RIT

University Magazine
Fall 2026



Shaping **new careers**

Agentic **AI engineer**

3D-workflow **and technology specialist**

Cybersecurity **incident commander**

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RIT University Magazine

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Vol. 28, No. 2, 51M-MC00622-11/2026-RRD-JSA

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On the cover



Malcolm Zale '23 (motion picture science) takes a break from swapping out modules on a virtual production LED wall. As a 3D-workflow and technology specialist, he is helping shape the future of the entertainment industry.

Photo by Jesse Winter '01



Carlos Ortiz

RIT President Bill Sanders talks about the new Strategic Framework during his State of the University address in the RIT Performing Arts Center in September.

Creativity and innovation are transforming careers

RIT graduates have always been leaders, but increasingly, they are leading in professions that did not exist a generation ago. They are shaping emerging industries, combining disciplines in unexpected ways, and creating new approaches to serving people and solving problems.

The alumni featured in this issue (pages 20-27) exemplify that spirit. Their careers remind us that an RIT education prepares graduates not simply to enter the workforce, but to imagine how work itself can be different.

Olivia Svrchek '11, a biomedical sciences graduate and an executive at a preventive health screening company, captures that idea beautifully: "What I experienced at RIT opened my mind to know that I could approach nursing in a different way. I didn't have to stay at the bedside or stay in a hospital system or live my career in a traditional sense."

That openness to possibility is part of what makes RIT distinctive.

I have been reflecting on the profound changes affecting higher education and the world around us. Artificial intelligence is transforming how people learn and work. Employers are reconsidering the capabilities graduates need. Students and families are asking important questions about the value of a college education and the opportunities it will create.

These are serious questions. They are also questions RIT is prepared to answer.

Our university has spent generations developing an educational model built for this moment. Experiential learning, cooperative education, applied research, creativity, entrepreneurship, and strong partnerships with industry enable our students to connect knowledge with action. They learn to adapt, collaborate, think critically, and create meaningful change.

These strengths are guided by a clear vision—to shape the future and improve the world through creativity and innovation. Our new Strategic Framework advances that vision through four pillars: transformative student experiences and success, world-changing research, a culture of well-being and belonging, and global reach and mindset.

Our alumni bring those goals to life every day. They lead organizations, launch businesses, advance technologies, strengthen communities, and pursue careers that cross traditional boundaries. Just as importantly, they demonstrate to today's students what is possible when an education encourages resilience and a willingness to explore a different path.

The world will continue to change, often in ways we cannot predict. But RIT's mission remains our compass. We will continue preparing students not only for their first opportunity, but for a lifetime of learning, reinvention, and leadership.

Together, we are showing why RIT is built for the future still taking shape.

Yours in innovative spirit,

Bill

William H. Sanders, President
sanders@rit.edu



Hands-on exploration is at the heart of a new performing arts course that highlights technical roles in theater. Students get a behind-the-scenes tour of performance spaces on campus, like the scene shop in the new RIT Performing Arts Center, to learn what it takes to bring a stage production to life.

Carlos Ortiz



From left to right, RIT researchers **Linda Bryant**, **Seth Hubbard**, **Jie Qiao**, and **Stefan Preble** are part of the NSF STELLAR Engine group that brings $15 million in federal funding to the Rochester region to bolster a national laser technology hub.

RIT key partner in $15 million award to establish a national laser technology hub

The National Science Foundation will award $15 million over the next two years to the Rochester/Finger Lakes region of New York to establish a national hub for laser science and development.

RIT is a key partner in the initiative led by the University of Rochester.

The award, matched by $16 million in New York state support over the next six years, will establish an internationally competitive technology and innovation cluster in the region focused on laser technologies, education, company creation, and workforce development.

An estimated $16 trillion global marketplace depends on lasers for everything from smartphones to national defense but is increasingly based overseas. The STELLAR (Science, Technology and Engineering for Laser and Laser Applications Research) Engine project will bolster laser production domestically.

Faculty-researchers involved in the initiative from RIT are Stefan Preble, the Bausch and Lomb Professor in Microsystems Engineering; Linda Bryant, director of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf's Learning Consortium; Seth Hubbard, head of the School of Physics and Astronomy; and Jie Qiao, associate professor in the Chester F. Carlson Center for Imaging Science.

"Through STELLAR, we will drive the next era of innovation in laser technologies and their applications," said Preble,



Liam Myerow

a co-principal investigator. "By leveraging Rochester's and RIT's leadership in optics, photonics, imaging, semiconductor, and microelectronic research and education, and working closely with our partners, we will advance transformative laser-enabled technologies and develop the skilled workforce needed to maintain our region's position as a global leader."

Mollie Radzinski



Paul Besch-Turner

Dr. Daniel Taramasco '05 teaches "Is *The Pitt* Legit?" to students in health fields and fans of the popular show.

RIT class asks if 'The Pitt' is legit

Instead of buying a textbook this semester, students in a new course subscribed to HBO Max.

Their assignment: watch *The Pitt*, the Emmy award-winning medical drama with a realistic portrayal of emergency medicine in a fictitious Pittsburgh hospital that is helping future healthcare professionals explore the ethical, emotional, and practical challenges they may one day face themselves.

Dr. Daniel Taramasco '05 (biology), an internist at Rochester General Hospital, is teaching the class "Is *The Pitt* Legit?" about the series lauded for its gritty accuracy. Taramasco works closely with his colleagues in the ER.

Emma Morris, a fifth-year biomedical engineering BS/MS major who hopes to go to medical school after graduation, has rewatched the series several times.

She enrolled in the class to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing emergency physicians.

"I want to be able to break down the nuances of their decision making while also taking into account the impact that their work has on people's everyday life," Morris said.

Susan Gawlowicz '95

In Brief

Ranking high

RIT continues its run as a top 100 national university, according to the 2027 *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. The publication, which places RIT at No. 95, also cited it as being among the best universities in innovation, experiential learning with co-ops and internships, and value.

This year, RIT jumped 10 spots in the "Most Innovative" category, landing at No. 32, while exposure to co-ops and internships for students remained strong, coming in at No. 5 in the nation. Additionally, RIT's undergraduate business program leapt 19 spots from last year to No. 58.

RIT also was ranked among the top 50 schools for "Colleges that Create Futures" in The Princeton Review Best 392 Colleges 2027 edition.

And RIT's School of Film and Animation is among the top 25 film schools in the United States, according to the most recent list published by *The Hollywood Reporter*. RIT ranked No. 21 this year.

New degree in AI

About 20 students began studying in a new artificial intelligence bachelor's degree program this fall.

The interdisciplinary undergraduate program blends core programming and algorithmic principles with the chance for specialized study in areas like agentic AI and robotics. Students in the major will work on hands-on projects building and applying AI.

RIT also offers a master's degree and a minor in AI.

Assisting Google

Researchers at RIT's National Technical Institute for the Deaf have collaborated with Google to test new AI technology that converts sign language into text in real time.

That technology, called Sign Language-to-Text (SL2T), is now available as a standard feature on Google Pixel 11 devices, released in August. It represents a significant advancement in accessible communication technology.

NTID Center on Access Technology collected data and offered feedback to Google.



RIT Board of Trustees member Jeff Harris '75 and College of Liberal Arts National Council chair Joyce Pratt have made a $24 million commitment to the university, as the couple's lifetime giving now surpasses $30 million.

Donors commit $24 million to advance AI leadership

RIT has received a $24 million commitment to advance artificial intelligence leadership, faculty excellence, and student success.

The gift from Board of Trustees member and immediate past chair Jeff Harris '75 (photographic science and instrumentation) and President's Roundtable member and College of Liberal Arts National Council chair Joyce Pratt brings the Annapolis, Md., couple's lifetime giving to more than $30 million. Since 1985, Harris and Pratt have supported scholarships, professorships, academic programs, and student initiatives across the university.

The commitment supports several strategic priorities, including the creation of a Harris-Pratt Directorship for the university's new artificial intelligence institute expected to launch in early 2027, expanded scholarship support, and strengthened endowments for three distinguished professorships.

The institute will advance artificial intelligence education, research, and responsible application across disciplines while helping develop the talent needed to guide, apply, and improve emerging technologies.

Russell Nunley

Highmark Stadium features work with RIT roots

When Buffalo Bills fans at Highmark Stadium cheer for the team this season, their energy will be transformed into a living piece of art through a new installation co-created by a faculty member.

Randy Fernando, assistant professor in RIT's School of Design, is one half of MOV.E, a collaborative artist-design team based in Buffalo, N.Y. He and his partner at MOV.E, Joselyne Morocho, created their installation, *Charge the Herd*, for the stadium.

The duo was commissioned for this site-specific artwork as part of the Buffalo Bills Public Art Program at Highmark Stadium, and the installation has become a part of the stadium's permanent art collection.

"We were inspired by the strength, dynamic movement, and symbolism of the American bison when creating the piece," Fernando said. "The installation abstracts the image of a stampeding herd, and celebrates the cherished, chaotic energy of a home game."

Charge the Herd, crafted from audio-reactive light, perforated steel, acrylic, and wood, aims to capture and transform the collective energy of Bills Mafia. The immersive media installation uses illuminated geometric screens and responsive lighting animations that react to crowd noise and stadium atmosphere, creating a living artwork that embodies movement, resilience, and collective identity.

Felícia Swartzenberg '19

Joselyne Morocho installs an immersive display that she co-created with **Assistant Professor Randy Fernando** at the new Highmark Stadium.The artwork transforms crowd noise into light during Buffalo Bills football games.

Photo provided by MOV.E



In Brief

Smart Seat

A research project that began with a student's idea in an engineering laboratory at RIT is now a commercial product designed to help older adults live independently while giving their families peace of mind.

Casana, a Rochester-based health technology company co-founded by RIT alumnus Nick Conn and led by RIT alumnus Austin McChord, has launched its Smart Seat, a next-generation device that automatically tracks blood pressure trends, heart rate, blood oxygen, stability, and respiratory rate every time someone sits on the toilet seat.

The product's commercial debut is the culmination of more than a decade of research, engineering, clinical validation, and entrepreneurship that began at RIT.

Microplastic pollution

RIT Professor Matthew Hoffman is taking his mathematical models from Lake Ontario to Lake Huron to help map and assess microplastic pollution in Georgian Bay.

Georgian Bay Forever, a Canadian nonprofit aiming to conserve, protect, and restore the aquatic ecosystem of the area, announced five U.S.-based research projects. Hoffman will be working with researchers from the University of Michigan on one of the projects.

Tops in North America

RIT Baja Racing team captured first place at the Baja SAE Ohio competition, outperforming 83 collegiate teams from around the world. The win positions the team No. 2 in North America for the 2026 season.

In Ohio in late September, RIT topped the field that included national foes Purdue, Johns Hopkins, Cornell, and other collegiate teams from Canada, Mexico, Türkiye, and China.

The team credits RIT's support for much of its success. About 90 percent of the car is built in-house in the team's shop. RIT Baja also has a test track on campus.

Students build empathy through design

For 10 weeks, the wood shop was a second home for Brooke Banninger, a fourth-year industrial design major. She spent the summer designing a therapeutic toy in disguise.

Her multidisciplinary student team was challenged to create a fully functional prototype of a weighted pushcart for children at the Rochester Hearing and Speech Center. The motion and force needed to move the cart will improve children's motor development by stimulating sensory regulation that helps the brain and muscles work together.

"Being able to see your design in its intended final form is something that can take months or years in the industry, and having something ready for our client in just 10 weeks is remarkable," said Banninger, who is from Pottstown, Pa. "I now have an understanding of what it is like to work on a product during a full workday for weeks."

The pushcart project was part of Studio 930, an RIT design consultancy focused on producing access and health technology products. Studio 930 is one of many experiential learning opportunities that students can take part in at the university's multilevel makerspace, the SHED.

Maker culture has deep roots at RIT, with generations of students who tinker and play with technology and the arts and build careers around their passions. All RIT students have access to the SHED's centralized wood and metal shops, textile and electronics area, 3D printers, laser cutters, and other equipment and spaces.

"Studio 930 was meant for the SHED," said Lara Cardoso Goulart '16 MFA (industrial design), the program director for Studio 930 and co-director of the industrial design



Students **Brooke Banninger**, left, **Andrew Nasser**, center, and **Spencer Harris**, right, worked in RIT's multilevel makerspace to build a prototype pushcart for children at the Rochester Hearing and Speech Center. At right, toddlers test the pushcart, which improves motor development.

Photos by Traci Westcott '18



What's in a name?

Studio 930 was named after the temperature (in Celsius) at which steel turns the shade of RIT orange.

empathy through design

program. "It's not just a classroom; it's a multidisciplinary space."

This year's Studio 930 group gained co-op and internship experience working on projects for Rochester-area organizations serving people with disabilities. The 16 undergraduates from majors across RIT did onsite visits to clients and produced concepts, design plans, and replicable prototypes. Each student was assigned to work on two different projects.

Andrew Nasser, a fourth-year mechatronics engineering major, worked on the pushcart and designed an ergonomic bottle opener for pharmacists.

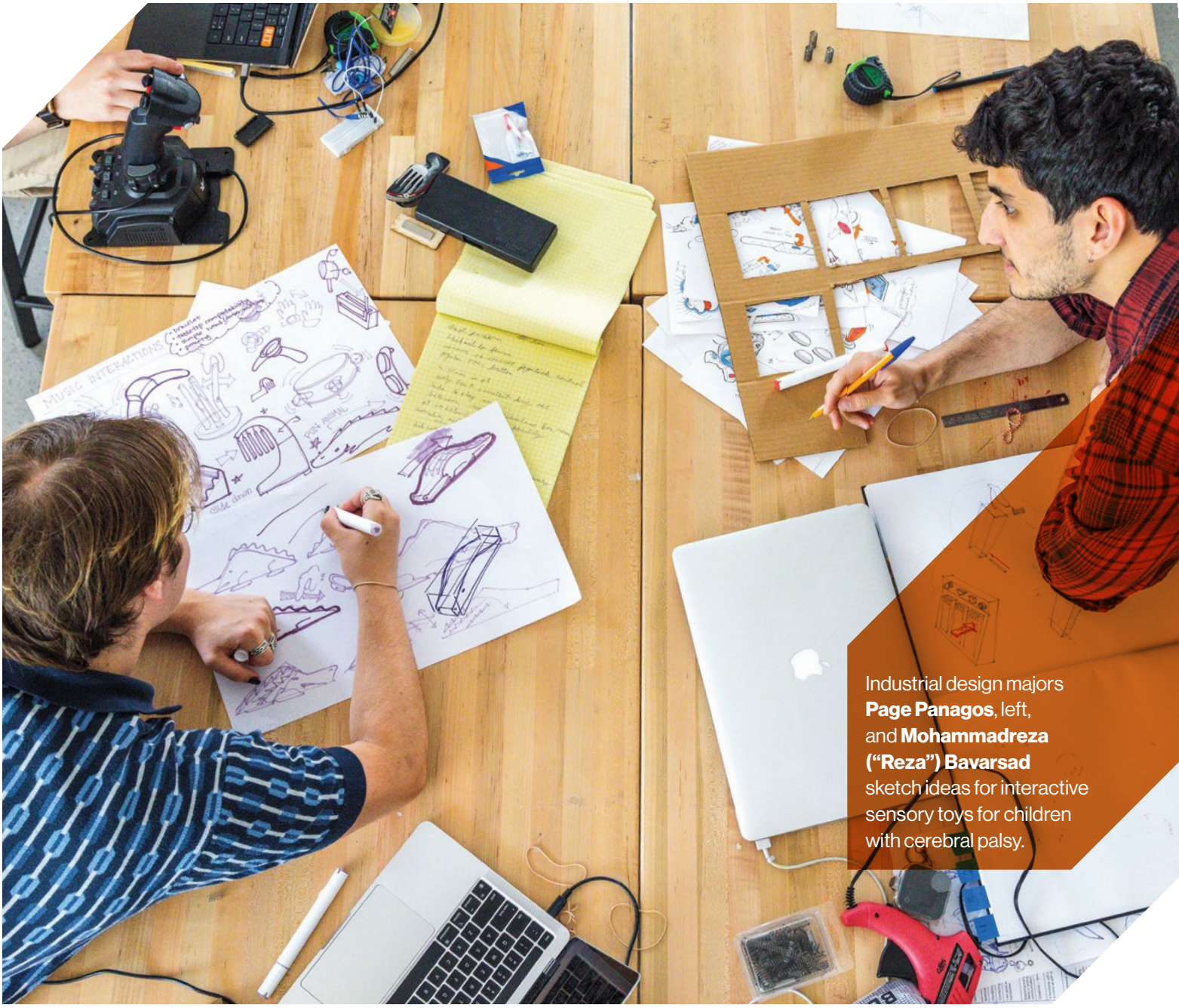
His team's solution aimed to reduce repetitive motion injuries caused by opening hundreds of childproof bottles a day.

"Switching gears and focusing on a different project is something I was familiar with," said Nasser, who is from Manhattan. "It builds organizational skills that allow you to keep track of your progress, manage time efficiently, and pick up where you left off."

Madisen Pavoris, a fourth-year industrial design student, worked on a project that simplified a workflow.

Her team sought to design a precision food-cutting solution for staff at Lifetime Assistance, a group home for people with intellectual disabilities.

Many of the residents there have trouble chewing and swallowing food, and mealtimes can be dangerous for them. To prevent choking, the state stipulates each piece of food measure from 1/4-



Industrial design majors **Page Panagos**, left, and **Mohammadreza ("Reza") Bavarsad** sketch ideas for interactive sensory toys for children with cerebral palsy.



Spencer Harris, left, and **Madisen Pavoris** make a system for cutting food into precisely sized pieces for group home residents prone to choking.



The food-cutting prototype combines a grooved cutting board with a removable guide and a modified pizza cutter.

inch to 1-inch cubes, with the precise dimensions illustrated on a cutting mat.

Pork chops were on the menu the day the RIT design team visited the kitchen staff. The students observed the time and dexterity required to cut the meat to the right size and tried it for themselves.

"The food moved around on the mat, and we could only cut one piece at a time," said Pavoris, who is from the Chicago area. "It took over one hour to cut pork chops."

The team simplified the workflow and designed an efficient and ergonomic tool. Program organizers said the team advanced a project that had stumped students in prior years.

Their solution centered around a grooved cutting board with a guided cover for slicing food with a knife or a modified pizza cutter with different handle attachments. Professors said the food cutter design will continue as a capstone project for graduate students in the mechatronics and mechanical systems program.

"It's the process of the real world," Pavoris said. "This is where our job as designers stops, and the product goes to manufacturers, the engineers. I enjoyed the problem solving."

Susan Gawlowicz '95

Challenge accepted

Students were given a 10-week experiential learning challenge to produce practical solutions for real clients. Here's some of what they made.

Problem: Dementia patients at the Jewish Home of Rochester need more sensory stimulation.

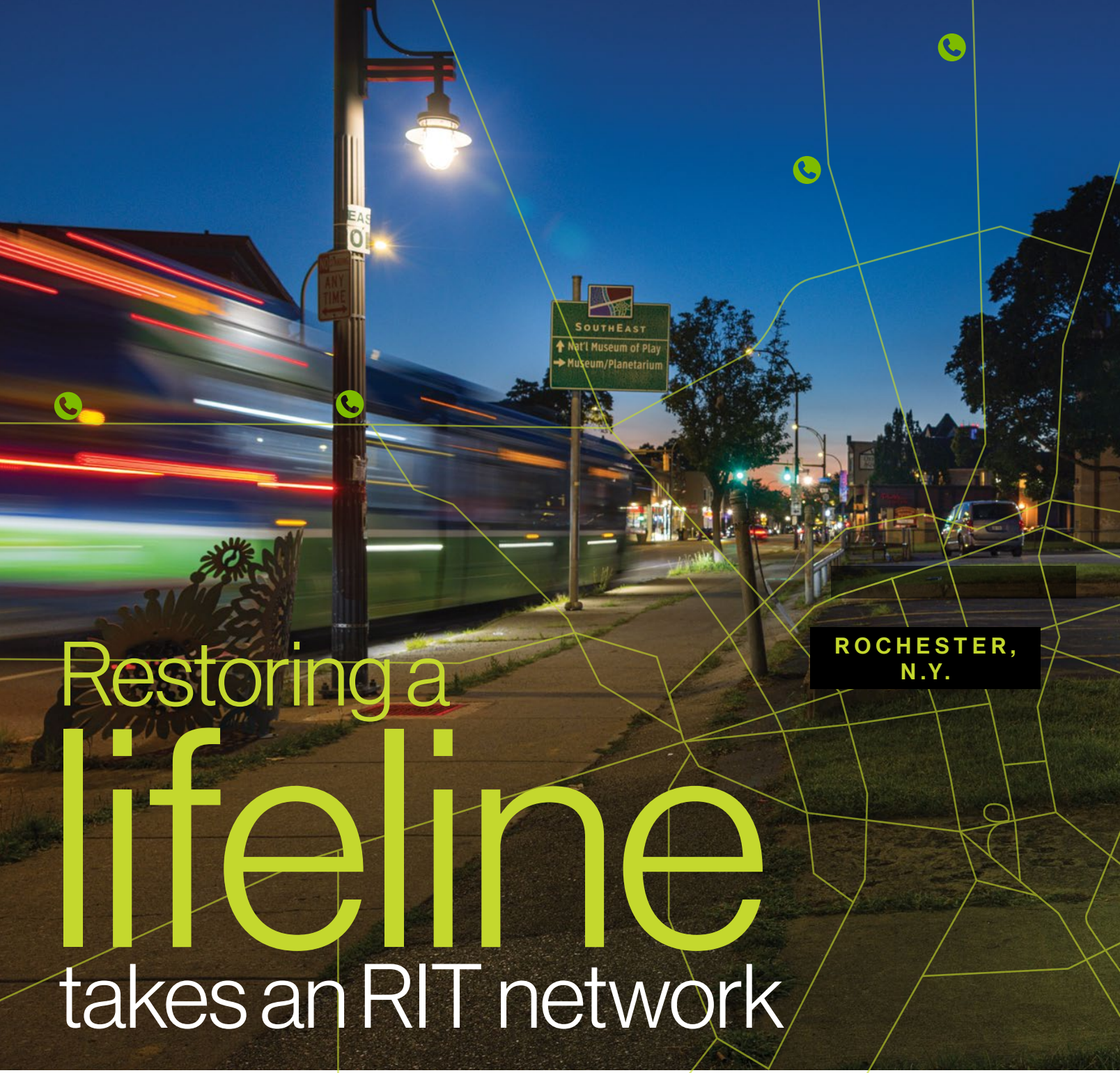
Solution: The Memory Map, a wooden map of Rochester neighborhoods with landmarks to stimulate conversation.

Problem: Re-engineer an adjustable toilet support system for children with cerebral palsy.

Solution: Designed a prototype and created technical drawings that could be built on site in a cost-efficient way.

Problem: Nurses need a precision liquid dispenser to prepare thickened beverages for patients with dysphagia, who have trouble swallowing.

Solution: For warm beverages: clear containers with inserts and slots that allow for accurate measurement without overflow. For cold drinks: a storage unit for the refrigerator with visual indicators.



ROCHESTER, N.Y.

Restoring a lifeline takes an RIT network

At one point in Dennis Williams' career, every city branch of the Rochester (N.Y.) Public Library had a payphone. Over the years, he's watched this resource slowly disappear, but the need hasn't gone away.

"No matter what public library you go to, you will likely see patrons using the staff phones," said Williams, the Lyell Branch Library manager. "Branches like ours get a huge amount of traffic from people that do not have phones. Sometimes they need to make connections for services, or sometimes they just need to call a parent to get a ride."

When RIT Assistant Professor Eric Kunsman approached Williams and former branch manager Shamika Fusco about bringing a public phone back into the library, they were eager to integrate it.

"Once people find out about it, they regularly come in and make a beeline right for that service. About 50 percent of them will come back to use the computers or other library services," Williams said.

Success stories like this were the endgoal when Kunsman established the GoodPhone Project, a grassroots effort to provide free public phone service and high-speed Wi-Fi to Rochester area residents. The



What began as a photography project became a community movement. Led by an RIT assistant professor and powered by a network of collaborators, the GoodPhone Project is restoring a simple but essential service.

Photos by Traci Westcott '18

project upcycles old, discarded payphone parts into Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phones and makes them available for anyone to use.

Kunsman's interest in payphones began with a photography project. But after all the payphones in town were removed, his photography became a catalyst for action.

He leaned into the strength and spirit of RIT's maker-focused community and created a model for how Rochester and other cities can introduce free public phones. In the process, he demonstrated how a photographer's creative practice can extend beyond a camera.

A creative spark

When Kunsman drives to Booksmart Studio, his business located on Walnut Street in downtown Rochester, he's greeted by lush foliage, dappled sunlight, and his neighbor Roberto, the "friendliest and busiest mechanic in the city," working out of his garage.

From his perspective, moving his studio to this quiet, dead-end street was a wise one.

Kunsman teaches full time at RIT's National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), the world's first and largest technological college for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, and the School of Photographic Arts and Sciences, which is nationally recognized for its degree programs. When he isn't on campus, he spends much of his time at his studio.

In 2017, on the first day he moved in, Kunsman was greeted by three 9-year-olds—Harry, Elijah, and Grumpy—who asked if they could help him carry moving boxes. When their parents noticed them talking to a stranger, they came over to introduce themselves. Kunsman quickly made friends with the parents, and his two children became playmates with the trio of 9-year-olds.

It was a picture-perfect caricature of a friendly neighborhood. Yet, when he told his friends and colleagues about the move, he was shocked to hear them call the area a "war zone."

"I was trying to figure out why people had that quick biased reaction—and everyone had it. Not one person I spoke to said, 'Oh, that's a smart move,' but they don't even know these people," he said. "Those reactions still boil my skin."

Fueled by frustrated curiosity, Kunsman reflected on those conversations and began to explore around his studio to form his own opinions.

The abandoned houses, corner stores, and other details people pointed to as signs of danger weren't a reflection of crime rates or lack of safety, as his friends suggested. Instead, he saw them for what they were: the visual markers of poverty and inequity.

Kunsman, who has been teaching courses on photography, printing, and digital workflow processes at RIT

Restoring a lifeline



Assistant Professor Eric Kunsman helps Flower City Arts Center photography students place their work on a phone enclosure. Displaying art on the phones is a way to include the community in the GoodPhone Project.

since 2000, felt called to use his artistic practice to push back against these unfair judgments and encourage others to understand the full story.

"I started photographing payphones because it was an inanimate object I could document that didn't require people. Everybody was already judging the area, and I was worried that as soon as I put someone in the photo the same instant labeling would be applied," he said.

Kunsman chose to take these photos using an old Hasselblad camera and Kodak film as a conceptual nod to how the decline of blue-collar industry led to sustained poverty in the city. He also chose to present his body of work in black and white as a way of visually "leveling the playing field."

The project started casually. On days when he had free time, Kunsman hopped into his truck and drove around to photograph as many payphones as he could find.

In 2018, he procured a list of all 1,455 payphones in Monroe County (N.Y.) from Frontier Communications, making his scavenger hunt a little easier. That same year, he began photographing payphones in different cities across the country.

As Kunsman amassed more images and discovered new phones, he was surprised to find that many of them were still heavily used.

While Kunsman was photographing at Busy Bee Diner, located on West Main Street in Rochester, a gentleman rushed outside to confront him and hurriedly asked, "You're not going to rip that out, are you?" Kunsman explained what he was doing, and the man was relieved because he used the phone frequently.

"He was the first person who told me that he hated how people looked at him when he used the phone. He wasn't doing something wrong, he was just calling his family," said Kunsman. "That's when I realized that I needed to find a way to integrate voices like his. I'm not just a man on a soapbox. I'm trying to tell other people's stories."

The realization marked a turning point in Kunsman's relationship to the work and his artistic approach.

In 2021, Kunsman debuted an exhibition of his portraits, titled "Felicific Calculus: Technology as a Social Marker of Race, Class, & Economics in Rochester, N.Y.," at CEPA Galley in Buffalo, N.Y.

His photographs were shown alongside an interactive map—created by Rebekah Walker '24 MS (science, technology, and public policy)—that compared the locations of all the local payphones to census data showing economic status, ethnicity, age, sex, and crime rates throughout Monroe County.

The exhibition also featured a faux payphone that played first-hand testimonies from people who still rely on this seemingly antiquated service.

"Felicific Calculus" has been shown in galleries across the country and internationally, and the photos have been published in magazines like *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *Harper's Magazine*, and *Dodho*.

The work also has received multiple awards.

Art into action

In January 2024, Frontier Communications disconnected every payphone in Monroe County, leaving the physical phones in place while revoking service. Later that year, the federal Affordable Connectivity Program also ended, leaving community members with two options: pay for a cell phone plan or lose easy access to making calls.

When Kunsman heard this news, he remembered the man who confronted him at Busy Bee Diner. He also thought of the pair of friends he met outside of a homeless encampment at an abandoned strip mall in Arizona, who told him that the city disconnected service from the payphones at the mall simply because they moved in.

The reality of Rochesterians being cut off from phone connections, of a lifeline being taken from people who are already struggling, wasn't something Kunsman could silently watch. Instead, he used his photography as a launch pad and sought a solution.

Michael Riordan '97 MS (graphic arts systems), a longtime collaborator of Kunsman's and former RIT professor, was familiar with Kunsman's payphone work and helped connect him with Walker and others to move the exhibition forward. Riordan also acted as a sounding board for Kunsman's ideas.

After leaving RIT, Riordan deepened his focus on Independent Good, a local organization he founded that works toward making large-scale positive community impact by providing creative and consulting services for clients. When Kunsman expressed his desire to establish the GoodPhone Project and bring payphones back into the community, Riordan was eager to help.

"One of the biggest things I learned during my 20 years at RIT was the power of a network. If you're trying to make something bigger happen, it must be a collaborative effort," he said. "This project showcases what the RIT community should be doing. We're a bunch of doers and makers, so let's get together and solve these issues."

At its inception, the GoodPhone Project's core team comprised Kunsman, Riordan, Walker, and Janelle Duda, former staff member of RIT's Center for Public Safety Initiatives and founder of On the Ground Research, which supports local community intervention organizations.

Their first step toward establishing a free phone service was to consult others doing similar work.

Futel, a grassroots organization in Portland, Ore., has installed 25 free payphones across five cities: Portland; Seattle and Long Beach, Wash.; and Detroit and Ypsilanti, Mich. In 2025, more than 30,000 phone calls were made from Futel phones.

Futel founder and director Karl Anderson offered guidance on how Kunsman could create a free phone network in Rochester, but the team still lacked a key technical element: an Asterisk server to facilitate telephone calls. California-based data communications service provider Littlejohn Communications came to the rescue by setting up the server and giving them insight into how to manage a VoIP network.

Armed with strong community support and technical know-how, the team installed the first GoodPhone at Father Tracy Advocacy Center in July of 2024.

The installation was made possible by funding from NTID's Scholarship Portfolio Development Initiative grant program.



Family Dollar Store, Lyell Avenue, Rochester, N.Y. (2021)



Point Reyes National Seashore, Marin County, Calif. (2020)



Grape and Orange Mini Mart, Orange Street, Rochester, N.Y. (2019)



Dunkin' Donuts, Monroe Avenue, Rochester, N.Y., after phone was removed. (2021)

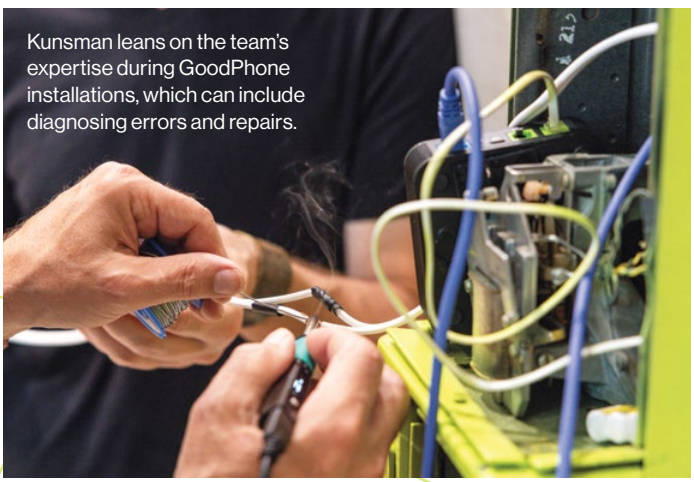
Kunsman's interest in payphones resulted in two bodies of work: "Felicific Calculus," which focuses on Monroe County, N.Y., and "Life-Lines Throughout the U.S.," which includes payphones across the country.

Restoring a lifeline

Local news outlets publicized the phone installation, and one story from WXXI News caught the eye of Bill Canning '24 (EMBA), a financial planning and analysis analyst at Greenlight Networks.

Canning was looking to get more involved with the community. While payphones and VoIP were somewhat outside his scope of expertise, he was happy to learn—and the simplicity of the technology was a pleasant surprise for him.

Once the team procures an old payphone, either via donations or dumpster diving, the first step is to remove all the internal parts that make the device coin operated. Then, they place a small ATA device inside, which transforms a signal that can be transmitted over internet connections to a more analog signal the old phone recognizes, and vice versa. From there, all that is needed is electrical power and internet access to get the phone up and running.



Kunsman leans on the team's expertise during GoodPhone installations, which can include diagnosing errors and repairs.

Despite working for nearly 10 years in telecommunications, Canning was unaware of the vital role payphones play until he joined the project team.

"If there is a need for something like the GoodPhone, there are probably a lot of other things I'm used to having that others don't have access to," he said. "It makes me wonder what other gaps there are that can be addressed with creative solutions. How else can I help?"

In 2025, with grant support from NTID and Genesee Valley Council on the Arts, the team installed five additional phones throughout the city.

Between December of 2025 and June of 2026, the six phones have made more than 3,500 outgoing calls, totaling more than 8,200 minutes of conversations. GoodPhones have facilitated roughly 400 calls per month in 2026, and Kunsman says the demand consistently outpaces the working network.

Lessons that last

Working with the GoodPhone Project was one of the most important experiences Brianna Hill '24 (individualized program) says she had at RIT. She often leans on the lessons she gained from this work in her full-time job as a program and media outreach specialist at the Finger Lakes Boating Museum.

"It was exciting to see how I could do more with my photography," said Hill, from Hammondsport, N.Y. "I saw that I didn't have to just stop at the camera and be a spectator. My art could lead to a positive change if I make that effort."

Hill met Kunsman during RIT Orientation when he welcomed her and three other NTID-supported photography students to campus. When he received funding from NTID to hire a co-op student at his studio in 2022, Hill applied.

During the second week of her co-op, she joined Kunsman to volunteer with Father Tracy Advocacy Center for street outreach. They handed out resources like food and water, socks, and Naloxone Nasal Spray.

"We walked down all the 'bad' streets others warned me about, and we just talked to people. It reinforced my beliefs of not judging an experience that I haven't lived myself, and not giving credence to the stigma that gets put onto people or places," said Hill.

Christye Sisson, director of RIT's School of Photographic Arts and Sciences, hopes all photography students can gain this perspective before they graduate.

"The ability to translate emotional weight, human empathy, sensitivity, and narrative storytelling with an image is a skill that takes time. It's not something achieved by simply taking a photograph, which is why we work so hard with students to hone that element of artistry," said Sisson. "Eric's work and need to effect a difference is a wonderful example for our students of how the power of photography, the power of persistence, and certainly the power of personality can drive a project forward."

While funding for phone installations has been harder to come by these days, the





From left, Michael Riordan '97, student intern Delia Giovannucci, and Kunsman test old payphone parts at Kunsman's studio before repurposing them for GoodPhone installations.

team has not lost steam.

Kunsman secured a new grant from Genesee Valley Council on the Arts to re-photograph some of the payphone locations around Rochester to help raise awareness and drive support. But now, what he sees most on his drives are empty spaces and blemishes on concrete.

Unless they know what to look for—or they memorized the locations like Kunsman has—most people won't even register the loss.

"I can't believe how many of them have been removed and thrown away," Kunsman remarked as he drove to the fifth empty location where a phone used to be. "There might come a time when the only phones left in the city are GoodPhones."

By the end of 2026, Rochester Public Libraries aims to install GoodPhones at five of its city branches, with the goal of expanding the service to all 10 branches in 2027.

The team is also in the early stages of planning with Monroe County officials to install more GoodPhones throughout the city to support the county's Code Blue cold weather emergency plan.

Another goal of the team is to provide guidance for people in other cities who want to establish their own community phone networks; an act made possible by careful planning to ensure the project is easily scalable for other locations.

"Our goal is to build that foundation so we can turn it over to other people, and maybe it becomes its own nonprofit," Kunsman said. "I really do hope it outgrows me and the team."

Felícia Swartzenberg '19

How to help

Goodphoneproject.com



Harvey J. Palmer Endowed Professor Karin Wuertz-Kozak, left, works alongside undergraduate and graduate students through the research process, from designing experiments and analyzing data to interpreting findings.

RIT research looks **beyond surgery** for back pain relief



For those with chronic back pain, surgery might seem inevitable. But biomedical engineering professor Karin Wuertz-Kozak sees other possibilities before that point is even reached.

Wuertz-Kozak is developing gene and cell therapies that may be the next step in tissue regeneration, a type of noninvasive treatment that could control the molecular mechanisms contributing to pain, mostly inflammation.

The breakdown of the intervertebral disc—the cushioning tissue between the bones of the spinal column—occurs for multiple reasons, from age and genetics to repetitive tasks and injuries. Her research team in the Tissue Regeneration and Mechanobiology Lab is focusing on extracellular vesicles (EVs), natural nanoparticles that can stimulate tissue repair, reduce inflammation, and modulate the behavior of existing cells.

"Professor Wuertz-Kozak's translational research shows significant promise in potentially revolutionizing clinical spine care," said Dr. Varun Puvanesarajah, a top surgeon in orthopedic care and treatment for back, spine, and disc ailments at the University of Rochester Medical Center.

He worked closely with Wuertz-Kozak and her student-researchers to assess the clinical and translational relevance of the research.

"The work that she has pioneered could provide a critical non-operative modality that may help alleviate symptoms and avoid invasive procedures, which may have higher inherent risk," said Puvanesarajah.

That could be a game changer for the millions of people who are impacted by degenerative disc disease.

Building a lab

Researchers in Wuertz-Kozak's lab study cellular mechanisms involved in inflammation, degeneration, and fibrosis, with a primary focus on the inter-

Photos by Carlos Ortiz

vertebral disc. Their goal is to advance disc repair through innovative, noninvasive therapies.

The team has had some success controlling tissue inflammation and promoting regeneration using EVs derived from CRISPR-modified stem cells in vitro. Stem cells show promise in regenerative medicine because once introduced into damaged tissue, they can develop into other cell types and release signals that influence neighboring cells.

A major challenge, however, is the intervertebral disc's harsh environment and limited regenerative cell capacity. Unlike conventional gene-editing approaches that cut or alter DNA, CRISPR activation technology increases the activity of selected therapeutic genes.

The modified stem cells then release EVs with enhanced therapeutic cargo. In laboratory studies, these EVs showed stronger anti-inflammatory effects than EVs produced by unmodified stem cells, Wuertz-Kozak explained.

Her path to this research reflects a cross-disciplinary approach that defines her laboratory.

Wuertz-Kozak earned a degree in pharmaceutical sciences from the University of Regensburg in Germany before pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Ulm's Institute of Orthopaedic Research and Biomechanics. Her training brought together cell and molecular biology, biomechanics, and engineering—an interdisciplinary foundation that continues to shape her research.

After completing her Ph.D., Wuertz-Kozak held research and faculty positions in the United States and Europe, including at ETH Zurich. She joined RIT in 2019 and is currently the Harvey J. Palmer Endowed Professor of Biomedical Engineering. Her background in pharmacology, biology, and engineering allows her to approach tissue disease from multiple perspectives and connect fundamental mechanisms with questions that matter to clinicians and patients.

"Karin brought an internationally recognized research program in musculoskeletal tissue engineering, a collaborative approach to science, and a deep commitment to student mentorship," said Thomas Gaborski, head of RIT's Department of Biomedical Engineering. "Her scholarship, collaborative leadership, and dedication to students have strengthened the department's research enterprise and its educational experience."



Gabriella Wagner, right, began working in Wuertz-Kozak's lab as an undergraduate. She is now a doctoral student studying plant-derived extracellular vesicles from hops.



Learning through discovery

What distinguishes RIT's biomedical engineering program is its emphasis on experiential learning. Students work alongside faculty and often with physicians from nearby medical centers, faculty from peer universities, and alumni at national technology companies.

These on- and off-campus experiences shape how students are trained in Wuertz-Kozak's lab. The team currently includes one postdoctoral researcher, six Ph.D. students, and seven undergraduate researchers. Students learn to conduct experiments, troubleshoot methods, analyze data, interpret unexpected results, and gradually take ownership of their own scientific questions.

One of those areas is whether plant-derived EVs could provide a complementary and potentially more scalable therapeutic source. Plants also release EVs containing proteins, lipids, RNA, and other bioactive molecules.

The lab is particularly interested in EVs derived from hops. Hops contain compounds with recognized anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, making them an intriguing candidate for EV research.

Gabriella Wagner '25 (biomedical engineering), '25 MS (biomedical engineering) began working in the lab in 2022 as an undergraduate, then continued as a doctoral student in RIT's biomedical and chemical engineering Ph.D. program.

Wuertz-Kozak, who grew up near hops fields in Germany, introduced Wagner to the concept of hops as natural supplements for healing.

For her dissertation, Wagner is studying whether plant-derived EVs are an alternative to stem cell-derived EVs. It is a project she helped shape as her role in the lab has grown.

"Dr. Wuertz-Kozak instilled



Tori Russell '25 (biotechnology and molecular bioscience, applied modern language and culture-French option), a Ph.D. student in the lab, is RIT's newest recipient of the prestigious National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship award.

Wuertz-Kozak came to RIT in 2019 and currently serves as the Harvey J. Palmer Endowed Professor, one of 54 endowed professorships at RIT. Endowments create a source of funding in perpetuity to support and retain cutting-edge teaching and research faculty.

in me the importance of independence, curiosity, and always pushing scientific questions further. She encourages me to improve, think critically, and reach higher," Wagner said. "That mindset has shaped not only how I approach research, but also how I approach challenges in every part of my life."

Mikkael Lamoca '24 (biomedical engineering) also grew as a researcher working closely with Wuertz-Kozak in her lab during his undergraduate studies, and the experience became one of the influences in his growing interest as a research scientist. He was a 2024 Fulbright Scholar and spent 10 months at the National University of Singapore.

When he completed his Fulbright, he was hired as part of the clinical research team at Stanford University. He primarily coordinates and manages clinical trials and research studies related to sports medicine, bone stress injuries, and shockwave therapy. His current work bridges his research initiatives at RIT with his aspirations to become a physician.

"Before I worked for Dr. Wuertz-Kozak, I did not even know what research was. I had no idea there was a whole field of research," said Lamoca. "Before her, it was mainly, I want to get my M.D. I've always had the passion for patient care, taking care of others. But that intellectual curiosity for science was definitely something I developed at RIT."

Michelle Cometa '00

Watch Research Minute video
rit.edu/kwkoz

Shaping **new careers**

Alumni thrive in professions that didn't exist a generation ago

RIT's new Strategic Framework promises to prepare graduates for the opportunities and challenges of tomorrow—including careers in fields yet to be imagined. That's a promise grounded in experience. Alumni are already building professions in fields that were unthinkable a generation ago.

Meet some of them.





Malcolm Zale '23 is carving out a niche in the entertainment industry as a technology expert.

3D-workflow and technology specialist

When Malcolm Zale '23 (motion picture science) clocks in for his job at 4Wall Entertainment, he says it feels like "every day is a *Choose Your Own Adventure* book." As a 3D-workflow and technology specialist, he tests and integrates new technology and software into the company's workflows and rolodex of offerings.

"I've always loved playing with toys, and I've been fortunate enough to turn it into a career. The toys just keep getting more expensive," said Zale, who is based in Long Island, N.Y. "I work in a playground for technologists in the film and television industry, and I have all the toys you could want."

4Wall Entertainment is a full-service lighting, video, audio, and rigging company serving all facets of the entertainment industry, from corporate events and theater to live concert tours and television. The company's work has been seen across the nation during events like Bonnaroo 2026, the 2026 NFL Draft, and PAX East.

Zale is part of 4Wall's Special Projects Group. He describes the bulk of his work as applied computational photography.

Lately, his focus has been stress testing new 3D-tracking solutions for cameras and other augmented reality elements in an In-Camera Visual Effects workflow. He also is developing internal workflows for Gaussian splatting, a technique that turns a series of overlapping photos or videos taken from different angles into a lifelike 3D reconstruction of the scene.

In this role, Zale applies his knowledge of technology and best practices used in the film industry—gained through his education in RIT's School of Film and Animation—to the live entertainment industry. His expertise is what earned him an "alarmingly long leash" to test new gear and software for wider use.

"Leadership generally trusts me to make good decisions about what sort of workflow and technologies to adopt, and to have good intuition about where the industry is going to go and what's going to work," he said. "Because of that, I get carte blanche to explore."

Felícia Swartzenberg '19

Jesse Winter '01

Cannabis **food scientist**

OGeez! cannabis gummies claim they are soft, bouncy, and delicious. Behind the scenes, it's food scientist Lauren Tamburro '04 (biochemistry) who is making sure the gummies live up to their marketing tag line.

As vice president of production for the company, Tamburro comes up with new non-medicated formulas. Once everyone agrees on a taste profile, she sends the formula on to be made into medicated gummies. From concept through scale up, to commercialization through launch and consumer feedback, she oversees it all.

Tamburro worked at Cadbury in analytical chemistry after graduating from RIT. In her 11 years with the company, she worked her way up to a senior scientist after earning a master's degree in food science from Rutgers University. She then made the career move to smaller, startup companies. A lot of startups don't think to have food scientists on staff, and Tamburro has proven her worth in the companies she's worked with.

The legalization of cannabis has created a new industry in food distribution. Today, the global legal market value is at least $40 billion, and the industry employs more than 400,000 U.S. workers. As it continues to grow and expand, it needs experts to research, discover, and formulate products for medicinal and recreational use.

"The thing with cannabis is because it was under prohibition for so long, it's like this wonderful bit of science just cracked open," said Tamburro. "There's so much research to be done. There's so much to learn and understand. We're really just at the beginning of it from a scientific standpoint."

As an undergraduate, Tamburro had a love for science and learning but wasn't sure what she wanted to do in her career. Her biochemistry degree from RIT taught her the fundamental skills that have helped her find success in a fast-growing industry.

While most children are taught not to play with their food, Tamburro now spends her workdays testing different flavors and textures in her home lab in Canandaigua, N.Y. She aims to keep the OGeez! brand competitive in the cannabis gummy market, along with all the other aspects of production that she oversees.

Mollie Radzinksi



Scott Hamilton '89



Lauren Tamburro '04 is streamlining the production processes of new cannabis-infused gummies.

3D **heart mapper**



Alket Pateqi/Abbott

Through electrophysiology, or cardiac mapping, Michael Kormos '17 helps physicians locate the origins of a patient's heart arrythmia to manage abnormalities.

Michael Kormos remembered the day well. As a service engineer for Abbott in Detroit, he had just installed new cardiovascular diagnostic equipment in a Detroit hospital operating room.

Through a glass partition into the next room, he watched drama unfold as a patient was coding. An entire clinical team of physicians, nurses, and technicians began performing highly coordinated actions to save that patient's life.

"It made me realize there's more I wanted to do," said Kormos '17 (biomedical engineering). "I literally and figuratively wanted to be on the other side of that glass."

Today, Kormos is on the other side of that glass as a clinical specialist. He provides electrical anatomical mapping to locate and navigate heart arrhythmias and tissue damage. This important information is relayed to surgeons performing ablations, the process of destroying heart tissue causing erratic heartbeats.

"There isn't a moment when I'm calm," Kormos said. "It's a lot of analyzing and assessing the timing and shape of signals. When the physician is performing the ablation procedure, we are in constant contact."

Today's physicians seek engineers with biology expertise like Kormos. Electrophysiology is its own subspecialty in the diagnosis and treatment of cardiac arrhythmia. The catheter readings, ultrasound imaging, and electrical signal capture are combined to pinpoint exact locations of damage in an accurate 3D model.

Kormos said that working with people from different disciplines prepared him to collaborate on surgical teams and to balance his role as a team member and patient advocate. It's not uncommon for the physicians he works with now to read articles about new procedures and ask him to assess possible implementation, sometimes just before a scheduled procedure.

"I think that is one of the things that is unique to the RIT program: you had to be able to build on an information set and apply it with a very quick turnaround," said Kormos. "There are new techniques being developed, so we are always learning."

Michelle Cometa '00

Life cycle **assessment manager**



Jesse Winter '01

Hema Madaka '22 Ph.D. analyzes the environmental impact of the entire life cycle of a product, material, or process from her home office in New York City.

Hema Madaka spent her doctorate journey disassembling laptops and phones piece by piece. Madaka '22 Ph.D. (sustainability) was building a detailed data repository and understanding of the environmental impact of electronics.

That initial curiosity carried Madaka to a role as a technical and life cycle assessment manager at Aligned Incentives, part of Bureau Veritas, a nearly 200-year-old testing and certification firm.

Her group works with global industry giants across e-commerce, electronics, and data center infrastructure sectors to evaluate a company's environmental impact in compliance with changing emissions guidelines for both the U.S. and European markets.

Organizations will often approach Madaka with incomplete estimates of their emissions. When Madaka's team replaces those averages with a tailored life cycle assessment, using carbon footprinting and data analytics, the real numbers are often dramatically higher.

"When we get more details into the modeling, they start seeing how their footprint is increasing," said Madaka. "They realize that they haven't accounted for all of this."

She provides clients with suggestions to redesign supply chains, set goals with their suppliers, and helps clients build supplier engagement programs around renewable energy.

This is personal for Madaka, who grew up near a steel manufacturing plant in a city in southern India. Her childhood was often defined by constant pollution, where she and her family would clean black soot daily from their home.

"For me, it's important that future generations don't have what I grew up with," said Madaka. "As a sustainability professional, you have a bigger role to play, and it's not an easy one. But you see the bigger picture and work towards it."

Nathaniel Smith

Ben Garvey '21 created a business that taps into the thriving esports industry.



Carlos Ortiz

Esports **country club founder**

Ben Garvey loves video games and as an entrepreneurial student at RIT, he detected a gap in the market.

Hundreds of millions of people around the globe now engage in esports. It's a multi-billion-dollar industry, where professional and amateur players compete in popular video games.

At RIT, Garvey '21 (applied arts and sciences) helped start and manage the collegiate *Call of Duty* team. While procuring PlayStation 4s and organizing practice time, he realized that there was no "third space" for video gaming—a social environment that's separate from home and work and school. Even when they could find a space, it wasn't a high-end experience with premier equipment.

"The venues would smell or have power problems, or you'd have to bring your own consoles and power cables," said Garvey. "If I had to bring my own mower to cut the grass at a golf country club, that would be crazy."

In 2020, he founded Great Lakes Gaming (GLG) on the 22nd floor of Innovation Square, a downtown Rochester complex. He sees it as a country club for local gamers, where people can compete and socialize. The space features high-end PC stations, custom network stacks, private streaming booths, console setups, and a café for gamers.

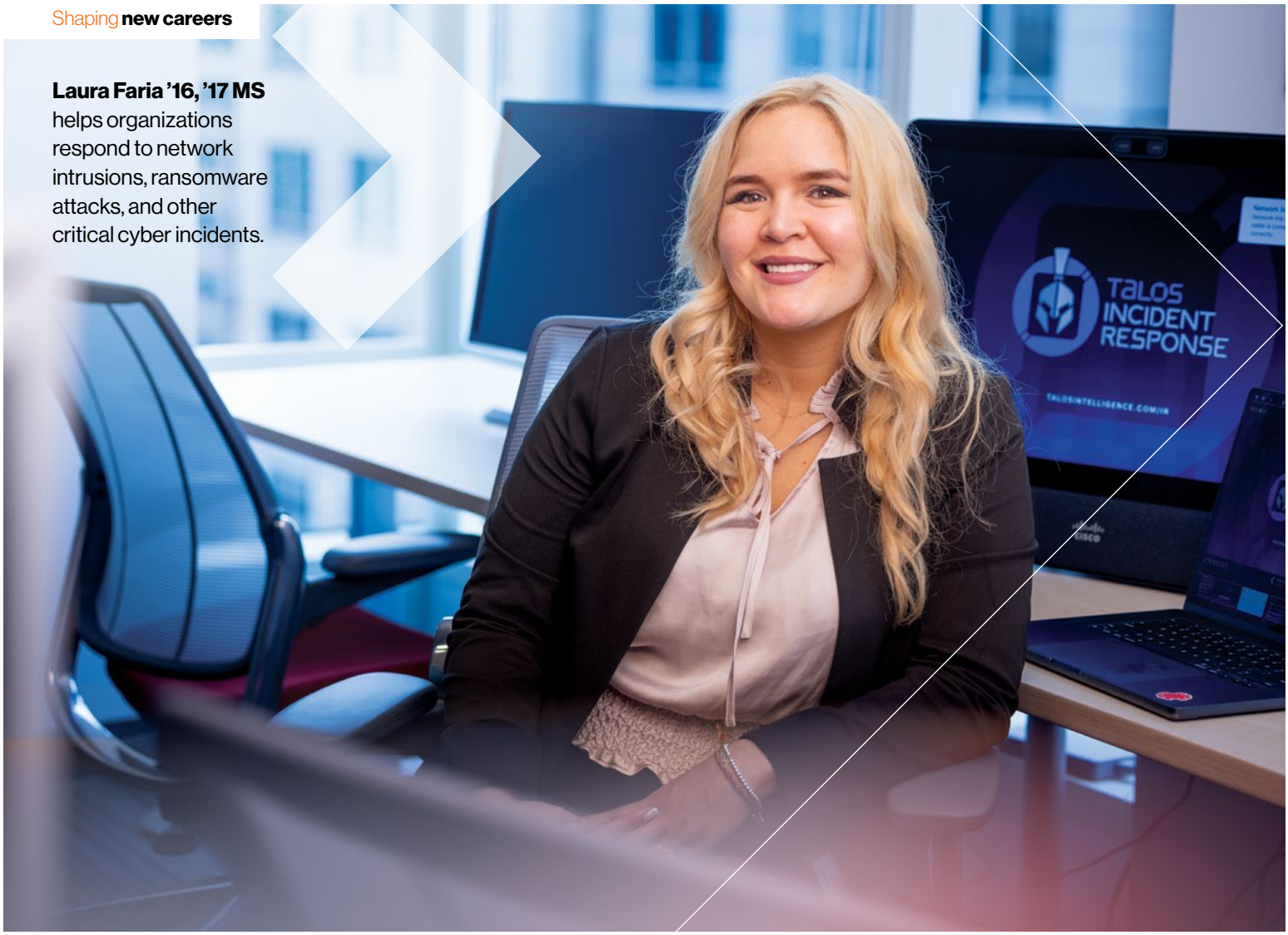
GLG holds leagues, weekly tournaments, and events for competitive college and high school gamers. The company has also expanded into parties, summer camps, and trading card events. In 2026, GLG opened a second retail shop at Total Sports Experience in Gates, N.Y.

Garvey said that GLG wouldn't be a thing had it not been for RIT's Gap Year Entrepreneurial Fellowship. The School of Individualized Study program gave him time to focus on jump-starting his business venture.

"I love it because I can't call anyone and ask how to run a gaming country club," said Garvey. "There's nothing else like it."

Scott Bureau '11, '16 MBA

Laura Faria '16, '17 MS helps organizations respond to network intrusions, ransomware attacks, and other critical cyber incidents.



Scott Hamilton '89

Cybersecurity **incident commander**

Twenty-five years ago, few companies employed cybersecurity incident commanders. Today, they are on the front lines of defending organizations against ransomware attacks, data breaches, and other digital threats that can disrupt, or even destroy, operations in minutes.

Laura Faria '16 (mechanical engineering), '17 MS (science, technology, and public policy), cybersecurity engineer and incident commander for Cisco, began her professional career examining drone landing gear and structural components.

But, as technology evolved, so did her interest in cybersecurity. She was attracted by the sector's rapid growth, its connection to emerging technologies, and its long-term career potential. An encounter with a mentor in Silicon Valley launched her cyber career.

At Cisco, in Boston, her job involves responding to major cyber incidents, including large-scale ransomware attacks and network intrusions. As an incident commander, she helps lead investigations, coordinates response efforts, and works alongside forensic engineers to understand how attackers gained access and moved through a network.

"My work includes analyzing malware, understanding adversary behavior, tracking attacker movement through networks in real time, and helping organizations respond as quickly and effectively as possible," said Faria. "It can be really intense."

And, while the work is highly technical, Faria said the human side of cybersecurity is just as important. Helping customers during some of their worst moments is what motivates her.

"Not only did RIT help me grow tremendously as an engineer and as a lifelong learner, I also learned empathy," she said. "My focus, discipline, technical skills, and ability to solve complex problems were all equally challenged. I was also pushed to become more adaptable and open to learning new technologies quickly, which has been essential in my cybersecurity career."

Vienna McGrain '12 MS

Agentic **AI engineer**

When Sohil Shah first encountered generative artificial intelligence, he was skeptical.

"It didn't seem to have practical use cases—it was about as helpful as Microsoft's Clippy," said Shah '15 MS (computer science). "Once I saw agentic AI, I knew it was getting real."

Today, Shah leads development of an agentic AI system that is helping PayPal's reliability engineering team operate at a new level. The multi-agent orchestration framework can autonomously manage the full incident life cycle, starting from detection and intelligent triage to stakeholder communication, automated mitigation, and post-incident root cause analysis.

By leveraging agentic AI, Shah said, PayPal has reduced incident repair time from about 45 minutes to less than 5 minutes.

Shah explained that agentic AI is a major step forward because it shifts AI from a passive tool into an autonomous partner. AI agents can build on previous context, plan multi-step processes, and use tools to accomplish goals on their own. Shah's aim is to help agents get to their goal in a smaller context window—essentially reducing the cost of AI agents.

Before PayPal, Shah worked on TikTok systems at ByteDance and rose to vice president of Software Engineering at JPMorganChase. Now, he's become a leading voice in agentic AI while speaking at industry conferences, including the AI and Sustainability Global Summit.

Shah said that the scope of work software engineers can do now with AI agents is becoming wider and the quality will be richer. Soon, engineers could manage a whole team of multimodal AI agents collaborating with each other. The human engineer in the loop will play an important role in compliance, providing feedback, and making sure agents are achieving goals.

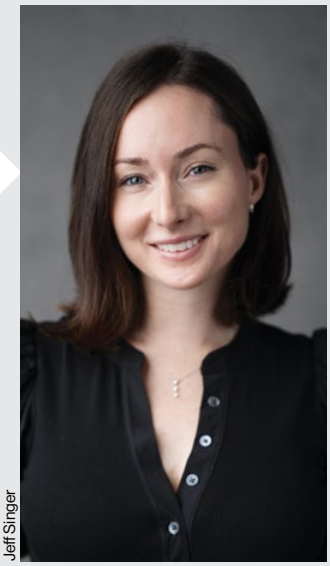
"With assistance from AI agents, my work has become more meaningful," said Shah. "I can focus on delivering value and that's exciting."

Scott Bureau '11, '16 MBA



Sohil Shah '15 MS designs and deploys agentic AI solutions at PayPal in San Jose, Calif.

Concierge **nursing executive**



Jeff Singer

Olivia Svrchek '11 works at a preventive health screening company.

Leaving behind oncology nursing for longevity medicine, Olivia Svrchek has followed a career path outside of traditional healthcare. She is reframing her profession in an era of unprecedented health technology, remote nursing opportunities, and personalized healthcare options for aging well.

Svrchek '11 (biomedical sciences) is the chief nursing executive at Prenuvo, a full-body MRI scanning and preventive health screening company based in Redwood, Calif. Direct consumers are turning to MRI scans and biomarker tracking to detect early-stage cancers and other conditions before symptoms show up.

In one year since joining Prenuvo, Svrchek has grown her staff from three to 80 registered nurses and nurse practitioners. They consult remotely with customers about their results.

"It's a different type of nursing practice and relationship with a patient," she said. "It's proactive healthcare."

After RIT, Svrchek earned multiple degrees in nursing and healthcare leadership from Johns Hopkins University, Mount Sinai Health System, and Samuel Merritt University. She enjoyed her oncology patients but saw entrenched problems within the healthcare system.

"Startups are the opposite of hospitals and the healthcare system—they move fast," said Svrchek. "They see a problem, propose a solution, and test it immediately. They get to 'yes' or 'no' fast, and that was more my style."

From the beginning of her education, RIT introduced Svrchek to systems thinking and cross-disciplinary problem solving. It prepared her to leave bedside nursing in 2015 and to rethink her profession in terms of health-tech innovation, AI in medicine, and the future of clinical care in which nurses are part of the conversation about the technology they use.

"What I experienced at RIT opened my mind to know that I could approach nursing in a different way," said Svrchek, this year's recipient of the RIT Emerging Leader Award. "I didn't have to stay at the bedside or stay in a hospital system or live my career in a traditional sense."

Susan Gawlowicz '95

See where graduates launch their futures at rit.edu/career-outcomes.

Turn the page for more alumni stories.



"It feels a world away from where the technology was just a few years ago." - *Time* magazine on the Meta glasses and wristband.



The Meta Neural Band is an electromyography wristband that can be used to control the Meta Display glasses.

Carlos Ortiz

Alumna develops hands-free tech at Meta



Dorrene Brown '13 joined Meta to work at the intersection of hardware, software, and AI. She helped get the Meta Neural Band ready for public launch.

Try funky ideas and see what happens. That's the mindset that has guided much of Dorrene Brown's career, including a recent launch of the Meta Neural Band.

As a technical program manager at Meta, Brown '13 (software engineering) leads software, firmware, and artificial intelligence (AI) teams developing cutting-edge devices. In 2025, their wrist-based controller was selected as one of *Time* magazine's best inventions of the year.

Brown helped create the Meta Neural Band that pairs with Meta's Ray-Ban Display smart glasses. Together, the wearable devices allow users to view texts, navigate maps, and interact with AI without holding a phone.

"When you're a software person working on hardware, you help get things out the door but you're also so far downstream that any kind of hardware, electrical, or battery issue kind of propagates to you," said Brown. "I find that the problems that come out of that are really interesting and fun because you need to have a deep understanding of the whole stack."

Brown's leadership roles date back to her time at RIT. As president of the Society of Software Engineers and the university's Fencing Club, she enjoyed working on fun group projects and learned how to network with people from different majors. Networking led to a co-op at Microsoft, which turned into her first full-time job.

There, she defined the developer experience for the Cortana Skills Kit by integrating language models and web services. She also worked on the Microsoft Surface experimentation team and led Microsoft Mesh from incubation to a product now used by hundreds of millions of users.

After leaving Microsoft, Brown worked at a gaming and entertainment startup and then joined Unity to drive AR and VR development tools with Apple Vision Pro. She also grew program management, quality assurance, and experimentation teams with Napster.

"I've jumped all over the industry and I chalk that up to the flexibility you learn in the software engineering department," said Brown. "I feel like learning how to learn quickly and how to synthesize information and act on it has been the cornerstone of my success."

In 2024, she joined Meta to solve a problem. How can users interact with wearable devices without traditional input methods, like a keyboard or joystick?

The Neural wristband measures the activity of muscles at the wrist when gesturing. The wristband detects signals based on what users intend to do, including clicking, selecting, or scrolling. This helps control the smart glasses.

Brown has focused on bringing together hardware, firmware, software, and quality assurance teams to move the wristband from prototype to shipped product.

"My role has been to look across the system and understand what is working and what isn't," said Brown. "And then problem solve to make sure everything comes together."

Brown said she uses the wristband and glasses herself every day. She explained that dogfooding—short for "eating your own dog food" in the tech industry—is an important way for developers to evaluate products and improve quality.

Last year, Brown came back to RIT to give the keynote speech at WiCHacks, the annual Women in Computing hackathon. She enjoys mentoring people who were in her shoes just 15 years ago.

"If we have a wider diversity of thought in the tech industry, it's almost always going to lead to a more successful product," she said.

Scott Bureau '11, '16 MBA

Chainsaw-carving science teacher chips away at convention

Work-life balance for high school science teacher Liz (Federici) Spry '09 (biomedical sciences) involves a chainsaw and a lot of sawdust.

A self-described "science nerd" and lifelong artist, Spry re-energizes on the weekends and during school breaks by carving bears, birds, dogs, and more at her Palmyra, N.Y., studio.

From her first lopsided pumpkin 15 years ago to the detailed birds she carves today, Spry's finesse with the chainsaw has turned her hobby into a micro-business called Spry Carvings.

"Once you get that confidence in creating something the way you envision it, then you can make it your own," Spry said. "I've been enjoying making birds over anything else, and the vision I have in my mind is to make them mostly realistic but a little bit whimsical at the same time."

Her approach is different for custom orders of people's pets. "I want it to look like their pet, and so I'll draw it out and sketch it on the log and constantly reference pictures."



Carvings are often of wildlife, such as birds and bears.

Spry spends most of July and August creating inventory for fall art and vendor shows. She also prepares for an annual chainsaw competition held in Pennsylvania in October alongside lumberjack sports, such as chopping and sawing wood.

Chainsaw carving is associated with men and, at festivals, Spry sometimes is met with doubt and cognitive dissonance.

"People will ask me, 'Oh are you selling these for your husband or for other male carvers in the area?' or 'Is your chainsaw pink?'—I get that every once in a while," Spry said. "It's frustrating in this day and age that people just can't believe it, but I see more and more women carving, and I think it's great."

Today, women carvers find community via social media and share process videos online. That support didn't exist when Spry started carving.

Her husband, Rob, introduced Spry to lumberjack sporting events when they were dating, and she was intrigued by the vendors' chainsaw carvings. After a safety lesson, Spry began honing her craft.

Her career and hobby coincided and developed into parallel paths. As a high school science teacher at the Penfield (N.Y.) Central School District, Spry teaches anatomy and physiology, chemistry, and forensic science—a dual-credit program through Syracuse University Project Advance.

"My biomedical sciences degree was a huge influence on my science teaching," Spry said. "It helped me realize my fascination in science, especially for anatomy and physiology and biological sciences."

While "anatomy and physiology" is her favorite class to teach, Spry rarely makes anatomical carvings—except for a skull candy dish for Halloween. She would rather carve animals.

Sourcing wood is unpredictable for Spry. Instead of buying from lumber mills, she relies on arborist friends who cut trees for a living. "I feel better environmentally if the tree is already going to come down anyway."

Spry's artistic talent and affinity for science have given her a hobby-turned-small business and a professional focus that enriches her life.

"I've always used art as a creative outlet," Spry said. "When I was at RIT, I would draw and paint as a hobby and a brain break, and I realized what an important part of my routine it became. Now, my medium is different, but the habit really took hold back then."

Susan Gawlowicz '95





Science and sawdust are mainstays for **Liz (Federici) Spry '09**, who likes to carve whimsical animals with her chainsaw.

Liam Myerow



Pano Spiliotis '99, '01 MBA is co-founder and CEO of the growing company Eoptic, which creates AI-enabled imaging systems.

Carlos Ortiz

Alumnus keeps the future in focus

Pano Spiliotis has always had an eye on the future. As co-founder and CEO of Eoptic, he is advancing imaging technology to meet the needs of security, space, industrial metrology, and medical industries while leading a company experiencing rapid growth.

This forward-thinking mindset dates back to his time as a student at RIT.

Spiliotis first heard about RIT from an older neighbor enrolled in the microelectronics program. In the mid-1990s, as personal computers were becoming increasingly common, he recognized the industry's potential and enrolled at the university.

But he realized early on that engineering wasn't the best fit. After a friend told him about the then-new imaging science program, which combines math, science, engineering, and computer science, Spiliotis switched majors.

Science, though, wasn't his only interest. He also had a strong entrepreneurial drive. After graduating with his bachelor's degree in imaging science in 1999, which included a co-op at Xerox, he stayed at RIT to complete an MBA in 2001.

Rochester was the ideal place to combine his interests in imaging and business. A group of scientists, most of whom were RIT faculty members, had started a company called Pixel Physics. Spiliotis did some pro bono work for the company before being hired full time. He quickly moved up the ranks.

"Back then there were a lot of dot-com startups, but there weren't a lot of imaging startups," explained Spiliotis.

In 2006, he co-founded FluxData with his wife, Tracie (Lamphere) Spiliotis '99 (accounting), '01 MS (business administration), and Lawrence Taplin '01 MS (color science).

"We were always product-centric," said Spiliotis. "We used our expertise in imaging science to look at hard, mission-critical problems for harsh environments, and we built solutions."

FluxData grew steadily—its multispectral cameras flew aboard the International Space Station, helping farmers monitor changes in their land—before it was sold in 2017.

Today, the Spiliotises are applying the same combination of technical expertise and business acumen at Eoptic, the company they co-founded, which creates AI-enabled imaging systems.

The company has expanded rapidly, growing from three employees in 2023 to about 30 today, and is still hiring.

Spiliotis says his career has been able to thrive because of RIT's interdisciplinary offerings.

"Even though I was in imaging science, I didn't feel like I was confined to thinking just as a scientist," said Spiliotis. "The other part of my brain was an entrepreneur. That wasn't being blocked or prevented."

The success also has come via strong connections with RIT faculty, students, and alumni. The majority of Eoptic's employees are former Tigers, and the company welcomes co-op students.

"I wasn't the best student, but I could recognize talent and drive and was going to put a great team together," he said. "That's what we've done. The success of these companies is the teams we built."

Mollie Radzinski

Graduate builds **systems and support**

Mona Moody '95 (computer information systems) learned early what it means to feel safe and supported—an experience that still shapes her work and her commitment to others.

Now based in Atlanta, Moody serves as the territorial web and systems manager at The Salvation Army's Southern Territory Headquarters, overseeing the organization's digital presence from Texas to the nation's capital. She also volunteers with Project Pinnacle, a Georgia-based program that supports young adults seeking second chances.

Moody grew up in Rochester and was a first-generation college graduate, in circumstances that were often difficult. During a short spell in Syracuse, N.Y., when she was around 7 years old, she and her family spent time at a Salvation Army shelter.

"I didn't quite understand what was going on," Moody said, "But it was warm, it was friendly, it was a safe place to be."

The memory of feeling safe stuck with her. Back in Rochester, she was drawn to computers just as the personal computer boom was taking off in the mid-1980s. In high school, she studied computer programming at Edison Tech and found her way to RIT for college, studying computer science but also gravitating to the business college's blend of technology and management.

She found her footing through a tight-knit network of organizations, including the National Society of Black Engineers, the Society of African American Business Students, and the undergraduate Pi Beta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., where she served as chapter president her senior year.

"Those organizations kept us supportive of one another," Moody said. "It kept me grounded, it kept me focused, like I had that support and I wasn't alone."

After a three-decade career in technology, moving through systems engineering, web development, and even briefly teaching, she had an opportunity to join The Salvation Army during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Joining the 160-year-old organization was deeply personal for her, serving as a reminder of that feeling of care and comfort that The Salvation Army afforded her and her family all those years ago.

The role also deepened something already in her. Throughout her career, she has volunteered with organizations ranging from the Ronald McDonald House to the Special Olympics.

Through Project Pinnacle, Moody guides mentees through career development panels, community service, and everything in between.

Last December, she watched with pride as her mentee, Ariyanna Harvey, delivered the graduation speech. Moody also was named Mentor of the Year.

"I'm directly and indirectly helping others, and that's what I want to keep doing in my personal and professional life," she said.

Nathaniel Smith

Mona Moody '95 says helping others at The Salvation Army feels like a full-circle moment because she was helped by the organization as a child.



Orientrius Cook

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.

1964

Don Kingston '64 (SCB) retired after serving 14 years as the mayor of Duck, N.C. The main stage in Duck was renamed the Don Kingston Pavilion to honor his service to the town. He relocated to Ashburn, Va.

1965

Denis A. Kitchen Jr. '65 (GAP) received a Lifetime Achiever award from the Clarence Chamber of Commerce.

1971



Tom Klinkowstein '71 (GAP) completed a 30-foot installation, titled *NOT ALL WHENS ARE TIME*, that was exhibited at the Kolding School of Design in Denmark and DHBW Ravensburg University in Germany. The installation examines the relationship between the nature and experience of time.

1973

L G Christensen '73 MS (CCE) has a novel, *Nexuses*, that was inspired by the wartime experiences of his Danish immigrant father and the sacrifices he and millions of immigrants have made for the U.S. in war and peacetime.

1974



Lee Green '74 MFA (FAA) was recognized by the city of Rochester on the 50th anniversary of the City Mark that he designed while working as a designer for the city. He culminated his career as a corporate vice president overseeing global design and branding for IBM.

1976

Michael Bienenstock '76 (COS) published the fiction novel *Love and Hope Have No Borders: An Interfaith Story.*

1977



John Raugalis '77 (GAP) retired after more than 30 years as a lighting technician with IATSE Local 52 in New York City. He also had six photographs featured in "Hudson Valley Artists 2026: Terrestrial Extra" at the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art at SUNY New Paltz, with one image selected as the exhibition poster.

1978

Gene Rusiecki '78 (CAST) retired after a 48-year career as an electrical engineer, contracting officer representative, project/energy manager, and healthcare engineer. He holds three U.S. patents and is a former RIT swim team co-captain and medalist on the USA Deaf Olympic swim team and Pan American Games for the Deaf.

1979

Jim Edmonds '79 (GAP) retired as a program manager with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Mission Support, Training Division. He and his wife of more than 42 years are relocating to their retirement home in Ohio to be closer to family and grandchildren.



Marcia Gabrilove '79 (CAST) and **Scott Ladin '78 (CAST), '87 MBA (SCB)** celebrated 50 years since meeting at RIT.

1981

Jim Bossert '81 MS (CCE) was promoted to manager, Lean Six Sigma Academy, at Oncor Electric Delivery in Fort Worth, Texas.

1982



Daniel E. Holmes '82 (GAP) returned to New Mexico and works as a prosecuting attorney for the New Mexico Medical Board in Santa Fe. In his spare time, he loves to hike.

Larry Martell '82 (CAST) is working at the startup Rational Exponent, changing the way banks grow their AI-driven operational intelligence platform.



John Metzger '82 (GAP) pivoted from his photography major and is now the earth monitoring manager and counselor at AssetAssurance Monitoring, where he works with imagery from global locations to support mining, natural resources, infrastructure, engineering, and environmental and social governance initiatives.

1983



Robert Ripps '83 (GAP) was selected to exhibit his *Negativityness* images as dye sublimation prints on aluminum at The Other Art Fair Brooklyn, part of an international series of art fairs taking place at Agger Fish in the Brooklyn Navy Yard.



Bill Zink '83 (SCB) competed in the 2026 USA Track and Field Masters Indoor Championship in Albuquerque, N.M. He took first place in the 800 meters and second in the 400 meters in the 65-69 age group.

1985



David Leonard '85 (FAA) had his oil on canvas painting, *Change in the Weather*, exhibited in the 2026 SAMA Biennial at the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art in Bedford, Pa.

1987



Michelle McCulloch '87 (FAA) wrote, illustrated, and published her first children's book, *What's in MiMi's Garden?*, a counting adventure set in her backyard in Georgia.

1988

Michael E. Kane '88 (SCB), '10 MS (NTID) published a third volume focusing on deaf and hard-of-hearing adults and children of deaf adults in the accounting profession.

Chris Martin '88 (GAP), '00 MS (CAST) joined his daughter in Swim the Arctic Circle 2026, an open water swimming event in the Torne River between Finland and Sweden. He graduated as the school record holder in the 100-yard breaststroke, a member of the record-setting 400-yard medley relay team, and ranked fourth all-time on the career scoring list. He is director of program management at L3Harris in Rochester.

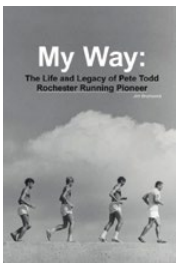


Marc Raco '88 (GAP) joined InfoTrack to lead production and scaling for Legal Talk Network, a resource for legal podcasts.

1989

Martin Daly '89 (CAST) was elected to the Mystic Aquarium's Board of Trustees and looks forward to advancing the mission of conservation, education, research, and animal rescue.

1990



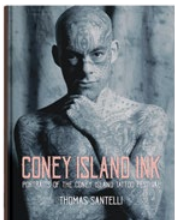
Jim Brunswick '90 (CLA) published *My Way: The Life and Legacy of Pete Todd Rochester Running Pioneer*. Todd was a long-time coach and involved in the Coast-to-Coast run during RIT's 150th anniversary.

Scott Rummler '90 MFA (FAA) created a fintech startup called ScalarSight, which uses quantum principles to predict long-range equity and crypto prices.



Sean Solomon '90 (GAP) retired from a career in the printing industry, where he specialized in selling printing equipment, cutters, and bindery machines. He looks forward to spending time with his family, dogs, and enjoying his hobbies.

1991



Thomas Santelli '91 MFA (GAP) published *Coney Island Ink: Portraits of the Coney Island Tattoo Festival*. The book features more than 230 portraits taken during New York City's ban on tattooing in the mid-1980s and early 1990s.

1993



Frederick Rueckert '93 (CIAS) works in the RV industry in California and occasionally does side work in the audiovisual world.

1994

Nela Alvarez-Sotomayor '94 (CIAS) represented RIT at the South Portland High School (Maine) Senior Acceptance Day—inspiring the next wave of college-bound seniors.

Thomas Peeples '94 (KGCOE), '03 MS (CAST) started a new position as the T901 engineering and manufacturing development program manager at GE Aerospace.



Mike Timm '94 (CIAS) is the producer and director of the short film *Mexican Hat*, which premiered at the Marina del Rey Film Festival.

1995

Kevin Harding '95 (CAST) stepped into an engineering and maintenance manager role, which has provided opportunities to broaden his impact and support the team from a different level.



Jeremy Sniatecki '95 (CIAS) designed official *Project Hail Mary* merchandise, including four enamel pins (vector art illustrated within enamel pin stroke, fill production specifications).

1999



Mike Krupnicki '99 MBA (SCB) is the new owner of the Rochester Brainery, a community classroom. He also owns Rochester Arc + Flame Center, an education and art space focused on welding, blacksmithing, and glass working.

2000

Marie Desrosiers '00 (CLA) and Jason Pepen were married Feb. 2, 2026.



Kerri Johnson '00 (CIAS), events manager in RIT's College of Liberal Arts, has helped countless students and families celebrate commencement over the years. In 2026, she had a front-row seat to watch her daughter graduate and cross the stage at her alma mater.

Join over 1,000 members

in giving 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. Your investment will help us go further than ever before. **Make your pledge today.**

"I want to help make it easier for future students to focus on learning and growth, not just on making ends meet."

– Joey Ganser '07
RIT Sentinel Society's 1,000th member



585-475-5500
sentinelsociety@rit.edu
rit.edu/sentinel

RIT | Sentinel Society

2001



Erin (Hallett) Fernsler '01 (CAST), '03 MS (NTID) published *A Blue Hawk's Journey*, a book that follows a shy, blue-feathered hawk on a quest to understand who he truly is.

2003

Bhairav Mehta '03 MS (KGCOE) has been promoted to executive director and head of artificial intelligence at JPMorganChase.



Josh Zatulove '03 (GCCIS) and his wife, Jessica, celebrated their 10th wedding anniversary with their daughters, Raya and Dahlia.

2004

Audrey Suehs '04 (COS) performed in a symphony on Broadway with the World Civic Orchestra, an ensemble of auditioned musicians representing 14 countries.

2006

Dean Ganskop '06 (GCCIS), '10 MS (GCCIS) started a new position as vice president of product technology at Iter Opus Corporation, a SaaS firm based in Rochester.



Kate Shaffer '06 (COS), '06 MS (COS) will serve as director of animal care and hospital operations at Sea Turtle Inc., the world's largest fully enclosed sea turtle hospital in South Padre Island, Texas.

Surat Teerakapibal '06 MS (KGCOE), '06 Ph.D. (KGCOE), associate professor, has been appointed as dean of Thammasat Business School at Thammasat University (Thailand).

2007

Ethan Feldman '07 (GCCIS) has joined MDCalc as a QA engineer after eight years at Northwestern Mutual.



Shqipe Neziri Vela '07 (CAST) was honored with the European of the Year Award 2026 from the European Union in Kosovo, in recognition of her contributions to advancing gender equality, women's empowerment, and sustainable energy governance.

2008

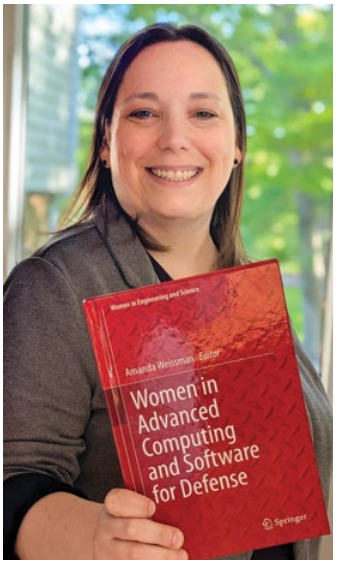


Anton Ali '08 (CIAS), '10 MBA (SCB) was named chief technical officer (elect) at NextGen Label Group, where he will lead technical strategy and sustainable packaging innovation, following his role as global head of packaging at Google Cloud.

2009



Brady Marrinan '09 (CIAS) successfully defended his dissertation, titled *Weaponizing Deepfake Media for Covert Influence*, earning a Ph.D. in intelligence and global security from Capitol Technology University.



Amanda Weissman '09 (KGCOE), '09 MS (COS) served as editor for *Women in Advanced Computing and Software for Defense*. She also authored the introductory chapter.

2010



Johnathan Murray '10 (SCB) celebrated 20 years of service at Finger Lakes Community College, where he serves as interim associate vice president of Enrollment Management, and five years as co-owner of Mill Street Gardens, a native plant nursery and shop he operates with his partner, Kyle Karan.

2011



Kyle Benesh '11 (SCB) published *The AI-Era Engineer: A Field Guide for the Next Generation*, a book that helps readers build an engineering career in the age of AI.



Lindsay Connelly '11 (SCB), '18 MBA (SCB), founder and president of Linden Digital Marketing, was named to *Inc.*'s 2026 Female Founders 500 list. She also earned the 2026 Athena Young Professional Award and was named the Rochester Chamber's Business Person of the Year in 2025.

Sam Rueby '11 (GCCIS) joined Microsoft as a solution engineer, where he works with organizations to design and implement cloud and AI-driven solutions.

2012



Yunus Lowenthal '12 (CIAS) teaches applied arts, including woodwork, clay sculpture, pottery, stone carving, weaving, and chair-making, to fifth through 12th graders.

Chih-Tao Tu '12 MFA (CIAS) is a medical translator at Cochrane Taiwan at Taipei Medical University.



Regina Kiperman-Kiselgof '00, '01 MS and **Dmitriy Kiselgof '96** met in Russia nearly 35 years ago. Decades of friendship, and eventually marriage, brought them both to NTID, where they are alumni and employees.

Carlos Ortiz

NTID alumni build life and careers together

Thirty-five years after they first met, Dmitriy Kiselgof and Regina Kiperman-Kiselgof still find themselves crossing paths several times a day.

The husband and wife work one floor apart inside RIT's National Technical Institute for the Deaf. And in addition to sharing quick conversations in the hallway, they both have a love for a campus that transformed their lives. Neither could have imagined their future together when they met as students in St. Petersburg, Russia.

"We only dated for 22 days and then life circumstances forced us to separate," said Regina '00 (social work), '01 MS (human resource development).

It was New Year's Eve in 1991 when mutual friends introduced the pair. Dmitriy, known as "Dima," was attending a mainstream technical college, while Regina had just begun studying at a college for deaf students.

Their connection was immediate but short lived. Just three weeks later, Dima '96 (applied arts and sciences) immigrated to the United States.

"I thought we'd never see each other again," said Regina.

They spent the next two years building a relationship, one handwritten letter at a time. The letters often took more than a month to reach the U.S. from Russia.

Dima described his new life, his experiences learning English and American Sign Language, and the opportunities he had discovered after leaving New York City and eventually enrolling at NTID.

"I always looked forward to the next letter," said Regina. "And I still have many of them."

Regina remained in Russia until her family, now in Ukraine, received approval to immigrate in 1994. After arriving in Buffalo, N.Y., she found Dima waiting at the airport.

The reunion was amazing, according to Dima, although not without challenges. He had become fluent in ASL and had forgotten much of his Russian Sign Language. Regina did not yet know ASL.

"We had to learn how to communicate with each other all over again," he said.

Having grown up in Russia and Ukraine, Regina had never written a résumé or prepared for a job interview. Dima had experienced firsthand how limited educational opportunities and accessibility were for deaf students in Russia.

A cousin encouraged Regina to attend NTID and, with Dima already at the college, it seemed like the natural place to be.

"Being at NTID was the first time I learned from deaf faculty members who understood my experiences and believed in my potential," said Dima.

For Regina, it was a place where people invested in her success and helped her develop the language, professional skills, and confidence to build a career.

Deep friendship became the foundation of marriage. They wed in 2004 and, today, both of their daughters are studying in RIT's physician assistant program, continuing the family's connection to the university.

As NTID alumni and employees, Dima and Regina help students who are navigating many of the same challenges they once faced, from adjusting to college life to preparing for careers after graduation.

"When I see our students, I remember what it felt like to be new to this country and new to this language," said Regina, who is assistant director in NTID's Co-op and Career Center. "I want them to know they belong here."

For Dima, an ASL instructor, working at NTID each day is a reminder of everything the college made possible.

"NTID gave me an education, a career, a community and, ultimately, the chance to build a life with the woman I love."

Vienna McGrain '12 MS

2014



Tiger Cub

Nick Fishman '14 (COS) and his wife, Rose Fishman, delightedly welcomed their child, Luna, in February 2026.

Chris Kulbago '14 (KGCOE) was promoted to director of life sciences at RoviSys. Kulbago supports facilities systems integration for regulated manufacturers in pharmaceutical, biotech, and food and beverage industries across the globe.

Erin Zach '14 (SOIS) was selected to be a linesperson for the Women's Ice Hockey Tournament at the 2026 Olympics in Italy.

2015



Luisa Schum '15 (SCB) received her MBA from the University of New Mexico.

2018



Michelle Beatty '18 MBA (SCB) is the new director of perioperative services for F.F. Thompson Hospital, an affiliate of University of Rochester Medicine.



Christina Flores '18 (CAST) and **Paul Haberek '20 (KGCOE)** married in September 2025 in upstate New York. They celebrated with many of their sorority and fraternity friends. The couple met through Greek life at RIT, with Flores a member of Zeta Tau Alpha and Haberek a member of Phi Kappa Psi.



Sandra Malinowski '18 (CAST) married Ben Fechtner on June 6, 2026, in Ontario, N.Y., surrounded by many RIT alumni.

Melissa (Young) Vuz '18 (GCCIS) and **Dylan Vuz '18 (GCCIS)** happily welcomed their first child in September 2025.

2019



Kayla Stephan '19 (KGCOE), '19 MS (CLA) and **Allison Carey '22 (KGCOE)** married on March 29, 2025, six years after meeting at RIT.

2020



Grace Fiacco '20 (COS) married **Justin Levine '19 (GCCIS)** after meeting almost nine years ago in the RIT Game Symphony Orchestra. They were married in June 2026, in West Seneca, N.Y., and now run the Virtual Video Game Orchestra together.

2021



Jesse Bairan '21 (CET) served as a construction project manager at Aviano Air Base, Italy, for two years. He relocated to the company's headquarters in Orlando, Fla., and transitioned into a new role as an estimator working on the preconstruction side of federal contracting.



Lindsey Walker '21 (CHST) graduated from medical school at Des Moines University. She matched into the OB-GYN specialty and will continue her training at Aultman Hospital in Ohio.

2022

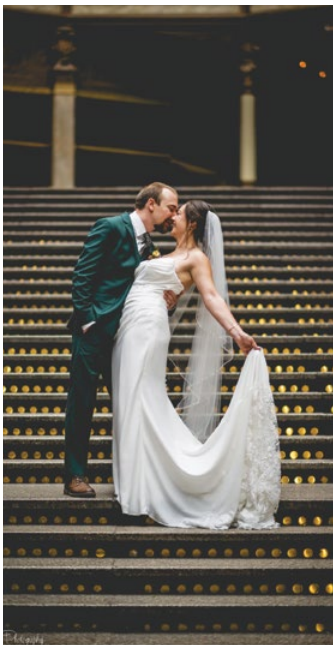


Kate (Shields) Molnar '22 (CAD) and **Marc Molnar '22 (GCCIS)** married in July 2025. They met in the second week of their first semester at RIT and have been together ever since.

2023

Rachel Kogut '23 (CIAS) celebrated her third work anniversary at Cvent as a product designer specializing in data visualization and dashboard design. She contributed to the UX department's role in the company's brand reimagining.

2024



Amy Galon

Sarah Manes '24 (KGCOE), '24 ME (KGCOE) and **Alec Paul '24 (KGCOE), '25 MS (KGCOE)** met during their first year of college through Engineering House and married in August 2026.

2025



Nart Madi '25 (GCCIS), '26 MS (SOIS) is building an AI startup called Senro, which he founded in April 2025. His thesis involved designing, training, and evaluating AI models for lung cancer detection.

2026

Aidan Allridge '26 (CLA) is headed to Japan. He was awarded a position as a coordinator for international relations through the JET Program, where he'll support internationalization efforts, translation, interpretation, and cross-cultural exchange.

Find more Class Notes
rit.edu/alumni/class-notes



Phi Sigma Phi in 1909.

RIT Archives



2025 Greek community members.

Scott Hamilton '89



Alpha Xi Delta at Mud Tug, an annual fundraising event, in 2007.

Michael Fiske

Greek life builds leaders for 125 years

When Phi Sigma Phi founded a chapter at the Rochester Athenaeum and Mechanics Institute in 1901, it became the first Greek organization at what would become RIT. Greek life continues to help students develop lifelong leadership skills, raise millions of dollars in philanthropic efforts, and benefit from networking with their Greek brothers and sisters across the country.

Nearly half of all RIT Student Government presidents—53—have been involved in Greek life since the student association was formed in 1914. Countless others have taken leadership positions in clubs and organizations across campus.

Research conducted on behalf of the National Panhellenic Conference and the North American Interfraternity Conference showed that students who participated in Greek life reported better college experiences and felt more prepared for life after college. They also found employment sooner after graduation compared to non-affiliated alumni nationally.

Brandon Hernandez never imagined joining a fraternity when he began studying mechanical engineering technology four years ago.

"I didn't even want to find out about it, but in my second year, I saw a table at the Greek Fair that had all these flags on it, including one from Puerto Rico that drew me to it," he said. "They said it was a Latino-oriented fraternity, Lambda Alpha Upsilon, and explained what they were about. I immediately felt represented."

This year, Hernandez, from Cornwall, N.Y., is president of the Greek Leadership Committee, representing approximately 550 students in the 27 fraternity and sorority chapters at RIT.

Greek organizations at RIT are expected to uphold standards of accountability, service, and responsible citizenship.

"Greek life at RIT is definitely for students who want to get involved and have meaningful relationships," Hernandez said.

For Audra Boynton '02 (biotechnology), joining Zeta Tau Alpha in 1998 transformed her college experience.

"It introduced me to a diverse group of women outside of my major, many of whom became lifelong friends," said Boynton, now a dentist in Portland, Maine. "The sense of connection and belonging I found within the chapter enriched both my academic and personal life."

Boynton also served on the Panhellenic Council and held several chapter leadership positions, experiences she credits with developing the organizational, communication, and leadership skills that continue to benefit her professionally.

"Beyond the personal and professional growth, I also had the time of my life," she said. "The laughter, shared experiences, and lasting memories are ones I will always treasure."

Greg Livadas

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No. 13, November 2026 – RIT (USPS-676-870) is published 13 times annually by Rochester Institute of Technology, One Lomb Memorial Drive, Rochester, N.Y. 14623-5603, 10 times in March, once in April, once in August, and once in November. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, N.Y. 14623-5603 and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to RIT, Rochester Institute of Technology, One Lomb Memorial Drive, Rochester, N.Y. 14623-5603.

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Brick City Homecoming and Family Weekend

Fans cheered on the men's hockey team, which played Michigan State in front of a sold-out crowd at Blue Cross Arena in downtown Rochester. Go to rit.edu/brickcity for more photos.



Paul Besch-Turner