CET) is advancing at Caterpillar Inc.



Nicole Lopez '21 (CAD) and **Dean Nguyen '21 (CET)** celebrated their wedding in November 2025. Many of their guests were RIT alumni involved in the founding and early growth of the RIT Game Symphony Orchestra club, making the celebration a mini-GSO reunion.

2022



Jessica Brock-Schlageter '22 (GCCIS) and **Drake Busdiecker '22 (GCCIS)** got engaged in August 2025. The couple met freshman year at RIT.



Eric Lang '22 (GCCIS) and **M.K. Killen** were married on May 25, 2025, in Geneseo, N.Y. **Dom Hen '21 (GCCIS)**, **Jeffery Russell '20 (GCCIS)**, **Elizabeth Wunder '19 (CET)**, and **Justin Kolodny '22 (GCCIS)** shared in the wedding fun.



Ryan Wicks '22 (SCB) and **Kristina (Haller) Wicks '22 (SCB)** were married with RIT alumni friends by their side.

2024



McKenna Short '24 (CET), **'24 MS (CET)** and **Benjamin Bremer '27 (GCCIS)** got engaged on Oct. 11, 2025.

2025

Sydney Baumbach '25 (CAD) started a full-time job in the Rochester area working for SWBR as an interior designer.



Chase Foresti '25 (CLA) has continued the journey of being an educator by substitute teaching and continuing to work at the National Susan B. Anthony Museum & House. 🐾



BRICK CITY

.....

HOMECOMING & FAMILY WEEKEND

October 16-18

..... 2026

We're always on to
something amazing
at Homecoming and
Family Weekend.

Save the date, Tigers.

- Visit rit.edu/brickcity for the latest updates

Alumni

1951

John Fladd '51 (FAA) Nov. 12, 2025

Ralph Panfil '51 (KGCOE)
Oct. 28, 2025

1954

Carl Howard '54 (GAP) Oct. 10, 2025

Gay (Hotchkiss) Lenhard '54 (SCB)
Sept. 14, 2025

Roland Witzgall '54 (GAP) Aug. 5, 2025

1956

Ronald Schlosser '56 (KGCOE)
Sept. 6, 2025

1957

Robert Miller '57 (KGCOE)
April 11, 2025

1959

Howard Bliss '59 (GAP) Oct. 13, 2025

Bernard McGrady '59 (KGCOE)
Nov. 22, 2025

1960

Margaret (Oster) Flanders '60 (SCB)
Aug. 10, 2025

Frank Gubernat '60 (FAA) Nov. 7, 2025

Elizabeth Kimball '60 (SCB)
Aug. 29, 2025

Robert O'Gorman '60 (CCE)
Aug. 30, 2025

John Pysz '60 (KGCOE)
March 14, 2025

Thomas Vokes '60 (SCB) Aug. 23, 2025

1961

Donald Arnold '61 (CCE) Oct. 2, 2025

James Ball '61 (FAA) Nov. 28, 2025

Domenico Dilucia '61 (CCE)
Aug. 12, 2025

Carol (Lapaana) Roy '61 (SCB)
June 20, 2025

Jeffrey Young '61 (GAP) Aug. 14, 2025

1962

Lois Jeffery '62 (SCB) Sept. 17, 2025

1963

Patricia Kramer '63 (CCE) Oct. 29, 2025

John Kriz '63 (GAP)
May 13, 2025

1964

Anthony Cavallaro '64 (COS)
Nov. 21, 2025

John Dombroski '64 (COS)
Nov. 2, 2025

David Plummer '64 (GAP) June 19, 2025

Ahlene (Marshall) Welsh '64 MFA (FAA) Dec. 27, 2024

1966

Joel Clarke '66 (GAP) Aug. 19, 2025

Patrick McGrain Sr. '66 (SCB)
Nov. 17, 2025

1967

Deo Hurlburt '67 (CCE) May 1, 2024

Eugene Pizzoli '67 (CCE) Sept. 11, 2025

Thomas Tomasky '67 (KGCOE)
Oct. 27, 2025

1968

Timothy Gallagher '68 (KGCOE)
Aug. 8, 2025

Marvin Williams Jr. '68 (CCE)
Nov. 1, 2025

1969

Carl Hotchkiss '69 (CCE) Aug. 11, 2025

Daniel Hunt '69 (KGCOE)
Dec. 15, 2024

Ronald Plantone '69 (GAP)
Sept. 17, 2025

Darrel Smith '69 (GAP) Aug. 14, 2025

James Spencer '69 (KGCOE)
June 29, 2025

Robert Zoller '69 (CCE)
March 31, 2025

1970

Lawrence Hilimire '70 (SCB)
Sept. 1, 2025

Azriel Rabinowitz '70 MS (KGCOE)
Oct. 23, 2025

Stephen Tillson '70 (FAA) Oct. 16, 2025

1971

William Doerr '71 MBA (SCB)
Sept. 12, 2025

Grant Dolge '71 (FAA)
Sept. 24, 2025

Charles Laine '71 MBA (SCB)
June 29, 2025

1972

Carol Malinoff '72 (SCB) Nov. 2, 2025

Richard McElwain '72 (KGCOE)
Aug. 25, 2025

1973

Arthur Grupp '73 (GAP)
Sept. 16, 2025

Cheryl (Kolts) Hodgson '73 (COS)
Sept. 27, 2025

David Lamoreaux '73 (KGCOE)
Oct. 24, 2025

Brian McMahon '73 (NTID)
Sept. 18, 2025

Craig Winchester '73 (SCB)
Nov. 28, 2025

1974

Lucien Bardeen '74 (CLA)
Sept. 11, 2025

Louis Bressler '74 (CCE)
Aug. 1, 2025

J. Randall Hewitt '74 (GAP)
March 3, 2025

Keith Kraft '74 (CCE) Oct. 1, 2025

Nedra Liebert '74 (FAA)
July 29, 2025

Michael Tuberdyck '74 (SCB)
Sept. 16, 2025

1975

Arthur Buckley Jr. '75 (GAP)
Oct. 24, 2025

Billy Cates '75 (CCE)
Sept. 26, 2025

Michael D'Avanzo '75 (SCB)
Oct. 10, 2025

John Giallombardo '75 MS (CCE)
Nov. 16, 2025

Robert Story '75 (GAP) May 21, 2025

1976

Mauro Buzzelli '76 MBA (SCB)
Aug. 29, 2025

John Rayburn '76 MBA (SCB)
July 6, 2025

1977

James McCauley '77 (GAP)
Sept. 4, 2025

John Pysar '77 (CCE), '79 MBA (SCB) Oct. 30, 2025

Norman Snyder '77 (GAP) Oct. 21, 2025

Prentiss Thompson '77 (CLA)
March 26, 2025

Michael Zimmerman '77 MS (CCE)
June 15, 2025

1978

Edward Regan '78 (SCB) Oct. 11, 2024

James Sandy '78 MS (CCE)
Aug. 14, 2025

1979

Gregory Helbig '79 (CLA)
Sept. 28, 2025

Alice Lichtman '79 MS (CAST)
Sept. 16, 2025

Robert Mindler '79 (SCB) Oct. 23, 2025

1980

Earnestine (Price) Pietrykowski '80 (SCB) Sept. 4, 2025

Martin Rogers '80 (CCE) Oct. 13, 2025

Douglas Wachter '80 MS (CAST)
Nov. 2, 2025

1981

Joseph Galletta Jr. '81 (CCE)
Sept. 28, 2025

Dominick Gasbarre Jr. '81 (COS)
Dec. 17, 2025

Gretchen McMasters '81 (CCE) Oct. 29, 2025

Jackie Padula '81 (CAST)
Aug. 26, 2025

Jeanne Phillips '81 MBA (SCB)
Aug. 9, 2025

Alan Vossler '81 (CCE) Nov. 26, 2025

1982

Colleen Rogers-Culver '82 (SCB)
Oct. 11, 2025

Beatrice (Jordan) Valcore '82 (CCE)
Aug. 19, 2025

Carol Walck '82 (CCE) Oct. 10, 2025

1983

John Bourdon '83 (CAST) Aug. 4, 2025

Arthur Carey '83 (CCE) Oct. 2, 2025

Mark Fisher '83 (GAP) Oct. 22, 2025

Ellen Flugel '83 (CCE) Oct. 17, 2025

Philip Pelletier '83 (GAP) Aug. 17, 2025

1984

Cynthia (Vanderminden) Daley '84 (CAST)
Sept. 17, 2025

Carol (O'Geen) Mileo '84 (CCE)
Dec. 10, 2025

Thomas Nuhn '84 (FAA) Oct. 26, 2025

Daniel Schaertel '84 (CCE)
Sept. 9, 2025

1985

Norman Weisfeld '85 (CAST)
Aug. 18, 2025

1986

Barbara Young '86 (CCE) Sept. 9, 2025

1989

Terry Keister '89 (CCE) Oct. 9, 2025

Julie Persia-Poma '89 (NTID)
Aug. 22, 2025

1991

Elizabeth Britton '91 (GAP)
Aug. 30, 2025

John Farnham '91 (CLA) Aug. 15, 2025

Frances Howell '91 MS (CCE)
July 9, 2025

1993

Dennis Holmes '93 (KGCOE) Dec. 6, 2025

Daniel Monahan '93 MS (KGCOE)
Sept. 14, 2025

1997

Thomas Leiboldt '97 (CAST)
Aug. 21, 2025

1998

Timothy Gilmore '98 (CAST)
Sept. 16, 2025

1999

Douglas Keith '99 (CAST)
Sept. 12, 2025

2000

Greg Bard '00 (CAST)
Oct. 26, 2025

2001

Thomas Niewald '01 MS (SCB)
Oct. 30, 2025

2002

Michael Seymour '02 (KGCOE), '04 MS (KGCOE)
Oct. 9, 2025

2006

Jesse Sommerlatt '06 (CIAS)
July 8, 2025

2007

Stacey Houghton '07 MFA (CIAS)
Oct. 5, 2025

2010

Damian Bostwick '10 (SCB)
Aug. 18, 2025

Faculty and Staff

Peter Anderson, retired Department Chair of Computer Science and Professor Emeritus, Oct. 1, 2025

Karen Beadling, retired director of University Publications, July 27, 2025

Julie Dougherty, retired employee of NTID's Office of the President, Nov. 16, 2025

Warren Goldmann, retired NTID science and mathematics faculty member, July 30, 2025

Vicki Hanson, Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences Professor Emerita, Jan. 20, 2026

Jay Holmes, RIT Trustee Emeritus, Nov. 28, 2025

Thomas Kausch, former adjunct packaging science professor and manager of the Packaging Dynamics Lab, July 17, 2025

Thomas C. McDermott, RIT Trustee Emeritus, Dec. 7, 2025

Alan Nye, retired mechanical engineering professor and RIT Formula Racing co-founder, Jan. 28, 2026

Thomas O'Connor, retired Facilities Management Services employee, Aug. 22, 2025

Bruce Pennington, retired Academic Success Center employee, April 2, 2025

Carolie R. Simone, wife of RIT President Emeritus Albert J. Simone, Jan. 9, 2026

Jerry Walter, former director of Institutional Research at NTID, Jan. 22, 2026

James Zukoski, retired senior computer programmer analyst, Nov. 19, 2025



RIT Archives

Public Law 89-36 was signed by **President Lyndon Baines Johnson** on June 8, 1965, at a special ceremony held in the White House Rose Garden. A crowd of onlookers and supporters, including Sen. Robert Kennedy, flanked President Johnson during the signing. New York Congressman Hugh Carey was the primary sponsor of the House version of the bill.

Celebrating 60 years since **LBJ signed law creating NTID**

Known as the “Grand Experiment,” the idea for RIT’s National Technical Institute for the Deaf was groundbreaking in 1965, charting a new course in higher education where deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals could excel in technical and professional education programs and explore liberal arts and science curricula. At that time, only about 1 percent of college-aged deaf people were enrolled in a university.

Sixty years later, NTID is celebrating President Lyndon Baines Johnson signing Public Law 89-36, establishing the college, which is a national and

international model for higher education and training for deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

With more than 11,000 alumni, it is the world’s first and largest technological college for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

It has been said that President Johnson’s personal connection to the Deaf community is believed to have contributed to his support for the NTID legislation.

His childhood neighbor and lifelong friend, Homer Thornberry, had deaf parents and Johnson learned to fingerspell to communicate with them.

The legislation had strong bipartisan support, passing the House and the Senate unani-

mously and underscoring a national recognition of the need to provide better post-secondary technical training and employment opportunities for deaf individuals.

RIT competed against eight other colleges in its bid for NTID to become part of the university. Rep. Hugh Carey announced RIT as the sponsoring institution in 1966 due to the new Henrietta, N.Y., campus, a strong technical focus, a supportive local business community, and a thriving Deaf community, particularly with the Rochester School for the Deaf.

“NTID has grown in unimaginable ways from its start as a national workforce develop-

ment initiative for deaf and hard-of-hearing people to a place where our students can engage in cutting-edge research with faculty, build lifelong friendships, and discover themselves in a community that allows them to thrive,” said NTID President Caroline Solomon, the first woman to lead the college. “Today, we are not here simply to prepare students for the workforce—we are here to prepare them for a world that needs their voices; their leadership; their moral compasses; and their ability to be agile, adapt, and innovate.” 🐾

Vienna McGrain '12 MS



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Time to **GRADUATE,** Now Stay **CONNECTED.**

Getting your RIT diploma is just the beginning— you can invest your time and talents to power up your RIT spirit. Attend alumni events, mentor students, or use your alumni benefits. Here are some ways to get involved.

Update Your Information

Stay in-the-know on campus news, new benefits for alumni, and the latest from all things RIT. You never know what opportunities you might be missing, so **scan the QR code** to make sure we have your latest contact information!



Use Your Benefits

From shopping discounts and lifelong learning opportunities to on-campus perks the next time you visit. You earned a lifetime of rewards that RIT provides exclusively to their alumni community.

Follow RIT Alumni on Social Media

Join our LinkedIn group to network and enhance your career. Celebrate milestones on Instagram and Facebook.



Access resources, events, and more ways to engage with fellow Tigers and RIT by visiting rit.edu/alumni.



From Prototype to Perfection

RIT students push the boundaries of what's possible.

Imagine RIT: Creativity and Innovation Festival showcases the ingenuity of students, faculty, and staff with 350+ interactive exhibits, research projects, hands-on demonstrations, and live performing arts.

Join us for a day of discovery.

Saturday, April 25
10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

rit.edu/imagine

Inspiring Imaginations

The festival takes place all over campus. New this year: tours of the recently completed RIT Performing Arts Center.

