

# ST MARY'S

COLLEGE of MARYLAND

*The National Public Honors College*



FALL 2025

## WELCOME PRESIDENT PHILLIPS

[ PAGE 8 ]



ST. MARY'S COLLEGE  
*of Maryland*

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*The Mulberry Tree* is published by St. Mary's College of Maryland, Maryland's public honors college for the liberal arts and sciences. It is produced for alumni, faculty, staff, trustees, the local community, and friends of the College.

The magazine is named for the famous mulberry tree under which the Calvert colonists signed a treaty of friendship with the Yacocomico people and on the trunk of which public notices were posted in the mid-1600s. The tree endured long into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was once a popular meeting spot for St. Mary's College students.

The illustration of the mulberry tree on the cover was drawn in 1972 by Earl Hofmann, artist-in-residence when St. Mary's College President Renwick Jackson launched the magazine.

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# CONTENTS

FALL 2025

## ST. MARY'S COLLEGE OF MARYLAND

July 2025 — June 2026

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Serra Erbas '15  
Leslie Fields '03  
Sean Floyd '06  
Mike Greer '01  
Valerie Gregorio '19  
Jim Harvey '83  
Kevin Hill '89  
Barbara Kimmelshue-  
Kearns '63  
Michael Mellinger '18  
Alexandra Minor '24  
Erin O'Connell '91  
Tae-shi Savage '24  
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Lindsey Siferd '13  
Nancy Yannayon '75

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Vacant  
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*New York City Regional:*  
Vacant  
*Philadelphia Regional:*  
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*Southern Maryland:*  
Cathy Hernandez Ray '77  
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Janssen Evelyn '01

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Tim Heely  
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Steny H. Hoyer  
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Micheline Lopez-Estrada  
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Aaron Tomarchio '96  
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#### PRESIDENT

Rhonda Phillips, Ph.D.



[ PAGE 8 ]



[ PAGE 12 ]



[ PAGE 17 ]

OPPOSITE:  
*Sunset over the St. Mary's River.*  
*From the College's collection.*

## FEATURES

PAGE 8

### Meet the President

Mulberry Tree magazine had the opportunity to interview St. Mary's College's eighth president in the early days of her 100-day plan.

PAGE 12

### Trailblazer

**Bonnie M. Green '74** is an ardent champion of her alma mater. She's a force of nature with a fascinating career story.

PAGE 17

### Super Grads!

Talk about a return on investment! These recent graduates are poised to make the world take notice.

## DEPARTMENTS

- 2 President's Letter
- 3 College News
- 22 Alumni Connection
- 28 From the Archives

COVER: *Portrait of Rhonda Phillips, Ph.D.*

**A**S AN EDUCATOR, I ALWAYS LOOK FORWARD TO THE START OF A NEW SCHOOL YEAR. The buzz of activity in welcoming the new student class, the energy of faculty eager to teach, contribute to a palpable campus heartbeat.

For students, staff and faculty new to St. Mary's College of Maryland, and for me as SMCM's new president, we have the opportunity to discover this place together. At Opening Convocation on August 29, I urged our students to explore their surroundings and to appreciate how the St. Mary's River is entwined in their learning journey. I'm discovering that myself, with an app for tide schedules (the tides being another measure of the pulse of this place) in this county with over 500 miles of coastline.

It is delightful to be here as the eighth president of this remarkable institution. As a practitioner in the public honors college space over the past two decades, it is my distinct privilege to lead St. Mary's College, a standalone public honors college. Since my arrival on July 1, I have been in a 100-day listening and learning campaign, meeting with as many faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, community members and state officials as possible: it's my own learning journey. This discovery process is remarkable, from exploring the many accolades and achievements members of our community have made, to fun facts. I've learned that the current captain of the Dove, Historic St. Mary's City's 17th-century tall ship, is an alumna of St. Mary's College. I've learned that the new class of students derived from the largest applicant pool and is the most diverse of any class in the history of this College. It is a joy every time I walk to the Campus Center and see the poetry of Maryland Poet Laureate and former faculty member Lucille Clifton, whose "blessing the boats" was written about this special place that is St. Mary's College of Maryland.

In early October, I'll report out my findings from this 100-day discovery tour. This report will be available on [www.smcm.edu/president/100-days](http://www.smcm.edu/president/100-days). We'll then join together to begin building the foundation for growth in the College's next strategic plan.

"Where will the river take you?" was the challenge posed to the new students at Opening Convocation. Taken more broadly, where will these unprecedented times for higher education take us? What is our signal call and how will we respond as a national public honors college? Let's do this together and chart our course for the future.



RHONDA G. PHILLIPS, PH.D., FAICP  
*President, St. Mary's College of Maryland*

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#### Editor's Note

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**W**HERE CAN A LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION take you? Anywhere, really, and this issue highlights that.

St. Mary's College of Maryland's eighth president, **Rhonda Phillips**, was a geography major in college. So far in her career, she has earned three more advanced degrees, authored or co-authored 30 academic books, held three Fulbright Awards, become a certified planner, a professor, a dean and a college president.

A social science major at SMCM in the 1970s, **Bonnie Green** has excelled in every job she's held, none of which could be described as a common career choice. Green says she called upon her liberal arts education for the tools she needed to succeed.

Our current "Super Grads!" featured on pages 17-21, show that tomorrow's technology is being developed by liberal arts minds. Thanks to **Shameer Rao '24** and **Alex Stoyanov-Roberts '24** for leading the way. Fulbright Teaching Assistants **Cooper Clendenin '24** and **Ellie Walter '24** earned their awards by demonstrating in their applications that they have the creative problem-solving capabilities and comfort with ambiguity to make them successful in an international placement demanding a second language. On top of that liberal arts sundae, neither one plans to stop their education or limit their impact there. Both have longer-range pursuits for which the Fulbright is a conscious choice along the way. **Annika Kumwembe '25** blasted through college in three years, nabbed an enviable summer internship studying deep space at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics and co-authored a paper. Moving like a rocket, Kumwembe is now at Dartmouth studying electrical engineering for astronomical instrumentation.

As this magazine's editor, I'm well aware that alumni readers open to the Alumni Connection pages first. There they'll see former classmates who are authors, scientists, teachers, artists, attorneys, musicians, athletic coaches, social workers, judges, creative directors and international financiers. The list is endless and further proves the point that you really can go anywhere (and do anything) with a liberal arts education.

LEE CAPRISTO, *editor*



# COLLEGE NEWS

## CAMPUS & COMMUNITY NEWS

On Aug. 29, SMCM welcomed nearly **500** new students from:

**201** high schools  
**44** two- and four-year colleges  
**22 of 24** Maryland counties  
**18** countries  
**16** states + D.C.

The Princeton Review named St. Mary's College of Maryland to its "Top 50 Best Value Colleges" among public schools, coming in at No. 45. SMCM was also highlighted at No. 2 on the list of "Top 20 Best Schools for Making an Impact" among public colleges. This list – on which SMCM rose two places from its 2024 ranking – is based on student survey results in the area of community service opportunities, student government, sustainability efforts and on-campus



student engagement. U.S. News & World Report's 2025 rankings put SMCM at #5 among public liberal arts colleges, with 2026 rankings expected soon. Forbes' 2026 list of Top Colleges includes SMCM. Read more about SMCM's national rankings at [smcm.edu/about/college-rankings](https://smcm.edu/about/college-rankings).

The College's 2025 Admission Viewbook was recognized by Graphic Design USA with the American Inhouse Design Award. The 28-page recruitment print piece was designed by Senior Graphic Designer Jennifer "Jo" Oliver '99. From over 5,000 entries, only the top 10% were selected to receive the award.



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Prince George Hall got a summer facelift: the hallways, common spaces and bathroom facilities were redone between May and August.

## Welcome! Congratulations! Best Wishes!

Welcome to SMCM's new faculty for the 2025-26 academic year:

**Yunling Deng** (chemistry)  
**Matt Wilfong** (environmental studies)  
**Abby Beatty** (molecular biology)  
**Katherine Young** (biology)  
**Sayan Goswami** (computer science)  
**Anne Groggel** (sociology)  
**Samantha Wrisley** (women, gender & sexuality studies)  
**Jeannine Ortega** (Afro-Latinx literature)  
**Shane Moran** (archivist)  
**Morgan Beers** (rhetoric & professional writing)  
**Heidi Castle-Smith** (theater, dance & performance studies; scenography)  
**Kyle Lorenzo** (psychology)

Congratulations to the following faculty were promoted or promoted with tenure:

**Promotion to Professor:**

**Barrett Emerick**, professor of philosophy  
**Matthew Fehrs**, professor of political science  
**David Morris**, professor of educational studies  
**Kelly Neiles**, professor of chemistry

**Reappointment with Tenure & Promotion:**

**Kristina Howansky**, associate professor of psychology  
**Sarah Latchney**, associate professor of neurobiology  
**Maria Ximena Postigo**, associate professor of Spanish  
**Waqar Saleem**, associate professor of computer science

**Thank you and best wishes to retiring faculty:**

**Ben Click** (English)  
**Walter Hill** (political science)  
**Andrew Koch** (chemistry)  
**Don Stabile** (economics and professor of the College)

## BOARD & FOUNDATION BOARD NEWS

In June, Governor Wes Moore re-appointed Judy Fillius '79, Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD 5th) and Ray Wernecke to another six-year term. The governor also appointed five new members of the College's Board of Trustees:

**Susan Perkoff Bass** has worked for nearly 35 years as an environmental and public interest attorney and executive. She is currently the senior vice president of programs and operations at EARTHDAY.ORG — a nonprofit organization whose mission is to diversify, educate and activate the environmental movement worldwide. Prior to joining EARTHDAY.ORG, she served as director of the inter-American program at the Environmental Law Institute for 16 years.

**Antoinette A. Coleman, Ph.D.**, is the provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at Medgar Evers College and is responsible for leading and directing academic planning towards excellence in all areas of the college. Prior to Medgar Evers College, Coleman was associate vice chancellor for academic affairs at University System of Maryland, and she also held the role of assistant vice president of academic affairs and professor at Morgan State University, an HBCU.

**Micheline Lopez-Estrada** is currently a partner and the managing member for Seymour Town Properties LLC, a company organized solely to purchase, develop, operate, own and/or lease commercial and residential buildings. Lopez-Estrada is also an investor in Washington & Park LLC, a company organized to own and operate a restaurant located in Leonardtown,

Maryland. Her professional career includes 13 years of government service with the Department of the Navy at the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) and over 30 years of systems engineering and technical program management.

**Heidi Murdy-Michael** has expertise in enterprise risk management, compliance, corporate governance, cultural change, crisis management and interfacing with independent overseers, monitors and audit regulators, having most recently served as national partner in charge of policy and enterprise risk at KPMG LLP. Prior to her tenure at KPMG, Murdy-Michael served as assistant general counsel at the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board, a private-sector regulatory body that oversees the audits of public companies.

**Aaron Tomarchio '96** is the executive vice president for corporate affairs at Tradepoint Atlantic. He also works with Tradepoint Atlantic's parent company Redwood Holdings where he directs government relations for its affiliated beer, wine and beverage wholesale distribution and energy distribution business.



The St. Mary's College of Maryland Foundation Inc. saw changes to its membership, effective as of its meeting on Sept. 23. Three individuals completed their respective terms: **Bonnie Green '74**, **Susan Paul**, **Nicole West**. Green was recognized with emerita status. Three new members joined the Foundation Board:

**Michelle Cutler '92** is general counsel at DN Capital Ltd. in London, England. Before that, she was legal director at Room to Read, an international NGO focused on literacy and girls' education.

**Joseph "David" Flynn III '93** holds an MBA and is a certified CPA. Flynn is senior director of

IT compliance at Exelixis Inc., an organization that specializes in biotechnology.

**Heather Haberle '95** is vice chair of the Kingwood Township Open Space and Agricultural Advisory Committee in New Jersey. Prior to that, Haberle worked at Alvarez & Marsal consulting firm.

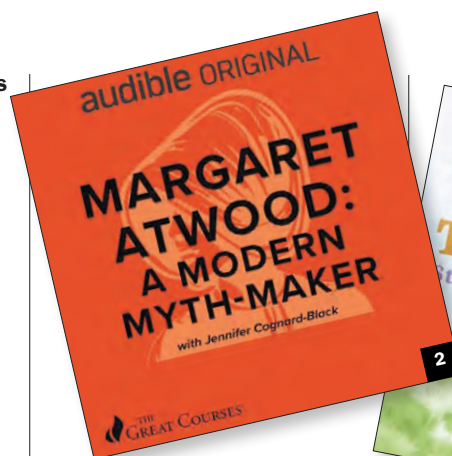
## FACULTY & STAFF NEWS

Professor of Psychology **Aileen Bailey** and Associate Professor of Psychology **James Mantell** had their article "Adding advanced data science skills in psychology laboratory courses" featured on the American Psychological Association's Society for the Teaching of Psychology Excellence in Teaching blog.

The exhibition "Sequence and Series: Faculty Work from the Art Department at St. Mary's College of Maryland" opened on Thursday, Aug. 14 and runs through Oct. 31 at the United States District Court for the State of Maryland in Greenbelt. Curated by Bobby Donovan, exhibition

works include recent works by SMCM art faculty **Tristan Cai**, **Susan R. Johnson**, **Elizabeth Kelly**, **Jessye McDowell**, **Carrie Patterson** and **Amelie Wang**. [1]

Since its inception in 1996, the U.S. District Court's art program at the Greenbelt courthouse has contributed to our region's cultural environment. The original purpose of the program was to feature works by Maryland artists, but over the years it has expanded to include international art. With exhibits in quilting, photography, sculpture and painting, the program continues to call attention to the diverse



interests and creative talents of local artists and the importance of their contributions to society.

Associate Professor of Art **Tristan Cai** presented his work, "Echoes of Resistance," at the Sun Valley Museum of Art in Ketchum, Idaho, as part of the upcoming exhibition, "Uncharted: Artists as Wayfinders." Cai examines the evolving nature of protest, migration and identity through both historical and contemporary conceptual photographic installations, focusing on the trans-Pacific movement of laborers. His work offers critical insights into how communities navigate displacement outside of dominant geopolitical frameworks.

**Jennifer Cognard-Black**, professor of English, [2] has released a new Audible Original lecture series: "Margaret Atwood: A Modern Myth-Maker." In the series, Cognard-Black explores the many ways "The Handmaid's Tale" has transcended its dystopian roots. She examines the impact of the novel and Atwood herself, unraveling the text's themes, inspirations and its use of archetypes, myths and the hero's journey.



In addition, **Cognard-Black** taught an upper-level food writing workshop last spring – cross-listed with the Department of Environmental Studies (ENST) – in which her students engaged in a collaborative podcast project called "Tilling Tales" [3] to help raise awareness about the Kate Chandler Campus Community Farm. The food writers volunteered out at the Kate Farm, digging in the dirt and helping with the chickens. They then conducted interviews with Kate Farm interns and with ENST Professors **Barry Muchnick** and **Matthew Wilfong**, who oversee the Kate Farm, as well as with community partners such as Bernie Fowler of Farming4Hunger. From these conversations and their hands-on experience, the food writers then drafted, revised and recorded their "Tilling Tales" stories as podcasts, each of them highlighting vibrant aspects of the Farm. The podcast series is available on Spotify.





4



5



6



7



8

Special Police Officer **Matthew Ennis [4]** was selected as the College's Officer of the Year for his invaluable work ethic and impact on the public safety department. Felix Martinez, director of public safety, said, "Officer Matthew Ennis exemplifies the very best of what we stand for at St. Mary's College of Maryland Public Safety." The Commissioners of St. Mary's County, the Department of Aging & Human Services and the Triad/SALT Council celebrated Law Enforcement Officers of the Year from each agency in the county during a ceremony in May.

The Center for Career and Professional Development (CCPD) represented the College at the Eastern Association of Colleges and Employers Annual Conference on June 25-27. **Holly Fabbri '12 MAT '13**, associate director of alumni relations; **Darah Schillinger '22**, professional pathways externship coordinator; and Meredith Weiers, internship coordinator, presented "Alumni Mentorship in Career Courses: Building Belonging Across Generations" about the Mentor-A-Seahawk program.

**Argelia González Hurtado**, associate professor of Spanish, **[5]** and **Jeannine Ortega**, assistant professor of English, **[6]** participated in a colloquium in July on

"Cinematic Mothers: Mothering and Motherhood in Contemporary Latin American Cultures." González Hurtado, co-organizer of the event, presented on the cinematic representation of rural mothers in Mexico, and Ortega discussed a film exploring topics of motherhood, migration and Latinx culture.

**Ashley Hardy**, marketing and publicity manager, and **Kelley Hernandez '08**, development information systems specialist, **[7]** graduated from Leadership Southern Maryland's LEAP Class of 2025 on June 20. The LEAP Program is specially designed for emerging leaders to refine individual leadership understanding and abilities via structured course curriculum focused on self-discovery, teamwork

and networking. This opportunity was made possible by the Staff Senate.

**Doug Hovland**, coordinator of laboratory support for chemistry and biochemistry, **[8]** served as the local host for the National Association of Scientific Materials Managers (NAOSMM) annual conference this July in Richmond, Virginia. Hovland has been a member of NAOSMM since 2014.

**George MacLeod**, associate professor of French, with **Fiadaina Bruno '26** (ILC-French and performing arts double major) presented original research at an event organized by the Association of Haitian Professionals and held August 25 at Montgomery County Community College in Maryland. MacLeod and Bruno shared the results of two





9



10

years' worth of interviews and field work with the Haitian Diaspora in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. They hope to publish an article on their research in the coming year.

Professor of Biochemistry **Pam Mertz** [9] received the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) William E. Rose Award for Exemplary Contributions to Education, announced Sept. 5. The award recognizes her exceptional contributions to the teaching of biochemistry and molecular biology, noting that Mertz "has transformed biochemistry education by leading national education initiatives, mentoring scores of undergraduates and developing innovative approaches to inclusive classrooms and curricu-



11

la." Mertz will give a talk about her work as part of the ASBMB annual meeting in March 2026. Earlier this summer, she participated in the "Transforming Undergraduate Education in the Molecular Life Sciences" conference held at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, from July 24-27.

Assistant Professor of Anthropology **Brian Smithson** [10] published his research in the journal, *American Ethnologist*. His article, "The world hates the truth: Moral artifice in Beninese moviemaking" explores how Beninese moviemakers convey moral truths and portray indigenous religions in respectful manners, whereas their Nigerian counterparts often portray indigenous religions as deceptive.

**Matt Wilfong**, [11] assistant professor of environmental studies, along with students in his Ecology of Fly-Fishing class, were published in the Sept. 3 issue of *Flylords* magazine. The class included a symposium, "Angling for Conservation," with a film viewing and discussion of "A Journey Upstream" by **Andrew Braker '17** and Eric Braker; a panel discussion with Maryland conservationists **Jonathan Bland '17**, **Kate Fritz '04** and Kirk Marks; a fly-tying workshop and catch-and-release angling for trout.

## STUDENT NEWS



12



13



14

how it predicts evaluations of transgender and nonbinary candidates and continues his spring 2025 directed research project with Associate Professor of Psychology **Kristina Howansky**.

Biology majors **Ally Rice '26** [12], **Krystal Moore-Nicks '26** [13], and **Aurora Lewis '26** [14] each received a 2025-26 Flores Biology Student Research Grant. Rice is studying the "Developmental timeline of gonadal and non-gonadal Wolbachia densities in adult female *Drosophila*" with Professor **Kevin Emerson**. Moore-Nicks is exploring "Feedbacks between snail grazing and fungal endophyte communities" with Assistant Professors **Elizabeth Hamman** and **Lorena Torres Martinez**. **Lewis** is studying the "Evolution of pathogenesis and incidence of an invasive fungal pathogen among populations of wild relatives of avocado in the United States" with Torres Martinez. Lewis and Moore-Nicks were also awarded research grants by the Maryland Native Plant Society to fund both of their SMPs. Lewis will study the pathogen *Rafaella lauricola* among *Persea* host populations to understand its evolutionary ability and how to fight the disease. Moore-Nicks will study how marsh periwinkle affects the fungal endophyte community of smooth cordgrass, and how, in turn, the community affects snail grazing.

**Samaira Thomas '26** was a spring 2025 recipient of the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship by the U.S. Department of State. The scholarship is enabling Thomas to study literature at University College Dublin this fall.

Psychology major **Danny Biller '27** received a Psi Chi summer research grant for his proposal, "Resistance or Uncertainty? Degendering and Pronoun Use Toward Transgender and Nonbinary Applicants." His research explores what degendering stems from and





# MEET THE PRESIDENT

*RHONDA PHILLIPS*  
PH.D., FAICP

RHONDA PHILLIPS, PH.D., FAICP, BEGAN HER TENURE ON JULY 1 AS THE eighth president of St. Mary's College of Maryland. During the past 20 years, Phillips served as president of Chatham University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; the inaugural dean of the John Martinson Honors College at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana; associate dean for Barrett, The Honors College of Arizona State University as well as professor and director of ASU's School of Community Resources and Development and senior sustainability scientist at ASU's Wrigley Global Institute of Sustainability.

The Mulberry Tree caught up with President Phillips before the fall semester began.



**F**irst, I'm delighted to join St. Mary's College of Maryland in this absolutely beautiful location! And congratulations to the entire campus for a well-deserved Reaffirmation of Accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. There are numerous reasons why SMCM continues to provide excellence in education, and this stellar achievement acknowledges many of those. SMCM has a remarkably strong foundation on which to continue to build and flourish into the future – it is indeed an honor to join all our stakeholders to do so.

## STUDENT SUCCESS

Here at St. Mary's College of Maryland, as well as throughout higher education, student success is the critical factor. That's why we exist, right? **Supporting a culture where everyone contributes to student success is essential since this is why we're here.** Every point of contact across the range of experiences is important and while there are many ways to bolster student success, my favorite is hearing from students. I enjoy meeting with student government, to learn what is top of mind for the campus from the students' perspective and to have touch points with events and programming to stay in contact regularly.

## A BIT OF CONTEXT: DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING

My career began as a community economic development and planning practitioner decades ago. When the opportunity arises, it's wonderful to bring students and colleagues into service projects focusing on development. Essentially, community and economic development is about considering resources and assets we have or can create as a town, city, region or state, and how to leverage those to foster improved community well-being. It's a way to think about potential solutions to challenges and opportunities for supporting desired outcomes. Planning works well when those impacted are part of the process for actualizing goals across the aspects that impact community well-being – whether economic, social or environmental. Being mindful of all who comprise communities and working with them to move forward to achieve what is valued is a truly impactful experience.



President Phillips signs her name in the President's Book for new students.

**“Good development doesn't happen in a vacuum. Those whom development impacts need to be involved. When included, better outcomes can be achieved.”**



President Phillips with her husband, Mark M. Miller, Ph.D.

The lesson from that background is: **good development doesn't happen in a vacuum. Those whom development impacts need to be involved. When included, better outcomes can be achieved.**

The same is true in the academy: **bringing people together who are impacted by decisions that must be made and getting them involved is going to yield more desirable outcomes.** I try to bring the mindset of community building, planning and development to my work as an administrator. Participation is a key aspect of this, both for improving processes and yielding better results. I look forward to many opportunities to learn from my new colleagues, students and community partners, and to engage together for moving forward.

## LITTLE THINGS CAN LEAD TO BIG THINGS

I'm a big believer in the planning process, but I'm also a big believer in taking action. Otherwise, elegant plans can stay static without implementation. It's easy to get consumed by the details and the operational aspects daily so it's vital to keep in mind what it is we're working towards. At a distance, this seems like a little thing, but it turns out to be a big thing – when meeting with others, I often ask everyone to construct “one sentence” we all remember. That sentence could be our vision or a goal, distilled to one single sentence. In other words, what is it that we're striving towards? Let's remind each other and keep it front and center so that we are continually inspired, and a “sound bite” we can share easily with others. Then we ask ourselves, is what I'm doing supportive of that vision or that goal? That's so critically important. And so, it seems like a little thing but turns out to be quite a big thing.

## THE 100-DAY PLAN

It always amuses me a little bit when people ask (even on day one), what's your vision? **Well, it shouldn't be just my vision.** It should be the vision for St. Mary's College as a whole and certainly reflect what we're already very good at doing, along with aspirations too.

I'm in the 100-day plan implementation now, meeting with staff, student and faculty groups, alums, elected officials, as well as with local and regional organizations. It's a process to gather information, and provide opportunities for all to contribute insights, ideas and information. This process will help **identify priorities, challenges and opportunities for the campus along with future aspirations for SMCM.**

This will aid in setting the basis for the next strategic plan. **We'll basically start the planning process with this 100-day plan and then continue it forward.** So many goals have been realized in the Rising Tide, SMCM's current strategic plan, and as it concludes next summer, we'll move forward into a new phase for our college. The 100-day plan should also yield much input from across the community to be able to say, "...What do we need to do now?" **Things have changed so dramatically in the last couple of years that we need as a community to come together and say, here's what we want.** And here's what will happen, and here's how we do it.

Other things already in motion are to launch a second, broader leadership group to complement the president's cabinet. This broader group includes such leaders as the faculty senate chair, staff representatives, the director of public safety, the registrar and others who have touch points across campus. With this group we can talk about issues that are facing the campus by joining together and exploring questions such as, "What do we do about this?" Sharing ideas and perspectives is vital. **Having space to learn from each other is important to me. Even though we're a small institution, we're still big enough that we have many moving parts and much complexity.**

The 100-day plan is ambitious, but it's not atypical; often college presidents do this their first months on campus. I really like the process because it helps me learn. It helps me know this place probably quicker than I could otherwise



President Phillips meeting staff at the 2025 Governor's Cup

**“Having space to learn from each other is important to me. Even though we're a small institution, we're still big enough that we have many moving parts and much complexity.”**



President Phillips thanks one of the show dogs at her Welcome to Campus event on Sept. 4.

because I'm hearing it from many different perspectives including students, staff, faculty, alumni and others.

## POSITIONING THE COLLEGE

**First**, how we position ourselves is essential. We continue to be “the hidden gem” although it is time to be more visible. Online searches for honors colleges usually do not bring SMCM to the top although they should. It's time to change that. **Secondly**, we're ranked number five in public liberal arts colleges in the nation – only the military academies are ahead of us. This reflects many accomplishments and a notable place to occupy. We need to let many others know about what we do here, and how well we do it.

Prospective students see rankings and their families, potential donors and peers use them too.

**We must be better about not keeping the secret.** We need to continue to tell others what we're about and expand those efforts. We need to have a presence at the National Collegiate Honors Council and other associations and gatherings in a way that they know us even more.

Competition is very different now. In the last 10 years, we have had literally many dozens, if not hundreds of new or expanded honors programs across the higher education landscape. And that's often our competition. Students seeking honors pursue it for the value-added educational experiences. SMCM provides these and more including an array of cultural, social, professional development and athletic offerings.

## THE STANDALONE HONORS COLLEGE

What we're doing here at SMCM is providing two kinds of experiences: One is similar to a private school experience with personalized learning and more in-depth faculty and staff attention. However, we offer this as a public institution with good value and pricing for students interested in pursuing a liberal arts and sciences



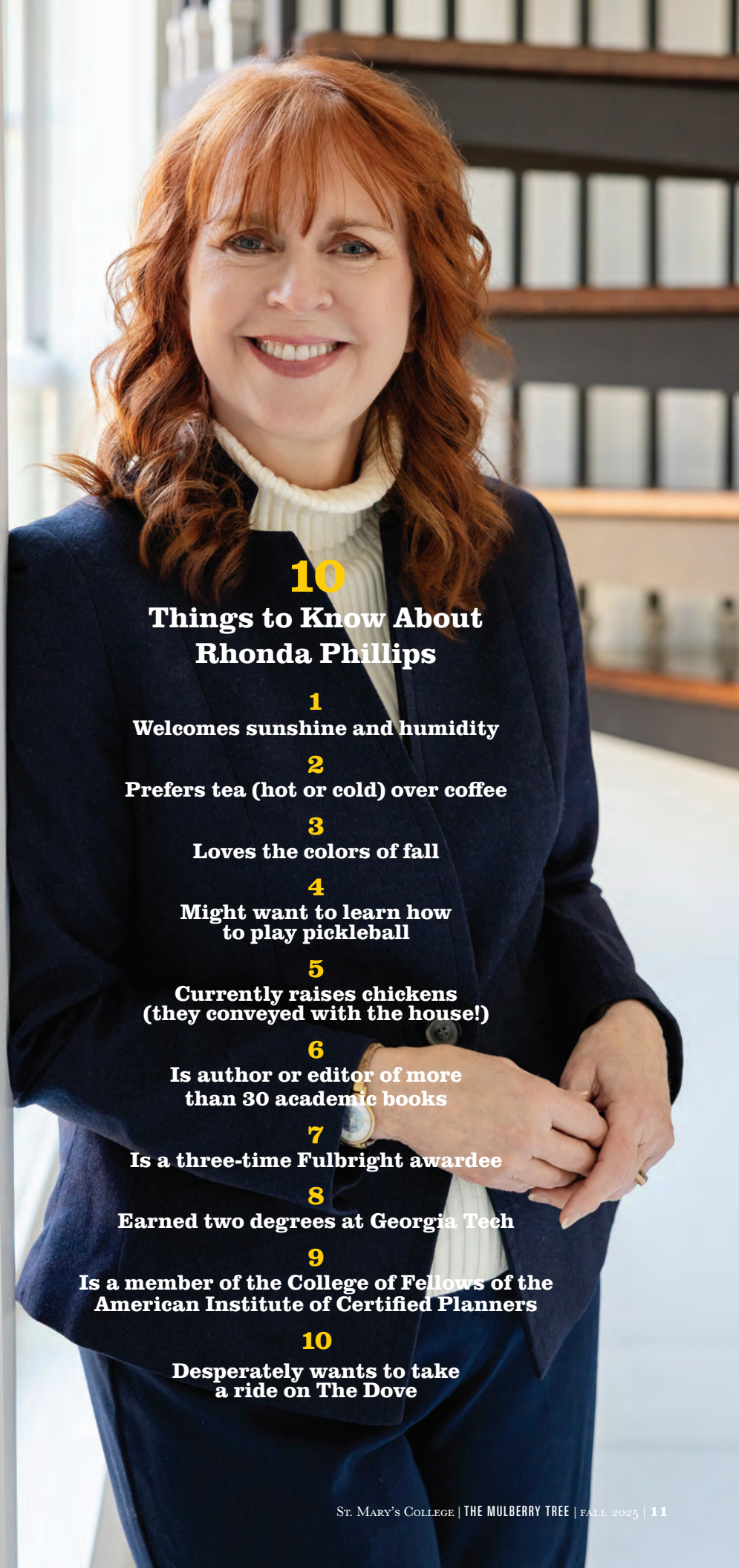
education. Two is we're also providing an honors experience with an honors-infused curriculum. LEAD (Learning through Experiential and Applied Discovery), for example, is very much on par with other excellent honors colleges. Combining these two kinds of experiences results in a robust and highly beneficial education.

We are also a choice for those students who are not seeking honors programs within the large state schools, because those tend to be rather large. We are a standalone honors college, and all that we do is part of an important honors infused value-added experience.

At Purdue University I was hired to build an honors college within the framework of a large university (fyi, Purdue was the last of the Big Ten to develop an honors college). I began with a deep dive on exploring good models and best practices – what works, what generates desirable outcomes for students. I visited with different college presidents across the U.S. and beyond, including President Jordan a few years after she joined St. Mary's College. I visited with her here and thought, how spectacular is this? A rarity as a standalone honors college. That's why SMCM has always been on the radar for me: both to learn from and to admire.

We have a unique opportunity here at SMCM because we are a standalone honors college providing excellence in liberal arts and sciences education. We can lean into that even more because there are many students seeking the kinds of experiences we offer. Combined with a strong foundation and committed members across our community, we can forge an even brighter future together.

And that's why I'm here. ❖



**10**

## **Things to Know About Rhonda Phillips**

**1**

**Welcomes sunshine and humidity**

**2**

**Prefers tea (hot or cold) over coffee**

**3**

**Loves the colors of fall**

**4**

**Might want to learn how  
to play pickleball**

**5**

**Currently raises chickens  
(they conveyed with the house!)**

**6**

**Is author or editor of more  
than 30 academic books**

**7**

**Is a three-time Fulbright awardee**

**8**

**Earned two degrees at Georgia Tech**

**9**

**Is a member of the College of Fellows of the  
American Institute of Certified Planners**

**10**

**Desperately wants to take  
a ride on The Dove**

# TRAIL BLAZER

**BONNIE M. GREEN '74**

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DEDICATED ON JUNE 5, THE BONNIE M. GREEN ALUMNI CENTER CELEBRATED ITS NAMESAKE ALUMNA'S decades-long investment in St. Mary's College of Maryland. A member of the SMCM Class of 1974, Green spent 10 years trailblazing her way in the Federal Maritime Administration before re-engaging with her alma mater as its youngest and first four-year graduate member of its Board of Trustees. Since 1984, she has served as a trustee or as a member of the College's Foundation Board, where she has held every governing position including president. She has been a long-standing member of the advisory board for the College's Center for the Study of Democracy as well.

**I**n 2001, Green was named to the Society of Distinguished Alumni and – reflecting decades of service to her alma mater – was awarded the College's highest honor, the Order of the Ark and Dove in 2017. Green is recognized in the President's Circle for her lifetime of giving which includes having established the Bonnie Marie Green Scholarship in 2017.

Since 2006, Green has been the executive director of The Patuxent Partnership (TPP) in Lexington Park, Maryland, making Southern

## **The Many Phases of Bonnie M. Green**

**[1] Working with the Catholic Relief Agency in Mozambique. [2] As a super proud alum! [3] Standing in front of the newly named Bonnie M. Green Alumni Center in June 2025. [4] On the docks as Deputy Administrator for Interland Waterways and Great Lakes during the Clinton Administration.**

Maryland her home. She's highly engaged and involved in TPP's educational and professional programming, outreach and scholarship promotion. Green is omnipresent at TPP's community events, academic forums and the like, yet still makes time to attend most alumni events and Arts Alliance programs at the College.

In the Southern Maryland community, Bonnie Green is a dynamic force. For this interview, Mulberry Tree magazine wanted to learn how this legend got her start.







**Q** You majored in social science and graduated in 1974. What was your first job after graduating from St. Mary's College?

**A** I worked for a few months for Prince George County, in the Department of Public Works, because that was where I had worked in the summers during college. I finished St. Mary's in three and a half years, so I graduated in December. While I worked there, I applied for jobs in Washington, D.C. and took the Federal Service Entrance Exam, but in 1974, there were a lot of veterans coming back to work and they received preference, so I was advised to take a job on the secretarial register as a way to get in. I had taken shorthand in high school, so that's what I did.

I was hired and worked several months in personnel and then took the next training slot that opened. I was the first female trainee at the Maritime Administration (MARAD) to complete the training.

When the MARAD hired me as an international trade specialist I worked for a man named Joe, who had three daughters. I frequently would get calls from people requesting U.S.-flag shipping waivers or people who were doing work with the Export-Import Bank. One day a man called, and when I tried to assist him, he said, "I don't want to talk to you. I want to talk to a man." I put him on hold, and I went into Joe's office and said, "There's a man from Caterpillar and he says he wants to talk to a man about his shipping issue." I was really upset. Joe got on the line with the man. "Yeah, yeah, I understand, yes. Uh huh. Well, she told me that you want to talk to a man. So, here's the problem: Bonnie's the only person here who can help you. I don't know what to tell you, but if you don't want to talk to her, then you know, your cargo is going nowhere." So that's how we got the man to talk with me. It was a powerful lesson for me.

I learned so much from Joe. I learned how to charter ships. I learned about containers; I learned about bills of lading and freight forwarding. I learned about cargo preference and about shipbuilding challenges. Initially, it wasn't because I had a particular interest in maritime: I was interested in commerce. But I became



With Hillary Clinton at Merchant Marine Academy Commencement, 2000



Vessel operations visit in Norfolk, Virginia, 1980s



Catholic Relief Services, 2000s

fascinated by the maritime business. I worked for MARAD for about 11 years, first at the U.S. Department of Commerce and then MARAD became part of the U.S. Department of Transportation. I got my MBA at George Washington University, and then in 1984 I went to work for a private shipping company, American President Lines (APL).

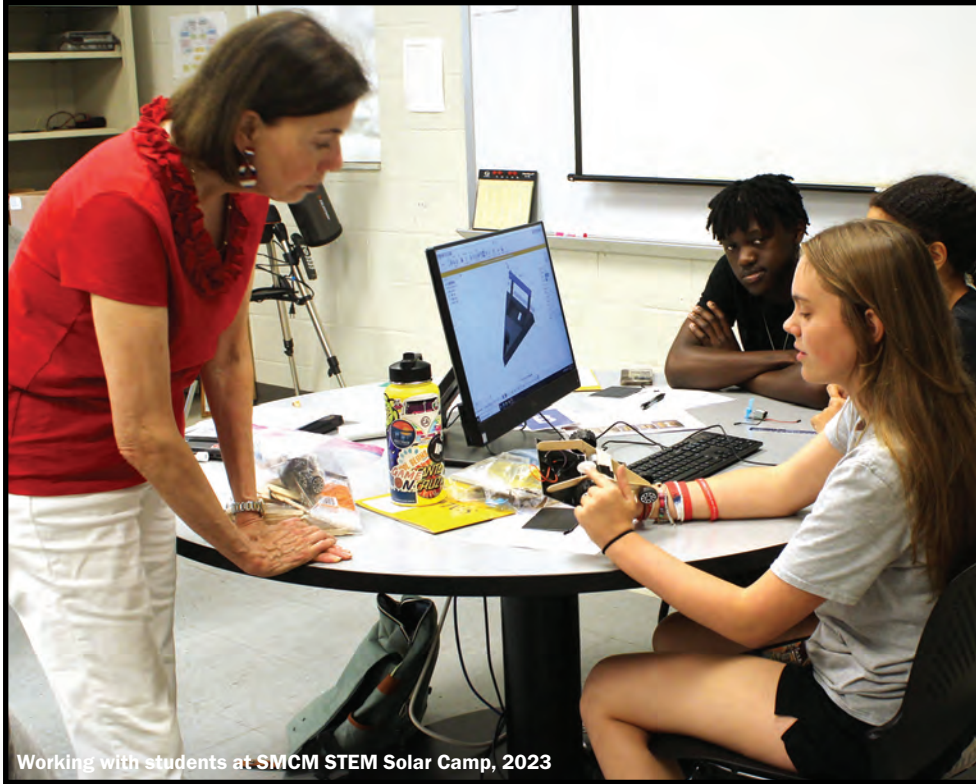
After working in Washington, D.C. for several years, APL sent me out to Oakland, California, to be director of government services. In those days, it was all about ships that were U.S. flagged, meaning U.S. built, owned and operated. And it was a much bigger U.S. flag fleet then. When I started in the shipping business there still were a lot of World War II ships being used for commercial shipping. Containerization was just really starting to take hold. I worked in cargo preference and much of my work was with companies, foreign military attaches and other government agencies to make sure they used U.S. flag ships when they carried cargo for the U.S. military, or they were using U.S. government funds or loans.

**Q** And did you like the work?

**A** I thought the work was really interesting. I worked with foreign governments on a regular basis. At first, I didn't know the difference between one ship and another: I just saw ships, right? I had to learn about breakbulk ships, tankers, bulk carriers, roll-on/roll-off and other special vessels. U.S. cargo moved on various types of ships, and it was a constant learning experience during my first few years. So that's why I would take these courses about the shipping industry at the World Trade Institute. In those days, shipping was primarily in New York. Now there's almost none in New York, it is based in New Jersey, but at that time it was booming.

APL moved me back to Washington, D.C. during Desert Storm, and then back to Oakland two years later. I left APL at the end of 1995. For several years I worked as a consultant for some shipping companies and did some government work.





Working with students at SMC STEM Solar Camp, 2023

Then in early 1999 I became the deputy maritime administrator for DOT. That was a good fit because I had worked on the commercial side at APL and in the government.

While I was deputy maritime administrator at DOT, we established a summer internship program with St. Mary's College that lasted for a number of years.

### **Q How did that work translate to working for Catholic Relief Services? What was the common denominator?**

**A** The common denominator was food supply, which has to go by ship. And I had done a lot of work with Catholic Relief Services, both in the government and when I worked for APL. At that point in my career I had decided I really wanted to work for a nonprofit. At the time, Catholic Relief Services was the largest shipper of food aid on behalf of the U.S. government. USDA purchased the commodities, and USAID managed the programs that did the distribution of the food. I was the senior commodity adviser, which meant I traveled to

different places like Kenya, Uganda, Madagascar, Mozambique, Haiti and Guatemala. And I would educate people about transportation, shipping and warehousing. We had people who were really good at distributing food, but they didn't know how to store it, or how to move it from the port in a timely manner. So, for example, I would go to Mozambique and then go to the port at Beira and then would understand that the reason the food was slow to move is because trucks with license plates from Zambia could not come into Mozambique. I was trying to figure out why is this not working? Because we were experiencing big food losses—food that looks good, but was inedible and would sicken and possibly kill you, right?

In early 2006 my husband was taking me to the airport to catch a flight to Guatemala. I was browsing through the Sunday paper, looking at the business section, and in the back was a half-page ad for an executive director at The Patuxent Partnership. I thought to myself, "I wonder what they do?" And I couldn't really find anyone who could tell me exactly what they did. I thought, "They'll probably hire some retired admiral, but I'll interview anyway." I wasn't looking for a

job, but it sounded interesting. I was offered the position of executive director and accepted the job.

As executive director of The Patuxent Partnership (TPP), Green provides a critical link between the College, the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division (NAWCAD), and the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) at the Patuxent River Naval Air Station, and its contracting community, in particular regarding the College's efforts in STEM fields and the establishment of the applied physics major. TPP, SMC and NAWCAD have an education partnership agreement that facilitates internships, programs and other opportunities. On behalf of TPP Green received the Trailblazer Award from then-president Tuajuanda Jordan in 2018.

One of the programs that TPP offers is the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) program, which permits the temporary assignment of personnel to and from state and local governments, institutions of higher education and other certified nonprofit organizations. While on IPA assignment, IPA employees are TPP employees but are subject to the same security, conduct, conflict of interest and other regulations as federal employees. They may supervise federal and contractor employees and represent the government in contracts and management.

### **Q Was the IPA a contribution that you brought to TPP?**

**A** No, I wasn't familiar with it, but it works in a similar way to a government detail, and I had worked in that area. We had IPA people around the country and in Europe and getting to know them and understand what they did and how what they did contributed to what we did here took a while. We have done rather well at it; and our IPAs sometimes participate in our programs.

IPAs are an important revenue generator and provide resources that support TPP programs and STEM outreach. Unlike many nonprofits TPP does not have to fundraise. Grants have supported our apprentice and intern programs, and summer camps. TPP provides three scholarships to the College of Southern Maryland pathway to engineering program. TPP also provides two physics scholarships for St. Mary's College students. Annual support from TPP also bolsters programming at the College's Center for the Study of Democracy.

## **Q** How did the applied physics major come to be established by TPP?

**A** It started with an audit, which often is done when there is a change in senior management. It was a thorough audit with an auditor recommended by Maryland Nonprofits. And one of the things the auditor discovered was that TPP had not been paid for some of its IPA work, in part because of TPP staffing changes. With the help of our auditors, we invoiced and were paid. The good news was we had this unanticipated revenue. Several years later, we determined that we could donate up to a million dollars to support naval aviation. It was a one-time opportunity, and the question became how to make it have the most impact.

I went to talk to the then NAVAIR commander, VADM David Archizel. I explained to him, “We’re looking to do something that is going to support naval aviation. From where you stand, what could we do that would have the most impact?” “I need physicists,” he said. “And in particular, training in applied physics.” I came back to our board, as well as reaching out to our benefactors, a number of whom had undergraduate degrees in physics. It took a while to get the board approval, given that there were other organizations and programs in the area. In the end, the answer was not about what we wanted, but about why are we here. We’re here because NAVAIR is here. That was the demand signal. And the TPP board approved the donation to St. Mary’s College for an applied physics curriculum.

## **Q** When you do have your interactions with the next generation of STEM workforce, what makes you most optimistic?

**A** Their excitement, their wonder, their lack of fear. They are so connected—how this might work with that, with no fear that they’re going to break something. They have incredible knowledge at their fingertips and always are learning. While the connectivity opportunities were not there, I think that’s part of what I always felt at St. Mary’s. I was a liberal arts undergraduate with a social science major. I got to know my professors. I felt that I was well read,



**ABOVE:** The Bonnie M. Green Alumni Center. **BELOW:** Green and spouse Bill Edgerton with their granddaughter Victoria Edgerton at the alumni center.



and I was a good writer; and I learned how to think, connect and see the big picture.

## **Q** How did you meet your husband, Bill Edgerton, and has he been with you over the years from D.C. to California and back?

**A** I met him in graduate school at George Washington University, in a contracting course, while living in D.C. A few years after we married, I went to work with APL and they offered me a promotion as part of a move to Oakland, California. I was not going to accept the transfer to California because I’d never lived more than 100 miles away from Annapolis, where I grew up. Bill said, “I’m an engineer. I

can get a job.” He convinced me to take the job. Bill still is at the company that he went to work for back in 1987. He was its president for 11 years, and then when he was selected to manage a very large project here in D.C., he stepped down as president. He still is there, with some time in Los Angeles working on the LA Metro.

## **Q** Did he do any international travel to such places as Mozambique and Guatemala with you?

**A** No. He does his own international travel. He is going to Kuwait in November as part of an ABET accreditation team. He has been doing engineering accreditations for over 20 years, including in Egypt, Jordan, India, Oman, as well as in the U.S.

## **Q** Who can testify that you have an occasional slow mode?

**A** Bill laughed a lot at this question. He says there’s no one who can do that. I don’t have a slow mode. It’s just the way I’m made, I guess. ♦





# SUPER GRADS!

BY LEE CAPRISTO, EDITOR

Colleges and universities track and measure outcome rates, an average percentage of graduates at an established marker date of six months post-graduation, indicating graduates who are employed, in school, volunteering, or in the military. St. Mary's College of Maryland graduates score a 90% for the Class of 2024. One of Forbes' Top Colleges 2026, SMCM graduates high-earners and propels students to become successful entrepreneurs and influential leaders in their fields.

Take a look at these recent grads, from the classes of 2024 and 2025. As the saying goes, their futures are so bright, they've got to wear shades.



## CLASS OF 2024

# Computer Scientists

## Shameer Rao '24

(computer science)

While still an undergraduate computer science major at St. Mary's College, Shameer Rao benefitted from the assistance of **David Hickman '07** of Resource Management Concepts, in Lexington Park, Maryland, by being able to earn the industry-standard CompTIA Security+ and CompTIA Linux+ certifications. Rao also took advantage of SMCM's partnership with the Defense Acquisition University (DAU), whose Mid-Atlantic Regional Headquarters is close to campus. Under the guidance of faculty mentor **Simon Read**, associate professor of computer science, Rao completed a number of DAU courses, including Cyber Training Range, Cyber Attack Kill Chain, Engineering Management and Cyber Table Top.

Rao translated these acquired skills to student competitions. Partnering with fellow computer science major **Alex Stoyanov-Roberts '24**, they placed first in the Velocity X: AI Hackathon hosted by the College of Southern Maryland and sponsored by the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division in March 2024.

Immediately after graduating in May 2024, Rao participated in NASA's L'SPACE mission concept academy program. He learned about mission concept development and systems engineering for a hypothetical deep space mission. Following that, he landed an intensive research opportunity at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth in cyber/computer forensics and counterterrorism. Of the experience, Rao says, "UMass Dartmouth gave me exposure to hardware security topics that helped clarify my research interests and ultimately led me toward pursuing a Ph.D. focused on embedded systems."

An example of a secure embedded system is the security hardware inside current-day cars and



trucks. These systems control access to critical vehicle functions like the ignition, braking, or steering through encrypted communications. If compromised, a hacker could potentially take control of a vehicle remotely. Rao's research focuses on designing embedded systems that are resilient against such attacks, using techniques like lightweight encryption and tamper detection.

Rao currently works full-time at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory (APL) in Laurel, Maryland, as an ASIC (application specific integrated circuit) design engineer. He collaborates with digital chip design and hardware security teams on tasks related to embedded systems and secure computing environments.

While working full-time at APL, Rao will wrap up his master's degree in secure embedded systems this fall. The degree is through a partnership between Morgan State University and the Johns Hopkins Whiting School of Engineering. "Along with being a National Science Foundation (NSF) CyberCorps Scholarship for Service (SFS) awardee, this has enabled me to get a world-class education with full funding from the DoD," he says.

Rao aims to complete his Ph.D. by 2028 and work as an ASIC development lead engineer, supporting national security missions in defense, space and aerospace. "Long-term," he says, "I also hope to teach or mentor students from underrepresented backgrounds in STEM and digital chip design."



## Alex Stoyanov-Roberts '24

(computer science)

Stoyanov-Roberts, like Rao, is working on his Ph.D. at Morgan State University. Stoyanov-Roberts is focused on integrated circuit design: think of computer CPUs, mobile phones, modern cars, all of which are designed with integrated circuits controlling different aspects of the technology.

While a doctoral student, Stoyanov-Roberts interns at Two Six Technologies, where he designs and integrates components for a complex hardware system designed for hardware isolated key storage and distribution.

Stoyanov-Roberts attended the International Solid-State Circuits Conference in San Francisco as part of his doctoral program. "We got to see firsthand the most cutting-edge hardware in the world!" he recalls. Just months after graduating from SMCM, Stoyanov-Roberts (with Rao) attended Black Hat USA 2024 in Las Vegas, a convention for cybersecurity enthusiasts. "Black Hat was very cool," he says. "I was able to meet cybersecurity professionals and start building my professional network."

He and his colleagues have submitted paper proposals for several conferences. He'd like to present on what he describes as a "relatively novel RISC-V hardware-based cryptographic algorithm."





In 2024 Shameer Rao '24 and Alex Stoyanov-Roberts '24 attended Black Hat USA in Las Vegas.

## CLASS OF 2024

# Fulbright Awardees

### Ellie Walter '24

(neuroscience and ILC-Spanish, minored in environmental studies and music)



#### **Fulbright English Teaching Assistant:**

*The English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Programs place Fulbrighters in classrooms abroad to provide assistance to the local English teachers. ETAs help teach English language while serving as cultural ambassadors for the U.S. For fellowships during the 2025-2026 academic year, there were 916 applicants for ETA awards to Spain, and 180 of those received awards (an acceptance rate of about 19.5%).*

ETAs help teach English language while serving as cultural ambassadors for the U.S. For fellowships during the 2025-2026 academic year, there were 916 applicants for ETA awards to Spain, and 180 of those received awards (an acceptance rate of about 19.5%).

Ellie Walter will spend her Fulbright year on Tenerife, a central island of the archipelago Canary Islands, off the west coast of Africa. Morocco and Western Sahara are the closest countries to the Canary Islands (owned by Spain).

Walter admits that the Fulbright application process was a long but rewarding one. "I began working with [Professor Jennifer Cognard-Black] in May 2024, and she guided me through every step of the process. She helped me choose the country and type of Fulbright award I wanted to apply for. She helped me refine my supplementary project proposal and provided critical feedback on my essays. She gave me the confidence I needed to present a strong application. The full process, from the initial brainstorming to receiving the finalist notification, spanned roughly 13 months."

Walter's supplemental project, which focuses on nature, well-being and mental health, was inspired by her experiences at SMCM and a study abroad trip to Costa Rica. "During my time in Costa Rica, I developed a strong interest in environmental science and the relationship between



humans and their surroundings," she says. "I wanted to create a project that would allow me to connect with the locals of the Canary Islands. This past year I worked as a youth rehabilitation specialist for a nonprofit. During this work, I noticed how easily I could connect with the kids I was working with when we were outside and being active. This made me realize the potential for a project to immerse myself in the local environment and connect with the people. I am excited to create a project that is both personally meaningful and relevant to the host country."

When the Fulbright concludes in June 2026, Walter plans to pursue a Ph.D. program in pediatric clinical neuroscience, bolstered by fluency in Spanish. "Becoming fluent in Spanish will allow me to reach wider groups of children and families, so that my future work can have a more meaningful impact," she says. "I'm excited to one day work in a field where I feel I can make a real difference."

### Cooper Clendenin '24

(ILC-Spanish, minored in sociology)



#### **Fulbright English Teaching Assistant**

Cooper Clendenin is returning to Spain. He studied in Granada in southern Spain during his



spring 2023 semester. This month, his Fulbright takes him to the village of Albelda de Iregua in northern Spain. A Spanish major and sociology minor at SMCM, his supplemental project stems from his St. Mary's Project, promoting artistic expression as cultural preservation. He plans to work with his Spanish students to create mini murals that act as visual representations of their culture and heritage and to compare those to that of the U.S.

A varsity soccer player at St. Mary's College, Clendenin sought out pickup soccer games while in Granada. This time, he hopes to join a local amateur soccer team.

Clendenin is quick to thank his coach and professors for their help with his Fulbright application process. "I have so much gratitude for their guidance and willingness to write on my behalf for my Fulbright application," he says. "Professor Jennifer Cognard-Black was my Fulbright application mentor, and she helped me tremendously with navigating through the whole application process and helping me revise my essays. I truly don't think I would have gotten this grant without her."

Fluent in Spanish, Clendenin intends to add Portuguese to his portfolio in his quest to become a foreign service officer and one day an ambassador.



## CLASS OF 2025

# Scientists & Business Acumen

### Annika Kumwembe '25

(physics)

"When I decided to graduate in three years," says Kumwembe, "I was encouraged by OS<sub>3</sub> (Office of Student Success Services) to apply for a summer research experience. I applied to 14 and chose to go to the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics to study the large-scale structure of the universe and test new techniques in intrinsic alignment measurements." With the support of her SMCM physics professors and advisers from Harvard-Smithsonian, she is first author on a publication with the Center for Astrophysics and the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument (DESI) Collaboration. A Phi Beta Kappa scholar at SMCM, Kumwembe is now at Dartmouth College for a Ph.D. in electrical engineering with the goal to create nanotechnology for astronomical instrumentation. Not bad for her first 21 years on earth!

### Sophia Koontz '25

(biology)

Sophia Koontz, of Catonsville, Maryland, was president of the College chapter of Beta Beta Beta biology honor society and is an aspiring biology professor. Koontz became interested in plant biology her first year at SMCM after meeting Lorena Torres Martinez, assistant professor of biology. Koontz joined Torres Martinez's lab as a directed research student studying plant-microbe interactions. For the summer of 2023, Koontz was a successful applicant for funded research as a Seahawk Undergraduate Research Fellow and continued work with Torres Martinez. This led to the development of Koontz's St. Mary's Project and her applications to doctoral programs in plant biology. Koontz is now at the Pennsylvania State University in the first semester of her doctoral program.



### Coen Dewalt '25

(business administration and management, economics)

A Phi Beta Kappa and Omicron Delta Epsilon scholar from Catonsville, Maryland, Dewalt was two-time captain of the Men's Rugby Club and a student ambassador for economics. He spent three summers as a finance intern at the University of Maryland Faculty Physicians Inc. For his senior seminar in business, he and his classmates



partnered with students from Colombia, South America and were co-taught by their mutual professors. "We used WhatsApp and Zoom for our project meetings and presentation," he says. "It was a fascinating opportunity to explore new experiences in international business." Dewalt got a job immediately after graduation working as an accounting associate at the University of Maryland School of Medicine's Department of Pediatrics in Baltimore. ♦



# ALUMNI CONNECTION

## CLASS NOTES

### 1960s

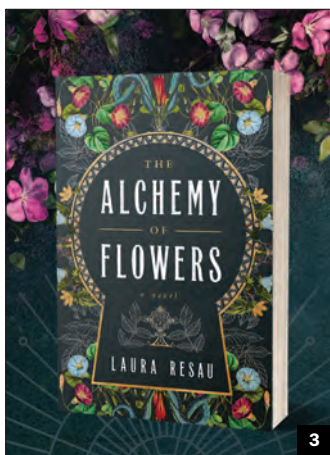
Five Class of 1967 alumni [1] met for lunch at The Pier in Solomons Island, Maryland, for a mini reunion on July 31. In attendance were **Terrie Leonard '67**, **Jeanie Mitchell**, **Woody Mitchell '67**, **Johnny Wood '67**, **Dino Zervos '67** and **Ron Leonard '68**. A good time was had by all, and they hope to have other mini reunions and invite more of their classmates.

### 1970s

**Elizabeth Carbery Neal '74** has entered a new career as a visual artist. She previously served as a psychotherapist, teacher, mentor and administrator in a multitude of agencies, universities and her own private practice. After working in the mental health field for 50 years, Carbery retired her art therapy credentials and discontinued her mental health counselor license. As an archetypal pattern analyst, she continues to serve as thesis advisor and reader for the Assisi Institute: The International Center for the Study of Archetypal Patterns. She is now focusing on making art, writing, leading artist workshops and art mail groups. She lives in Vermont with her husband, Milt Doda, who is a potter, and their dog, Wookie Bear.



1



3

### 1980s

**Britta Muehlberger Monaco '83** [2] of Gaithersburg, Maryland, has published her first book, "Lifelines: How I Restored My Soul, One Email at a Time." The book is a collection of daily emails to her 29-person municipal government team from the onset of the pandemic in 2020 through her retirement in 2022. It shares the journey of one manager's attempt to inspire, cajole, amuse and engage her staff and how that daily ritual ended up restoring her soul in the process.

**Kevin R. Hill '89** was appointed as judge to the St. Mary's County Circuit Court by

Governor Wes Moore, filling the late Judge Michael J. Stamm's seat. Kevin will serve as judge until the 2026 election, where he must run in order to remain in the seat for the full 15-year term.

### 1990s

**Hans Lemke '93** recently began a two-year term as president of the Association for Biology Laboratory Education (ABLE), an international organization focused on teaching biology in college and university lab settings. He is currently the lab coordinator for introductory biology at the University of Maryland.



2



4

**Laura Resau '96** [3] published her novel, "The Alchemy of Flowers," with HarperCollins on July 29, 2025. After 11 acclaimed books for children and teens, Laura's adult debut is an enchanting, modern-day take on "The Secret Garden," sprinkled with magic. It tells the story of a woman who finds a mysterious job at a chateau in Provence, where she hopes to escape reminders of children — only to discover an enigmatic little girl who needs her help. Sarah Penne, the New York Times bestselling author of "The Lost Apothecary," calls it "a beautifully written, atmospheric novel that will leave readers both mesmerized and moved." Alumni **Rella Boone**

**Murphy '75, Jim Connelly '75 and Brian Murphy '75** attended one of her book signing events at the Ivy Bookshop in Baltimore on August 9. Learn more at [www.lauraresau.com](http://www.lauraresau.com).

Alumni rowers [4] and current members of the women's rowing team had a strong showing at the USRowing Northeast Mid-Atlantic Regional Masters Championship held this past June on the campus of St. Andrews School in Middleton, Delaware. Representing various regional rowing clubs at the regatta, competing athletes included **Coach Karyn Shackelford '99**, **Laura Kruse '16**, **Sydney West '23**, **Gabriela Plummer '24**, **Tiffany Dioko '25**, **Allison Thresh '26** and **Charlotte Hope '27**.

### 2000s

**Joseph Glynn '05** and **Lou Sheppard '10, MAT '11** [5] were both appointed as school administrators in Queen Anne's County for the upcoming school year. Joseph is headed to Matapeake Middle School as assistant principal, and Lou is now the principal of Queen Anne's County High School.

**Amanda Alonso-Valenteen '07, MAT '08** was awarded the prestigious Louis E. "Doc" Lamborn Distinguished Teaching Chair, which recognizes excellent teachers who have been at the school for more than 15 years. Amanda has taught Spanish at McDonogh School in Owings Mills, Maryland for 17 years.

**Calvin Wise '09** is dean of admissions at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. He has worked in admissions for the past 15 years.





5



6

## 2010s

**Tony Quick '10 [6]** earned his Ph.D. in rhetoric and professional communication from Iowa State University of Science and Technology in 2025. His dissertation, "Presidential Plots: The Commander-in-Chief as National Narrator" focused on the intersection of presidential rhetoric and narrative over the course of the 21st century. Tony also published a chapter in "The Oxford Handbook of Black Horror Film" titled "The Inauguration of Black Horror: Duane Jones's Racial Revision of Night of the Living Dead." The chapter discusses racial representation within the classic

1968 horror film and the lead actor's efforts to negotiate the contours of his role.

**Andrew McDowell '12** is the author of the "One with Nature" series and was a guest on "The Merry Writer" podcast in July (episode 275). Andrew's writing credits include the fantasy novel "Mystical Greenwood" (Fae Corps Publishing, 2022) and "Beneath the Deep Wave" (Fae Corps Publishing, 2024). Andrew's writing won the 2021 Maryland Writers' Association Novel Contest and earned an honorable mention in the 2021 Top Shelf Magazine contest.

## Alumni Council Profile

By Cathy Hernandez Ray '78

**Tae-Shi ("Tae") Savage, '24**, is one of the Alumni Council's newest (and youngest) elected members. A familiar face to the council, she was the student member of the Alumni Council in her senior year, and it was this involvement that inspired her to become an elected member. She has set her sights on participating in various council initiatives such as Mentor-a-Seahawk, Hawktoberfest, Giving Tuesday, Spring Break-a-Sweat, and the Valumtines Virtual 5K. As the recipient of numerous scholarships while an undergraduate, her first order of business was to volunteer as a member of the Alumni Council's scholarship committee.



Tae majored in English with a music minor. While at SMCM she participated in the student leadership group Seahawks Advancing Graduate Engagement (SAGE), served two years as a Resident Assistant (RA), and one year as a Resident Hall Coordinator (RHC). She was a student intern for the Mulberry Tree Magazine, and a Giving Tuesday Champion, amassing twenty-six donors during her first Giving Tuesday campaign. Her favorite St. Mary's College memory was senior gala, as "my senior prom in high school was cancelled during the pandemic so it felt like a great way to make up for that lost time and opportunity."

Tae currently lives in Baltimore and is a second-year graduate student pursuing a master's degree in contemporary communications at Notre

Dame of Maryland University. She is also a graduate resident coordinator for the Office of Residence Life, working directly with Notre Dame of Maryland University's Director of Residence Life, Colette Lewis. Whenever she can, Tae takes every opportunity to travel with her long-term boyfriend of three years. Recently they embarked on their annual trip to Outer Banks, NC and have an upcoming cruise planned for February 2026 where they will visit the Dominican Republic, St. Thomas, and St. Kitts & Nevis.

Tae says she joined the Alumni Council because "I am passionate about giving back to the campus community and staying connected with my Seahawk family. In my senior year of college, I was the student member of the Alumni Council and was so grateful and inspired by the work of SMCM Alumni Council members to always make St. Mary's College a great place to be for the students."

When asked where she envisioned herself in five years, Tae answered, "In a very successful career and pursuing my Ph.D. in communications, continuing to travel the world with my boyfriend, and spending my leisure time crocheting."

She credits her SMCM education as being very valuable in her job search and preparing her for a successful career, especially her experience in Residence Life. She adds, "St. Mary's helped me find the confidence I needed to be a great leader in and outside of the workforce and classroom. Something I have always found unique about St. Mary's is that even though it's a small school, the alumni are spread out so far and wide across the country and it is surprisingly easy to bump into people who have attended SMCM or know others who have."





**Danielle Thorne '13** has been named to the Alexandria, Virginia Chamber of Commerce's "40 Under 40" Honorees. Danielle majored in mathematics and played varsity volleyball at SMCM, then earned a master's degree from George Washington University. She teaches math at Alexandria City High

School and is the head varsity volleyball coach. In her first year as head coach, Danielle led her team to a state championship, making her the first female head coach in that school's history to do so.

**Elise Valkanas '13 [7]** graduated with a Ph.D. in genetics and genomics from Harvard



**Taylor Schafer '15, MAT '16 [8]** was named the 2025 Cecil County Teacher of the Year at a gala in April. She will represent Cecil County at the Maryland Teacher of the Year competition this fall. Taylor has been teaching eighth-grade U.S. history at North East Middle School for nine years.

**Alison B. Curry '16** defended her dissertation and received a doctorate degree in history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in June 2025. Her dissertation examined the ritual, spatial and functional uses of Jewish cemeteries in Poland between 1918 and 1945. She has now begun a two-year postdoctoral fellowship at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

**Keely Houk Pompella '17** has taken a new role as creative director for the Pennsylvania State University Alumni Association in University Park, Pennsylvania. Previously, she was senior art director for Purdue for Life Foundation at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana.

**Tylita Butler MAT '18** was named the 2025 St. Mary's County Teacher of the Year. She will represent St. Mary's County at the Maryland Teacher of the Year competition this fall. Tylita has been teaching eighth-grade science at Esperanza Middle School for seven years.



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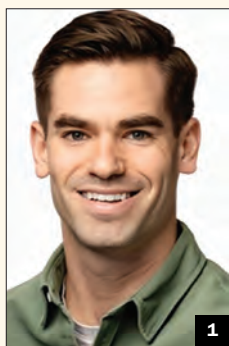
# Alumni Awards

By Sierra Brown '27

The St. Mary's Alumni Association issues three awards each year, to recognize exceptional members within the St. Mary's College community. Led by the Alumni Council Recognition Committee, nominations are reviewed based on the selection criteria for each award and chosen recipients are recognized at an awards ceremony during Alumni Weekend. Additionally, names of the awardees are added to the plaques on display in the newly-renamed Bonnie M. Green Alumni Center.

Nominations for the 2026 alumni awards will open this fall. For more information about nominating a deserving candidate for any of the listed three awards, please visit [smcm.edu/alumni/awards/](http://smcm.edu/alumni/awards/) or contact the Office of Alumni Relations at [alumnioffice@smcm.edu](mailto:alumnioffice@smcm.edu).

**THE OUTSTANDING YOUNG ALUMNI AWARD** honors graduates of St. Mary's College within the last ten years who have attained prominence in their career: innovation within their field and demonstrated dedication to public service.



The 2025 recipient of the Outstanding Young Alumni Award is **Bradley Roberts '15 [1]**, a rising global leader in neuroscience and scientific innovation. During his time as an undergraduate at St. Mary's College of Maryland, where he majored in biology and neuroscience, Bradley's passion for discovery was sparked in

the labs of professors Aileen Bailey and Brian Mathur and has since taken him to the world's top research institutions. He earned his Ph.D. in neuroscience at the University of Oxford, where his pioneering work advanced understanding of dopamine function and Parkinson's disease. As a junior research fellow at Oxford and in leadership roles at the Wellcome Trust and UK Dementia Research Institute, Bradley shaped transformative global research initiatives and championed equity for early-career and underrepresented scientists. Today, as CEO of Neuromatch, a nonprofit advancing collaboration and access in computational science, Bradley leads efforts that empower thousands of researchers in more than 120 countries, helping to democratize science on a global scale. Bradley embodies the St. Mary's Way through intellectual curiosity, global citizenship, leadership and service.

**THE SOCIETY OF DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD** honors alumni who have made significant accomplishments in their profession or community, who act in a manner that reflects well on the College and inspires the community, and who demonstrate pride in their education at St. Mary's College of Maryland.



The 2025 recipient of the Society of Distinguished Alumni Award is **Kerri L. Smith '09 [2]**, who is a partner at Silverman Thompson in Baltimore where she leads a thriving real estate practice and the firm's community service initiatives. Since earning her J.D. from the University of Baltimore School of Law,

Kerri has built an illustrious legal career representing clients in complex commercial and residential real estate cases. She is a recognized authority in landlord-tenant law, with deep expertise in affordable housing and federal housing programs. Beyond her practice, Kerri is an active leader in the legal community. She has held leadership roles in the Bar Association of Baltimore City, the Maryland State Bar Association and the American Bar Association, advocating for access to justice and the advancement of the profession. Furthermore, Kerri has earned wide recognition for her career and community contributions. She has been named one of the nation's Top 40 Young Lawyers by the American Bar Association and received the Edward F. Shea, Jr. Professionalism Award from the Maryland Bar Foundation. In 2023, Kerri was honored as one of Maryland's Top 100 Women. Kerri's path from SMCM, majoring in economics and human studies, to law firm partner reflects her dedication, integrity and passion for service.

**THE HONORARY ALUMNI AWARD** honors distinguished non-graduates who are closely connected with the College and have made significant contributions to St. Mary's College of Maryland, whether that be financial, promotional, educational or other influential ways.

The 2025 recipient of the Honorary Alumni Award is **Tuajuanda C. Jordan, Ph.D. [3]** Since 2014, she served as the seventh president of St. Mary's College of Maryland from 2014 until June 30, 2025, leading with vision, courage and an unwavering commitment



to equity and academic excellence. In retirement, Tuajuanda leaves behind a powerful legacy of transformation and impact. During her presidency, SMCM implemented a trilogy of strategic plans that elevated its national reputation and solidified its identity as the National Public Honors College. Under her leadership, the College has consistently been recognized as one of the nation's best and top-value liberal arts institutions by The Princeton Review, U.S. News & World Report and Niche. Tuajuanda is a nationally respected scientist and educator. She created the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science Education Alliance and its groundbreaking SEA-PHAGES program, which broadened access to undergraduate research in genomics and bioinformatics at more than 50 institutions across the country. Her many accolades include being listed on Maryland's Top 100 Women, the Top 25 Women in Higher Education and the Daily Record's Influential Marylanders list. She served as president of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges for a two-year term, further advancing liberal arts education nationwide. Her presidential tenure was defined by her dedication to access, innovation and justice, from inclusive hiring to the Commemorative to Enslaved Peoples of Southern Maryland she championed. Her legacy will endure in her transformative vision of what 21st century public liberal arts education should, could and can be at St. Mary's College of Maryland, the National Public Honors College.



**Valerie Gregorio '19** represented the USA East Coast in the Miss US International Pageant 2025, held in Washington, D.C. from July 3-6. Valerie earned her MBA from University of Maryland – Global Campus and works as a contract specialist. She has competed in several pageants, including Petite USA 2023, Miss Maryland USA 2022 and Miss Maryland Teen USA 2022.

## 2020s

**Cooper Clendenin '24** and **Eleanor "Ellie" Walter '24** both received Fulbright English Teaching Assistant awards in Spain for the 2025-2026 year. *See their stories on pages 20.*

**Leo Montenegro '25** received a teaching assistantship through the North American Language and Culture Assistants Program for the 2025-2026 academic year in Spain. Leo, a psychology and international languages and cultures-Spanish double major, will instruct Spanish students in English and expose them to U.S. culture.



## MARRIAGES & UNIONS

**Sara Morgan Watters '10 [1]** and Jack Turner were married on Sept. 28, 2024, in Oxford, Maryland. Alumni in attendance included **Kate Fritz '04**, **Ken Ahrendt '07**, **John Howell '07**, **Andrew Watters '07**, **Jill Bradley '09**, **Jenn Chamberlin Calhoun '09**, **Liam Bradley '10**, **Sara Flowe Ahrendt '10**, **Claire Marion Eisenbaum '10**, **Caitlin Mullett '10**, **Lindsay Beattie O'Connell '10**, **Abby Rowlands '10**, **Jason Stutman '10** and **Marissa Golison '16**. The couple currently reside in Annapolis, Maryland.

**Gillian Sawyer '16** and **Nicholas Tait '17 [2]** were married on Oct. 26, 2024, at St. Mary's Historic State House. **Kristina Colacicco '15**, **Rebecca Wenker '15**, **Megan Gerdes '16** and **Rylinn Sorini '16** were bridesmaids. **Kyle Reichard '17**, **Mat Seltzer '17** and **Yonah Zeitz '17** were groomsmen. Alumni in attendance were **James Pollock '16**, **Chris Richard '17**, **Claire Robey '17**, **Jimmy Robey '17**, **Dylan Smith '17**, **Andrew Battin '18** and **Sydney Larkin '18**. Soccer coaches **Alun Oliver '04** and **Peter Krech '08** attended as well. The couple exchanged vows on the same bench overlooking the water in the Garden of Remembrance where they had their first date in 2015, and they always knew they would get married at St. Mary's College. The couple honeymooned in Italy and currently reside in Silver Spring, Maryland.

## BIRTHS & ADOPTIONS



**Allie Scott Bowden '09** and **Michael Bowden '11 [1]** welcomed two daughters, Avery Iris Bowden and Quinn Michaela Bowden, on Dec. 24, 2024. Avery and Quinn join their older brothers Cameron Bowden, age 6, and Bryce Bowden, age 4. The family resides in Ellicott City, Maryland.

**Natalie Ulrick Schinse '14 [2]** and Jared Schinse welcomed a daughter, Elizabeth Colette Schinse on July 17, 2024. **Rachael Ulrick-Sowers '16** and **Scott Ulrick-Sowers '17** are excited to be aunt and uncle to Elizabeth. The family resides in Owings Mills, Maryland.

**Stephanie Schultz Shaughnessy '14** and **Michael Shaughnessy '14 [3]** welcomed a daughter, Emma Shaughnessy on Jan. 24, 2025. The family resides in Baltimore, Maryland.

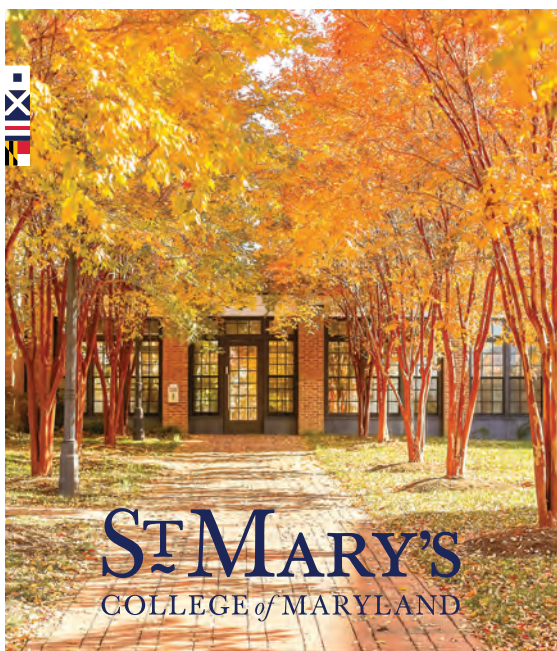




## IN MEMORIAM

**Garner D. "Butch" Morgan '76**, of Leonardtown, Maryland, died on May 2. He was 76. Born and raised in St. Mary's County, Maryland, Butch was a proud member of the first graduating class of Chopticon High School in 1966. He went to work for W.R. Blair Jewelers while attending New York University where he received certificates in horology and gemology. He married Mary "Pinky" Morgan in 1971. While a jeweler, he also attended St. Mary's College of Maryland, where he majored in biology and played on the varsity men's

basketball team under Coach Ed Cole. He graduated from SMCM in 1976 and then earned his dental degree from the University of Maryland School of Dentistry in 1980. His dental practice in St. Mary's County opened in 1980. Over the next three decades, he was deeply involved in the Maryland State Dental Association and the Mission of Mercy program. In 2009, Butch transitioned the practice to his son, Luke. He is survived by his beloved Pinky; his sons Luke and Adam; four grandchildren; two sisters and a brother.



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# THE MISSING MASCOT

By Darah Schillinger '22, professional pathways externship coordinator

In 1959, the St. Mary's Seminary Junior College allowed its 1960 graduating class to vote on a school mascot to encourage school spirit across campus. The students ultimately chose the Chesapeake Bay Retriever, the same breed that in 1964 was named the official dog of Maryland. The College commissioned a statue of the new mascot during the summer of 1960 with Washington, D.C. artist Katherine Beresford Hobbs (1910-1999). In October of that same year, an article on Hobbs' work ran in the *The Evening Star*, featuring an image of the artist working on the Chesapeake Bay Retriever sculpture, which would later be revealed as the commissioned piece for the Seminary Junior College.

Not much is known of Hobbs' personal life, but according to *The Evening Star*, she had an "affinity for animals" and often found inspiration for her work through this appreciation. Her commissioned Chesapeake Bay Retriever statue was originally meant to rest at the entrance of the student union building, Charles Hall, after its completion in 1966. The mascot was displayed in the Garden of Remembrance during the building's construction but remained in the garden even after the building's opening, never making it to its final resting place.

Not much was written about the statue between 1961 and 2000. In the early 2000s, Executive Editor and Writer Janet Haugaard learned from Elizabeth "Stu" Stuart



## WHEN WAS THAT THE MASCOT?

1959 to 1968: Go, Retrievers!

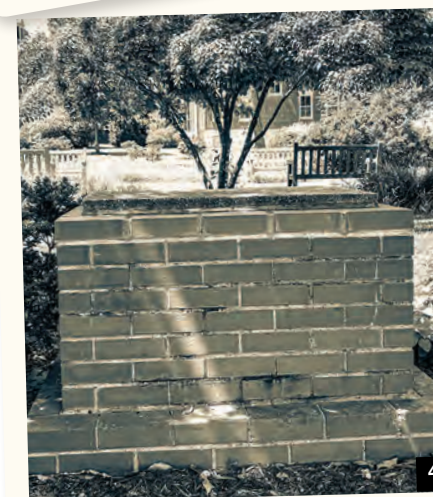
1968 to 1984: Go, Saints!

1984 to today: Go, Seahawks!

Wilkinson Egeli '62 that the front paws of the mascot statue had been broken off and thrown into the "pond" sometime in the early 1990s. There is no further information on how the statue's paws were later retrieved and restored, but the statue was photographed intact as of the 2007 publication of the "St. Mary's: A 'When-Did' Timeline," written by Haugaard and colleagues.

The statue remained in the garden as of 2007 but seemingly disappeared between the years of 2008-2010. No record of the statue can be found after the 2007 timeline publication; however, if any recent alumni photos exist, we hope these will be shared with the College Archives in an effort to solve the mystery.

If you have any information on the missing Chesapeake Bay Retriever statue formerly located in the Garden of Remembrance, please email College Archivist Shane Moran at [archives@smcm.edu](mailto:archives@smcm.edu).



PHOTOS: [1] Sculptor Katherine Hobbs working on a clay model of the Retriever in her Georgetown studio, 1960. [2] The statue on its pedestal in 2007, its last recorded sighting. [3] The Retriever's paws were broken off and thrown into the "pond" in the early '90s. [4] The statue disappeared sometime between the years 2008-2010.

### SOURCES:

"Chesapeake Bay Retriever, Maryland State Dog." *Maryland Manual On-Line*, 24 Jan. 2024, [msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/origlance/html/symbols/dog.html](https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/origlance/html/symbols/dog.html).

Griffiths, Harriet. "Artist with an Affinity for Animals." *The Evening Star*, 16 Oct. 1960, pp. 26-26. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1960-10-16/ed-1/seq-206/>

Haugaard, Janet Butler, et al. *St. Mary's: A "When-Did?" Timeline*. 1st ed., vol. 1 1, St. Mary's Press, 2007.





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SMCM ORCHESTRA



DAN TYMINSKI BAND



PISCATAWAY NATION



JAMELLE BOUIE



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**TUESDAY, SEPT. 16**

**CONSTITUTION DAY: JAMELLE BOUIE | 7:00 P.M.**  
New York Times Columnist

**WEDNESDAY, OCT. 8**

**ONE MARYLAND, ONE BOOK | 7:00 P.M.**  
Author talk discussing "Kin: Rooted in Hope"

**FRIDAY, OCT. 31**

**SMCM ORCHESTRA | 7:00 P.M.**  
Directed by Professor Jeffrey Silberschlag

**TUESDAY, NOV. 4**

**PISCATAWAY NATION | 7:00 P.M.**  
American Indian dance, song and storytelling

**SATURDAY, NOV. 15**

**THE STRING QUEENS | 7:00 P.M.**  
Dynamic trio with a soulful and orchestral sound

**FRIDAY, DEC. 5**

**SMCM ORCHESTRA | 7:00 P.M.**  
Directed by Professor Jeffrey Silberschlag

**SATURDAY, FEB. 14**

**DAN TYMINSKI BAND | 7:00 P.M.**  
Bluegrass ensemble led by 14-time Grammy-winning vocalist and guitarist Dan Tyminski



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