

The background of the entire page is a photograph of several jellyfish swimming in the ocean. In the upper portion of the image, several green avocados are visible, some with their stems. The jellyfish have translucent, bell-shaped bodies with long, thin, blueish-purple tentacles trailing behind them. The water is a deep blue-green color.

ST MARY'S
COLLEGE of MARYLAND

The National Public Honors College

The logo for 'The Mulberry Tree' is set within a green rectangular frame. It features a detailed illustration of a large, leafy tree in the background. Overlaid on the tree is the word 'The' in a cursive script, followed by 'MULBERRY' in large, bold, black, sans-serif capital letters, and 'TREE' in a similar bold, black, sans-serif font below it.

The
MULBERRY
TREE

FALL 2026

**AVOCADOS &
JELLYFISH**

*SURF-ing through the
summer at SMCM*

[PAGE 12]

ST. MARY'S COLLEGE
of Maryland

The
**MULBERRY
TREE**

FALL 2026, VOL. XLVII, NO.3

www.smcm.edu/mulberrytree

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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 Yacomico people and on the trunk of which public notices were posted in the mid-1600s. The tree endured long into the 19th 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 2026

ST. MARY'S COLLEGE OF MARYLAND

July 2026 — June 2027

ALUMNI COUNCIL

Executive Board

Michele Shipley '92, *president*
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Geoff Cuneo '10
Serra Erbas '15
Leslie Fields '03
Sean Floyd '06
Derric Gray '04
Mike Greer '01
Valerie Gregorio '19
Jim Harvey '83
Kris McDowell Jackson '96
Barbara Kimmelshue-Kearns '63
Michael Mellinger '18
Alexandra Minor '24
Erin O'Connell '91
Tae-shi Savage '24
Meg Gesner Shernisky '17
Lindsey Siferd '13
David Smith '92
Rose Ligsay Sutter '17
Nancy Yannayon '75

Student Members

Mary Govan '27
Augustin Horvatic '29

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Baltimore Metro:
Sophia Macek Rowe '19
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Megan Erikson '99
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Alex Hutt '05

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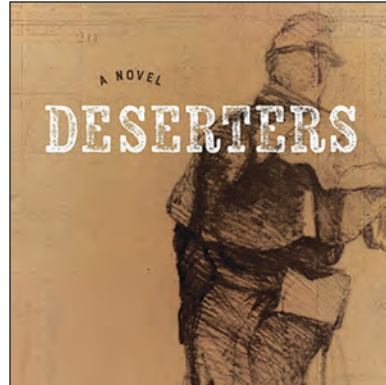
Nicolas Abrams '99

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Susan Dyer
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Elizabeth Graves '95
Bonnie Green '74
HSMC
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Steny H. Hoyer
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Heidi Murdy-Michael
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[PAGE 8]



[PAGE 12]



[PAGE 16]

OPPOSITE:

Sailboats on the St. Mary's River call to mind the scenic beauty of this waterfront campus.

FEATURES

PAGE 8

Deserters: A Novel

An excerpt from the latest novel by Associate Professor of English **Jerry Gabriel**.

PAGE 12

Avocados & Jellyfish

Highlighting the research of two of this year's SURF cohort.

PAGE 16

The Power of Community

Interview with first time filmmaker **Andre Jackson '04** about his documentary "Beyond Banners."

DEPARTMENTS

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

COVER: *Avocados & Jellyfish* are two of the many SURF studies going on every year at St. Mary's College of Maryland.

COVER PHOTO: *Avocado* image, Bernard DuPont@Wikimedia Commons

THERE IS SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF AN ACADEMIC YEAR at St. Mary's College of Maryland. Students return to the waterfront, classrooms and laboratories come alive, and new Seahawks begin discovering the people and experiences that will shape their time here. Each fall reminds us that while this is an extraordinary place, it is the people who make it a community.

That idea is especially meaningful this year as we explore our 2026–27 Essential Question: “What is community?” Throughout the year, we will consider that question across disciplines, experiences and perspectives. It is a fitting question for St. Mary's College, where students are known, challenged and supported, and where learning is shaped by the people, relationships and place around us.

This issue of *The Mulberry Tree* offers its own compelling answers. You will meet students whose summer research took them from studying bacteria found in wild avocados to examining jellyfish in the St. Mary's River. You will also meet alumnus **Andre Jackson '04**, whose documentary, “Beyond Banners,” explores family, mentorship and the people who continue to show up for one another. Together, these stories reflect the curiosity, relationships and hands-on learning at the heart of a St. Mary's education.

They also illustrate something fundamental about our identity as the National Public Honors College. We do not believe students should have to choose between rigor and relationships, individual attention and expansive opportunity, or excellence and public value. The power is in the combination—an education that challenges students to reach higher while providing the support and opportunities to discover what they can do with it.

That promise is guiding the implementation of our Strategic Plan, *Excellence Reimagined: Honors at the Helm*. A new research vessel will expand opportunities for learning and discovery on the St. Mary's River, while the newly launched St. Mary's Athenaeum will bring people and ideas together through scholarship, dialogue and engagement. These are just two of the ways we are building on what makes a St. Mary's education distinctive.

As you read this issue, I hope you will see that same spirit reflected in the accomplishments of our faculty, students and alumni. Wherever you are, I invite you to consider our Essential Question along with us: What is community?

Your continued connection to St. Mary's College is part of our answer.

Sincerely,

Rhonda



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

Editor's Note

FOR ME, A FAVORITE PART OF SUMMER at St. Mary's College is the Student Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) Symposium. It's a microcosm of what's special about SMCM as a whole.

Eleven students, each working with a faculty mentor, pursue their own self-designed project for eight intense weeks. During that time, the students live and learn together, forming their own thinktank. Late-night discussions and spontaneously helping each other with their projects add to the experience.

Soliel Paul '28 is now 40,000 words farther along in her novel. Mentored by **Jerry Gabriel**, associate professor of English, whose own novel is highlighted on p. 8, Paul has a podcast coming out this fall as part of the SlackWater Project (www.slackwateronline.org), another collaboration with Gabriel.

Riley Strohecker '27 has just presented her scientific discovery (!) at a state conference with her mentor, plant evolutionary ecologist **Lorena Torres Martinez**. More on that on p. 12.

I would have loved being a SURF-er back in my college days.

Don't take for granted the support that helps these students grow. SMCM faculty and staff provide guidance and resources to help them thrive. That support doesn't just happen by default: it's a commitment and a community not found at every college. It's woven into the fabric of this College and highlighted in this edition from cover to cover.

LEE CAPRISTO, *editor*

Welcome to these additions to the academy:

Christos Angelopoulos, (economics)

Ben Bechade, (biology)

Seung-Uk Huh, (political science & public policy)

Hannah Keats, (art)

Gisabel Leonardo, (ILC-Spanish)

Bryan Lloyd, (marine operations)

Blake Porter, (neuroscience)

Sondra J. Ragard, (business administration)

Justin Seffernick, (chemistry)

Sandeep Sthapit, (computer science)

Bofu Zheng, (marine science)

They'll be teaching and mentoring an incoming class from:

215
high schools

41
two- and four-year colleges

22 of 24
Maryland counties

21
countries

19
states + D.C.

Obama-Chesky Voyager Scholar

Samantha Peña '28, a double major in environmental studies and public policy, has been awarded the prestigious and highly competitive Obama-Chesky Voyager Scholarship for Public Service. Her public service focus is to provide access to fresh, whole foods and to green spaces in densely populated urban areas, particularly those with underserved populations.



Created by the Obamas and Brian

Chesky, co-founder and CEO of Airbnb, the Voyager Scholarship provides 100 rising college juniors each year the following:

Financial Aid: Up to \$25,000 per year ("last dollar" funding) for junior and senior years to reduce debt;

Self-Designed Summer Voyage Project: A \$10,000 stipend and free Airbnb housing to design a summer work-travel experience between junior and senior years;

Post-Graduation Travel: A \$2,000 Airbnb travel credit every year for 10 years (totaling \$20,000) to continue building global connections; and

Networking: Access to a network of Voyager leaders, mentors, and peers, including an annual fall summit in Chicago, Illinois.

Peña's application was supported by the College's National Fellowships and Awards Office, directed by Professor of English **Jennifer Cognard-Black**.



A signal cannon blast from the Maryland Dove indicated the early morning arrival of Dark Star, the first boat to cross the floating finish line at the 53rd Annual Governor's Cup Yacht Race, presented by PNC Bank, held July 31 - Aug 1, 2026. Dark Star was the first boat from the Potomac leg (2:42 a.m.) while Endorphin was the first to complete the Annapolis leg (6:44 a.m.) Racers and guests enjoyed live music, local food trucks and post-race activities which culminated in the awards ceremony and Hawaiian luau complete with hula dancers.

New Graduate Program at SMCM

St. Mary's College has a new graduate program beginning fall 2027— the master of arts in counseling and clinical psychology. This is the second graduate program offered at SMCM: the master of arts in teaching has been offered since 2006.

A new agreement with Towson University facilitates the matriculation of SMCM students as TU graduate students in nine master of science programs.



Seahawk Athletics Honors

4th consecutive United East Presidents' Cup

8 Rookies of the Year

9 Coaches of the Year

13 conference championships (school record)

15 Players of the Year

90 United East All-Academic Honors

91 Chi Alpha Sigma inductees for 3.5 GPA

BOARD & FOUNDATION NEWS



St. Mary's College of Maryland Trustee and alumnus **John C. Wobensmith '93** has received the Silver Bell Award, one of the maritime industry's highest honors, presented annually by the Seamen's Church Institute.

The Silver Bell Award recognizes exceptional leadership and service to the maritime community, honoring individuals whose contributions advanced the industry and supported the welfare of those who work at sea.

Wobensmith, chairman and CEO of Genco Shipping & Trading Limited, accepted the award during a ceremony held at Chelsea Piers in New York City. Making the occasion especially meaningful, the award was presented by his father, former Maryland Secretary of State John C. Wobensmith. SMCM Board Chair **John J. Bell '95** (shown with Wobensmith above) attended the ceremony.

In 2024, Wobensmith was inducted into the International Maritime Hall of Fame in recognition of his significant contributions to the maritime industry and global shipping community.

PRESIDENT'S NEWS

In August, **President Rhonda Phillips** presented at the 2026 conference of the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies (ISQOLS), held in Lexington, Kentucky. ISQOLS is an international organization dedicated to advancing research and practice related to quality of life and community well-being. Phillips co-led a featured workshop, "A Crash Course in Planning and Implementation of Community Indicators Projects" with M. Joseph "Joe" Sirgy, professor emeritus of marketing at Virginia Tech and a leading scholar in quality-of-life research.

Phillips' scholarship focuses on community and economic development, sustainability, and quality-of-life research. Throughout her career, she has worked with communities around the world to

develop strategies that strengthen civic engagement, resilience, and long-term prosperity. She currently serves on the ISQOLS Board of Directors and is a past president of the organization.

President Phillips welcomed two new vice presidents to her cabinet in July. **Elizabeth Mitchell** is the new Vice President for Advancement and Executive Director of the Foundation, effective July 13. She has held prior advancement leadership roles at Virginia Tech, George Washington University, the University of Maryland and Wheaton College. **Renée Morris**, M.Ed., APR, Fellow PRSA, joined the president's cabinet as Vice President for Communications and Marketing, effective July 1. She brings more than 30 years of communications and marketing experience, including leadership



1



2



3

roles at the University of Denver and Ohio University. She has also held interim executive leadership positions and served as a brand strategist with Carnegie Higher Ed. In October, **Sharief Hashim** joins the president's cabinet as Vice President for Athletics and Recreation. He joins the College from Susquehanna University with more than a decade of NCAA Div III leadership experience.

In June, **President Phillips**, joined by faculty members **Matthew Fehrs**, **Parisa Renaldi**, and **Andrew Cognard-Black** participated in the inaugural Partners in Peace Oslo Peace Congress in Oslo, Norway. The Partners in Peace (PiP) is a collaborative partnership between the National Collegiate Honors Council and the Nobel Peace Center. It provides honors students with an opportunity for personal leadership development through civic engagement, which often includes application of skill in conflict resolution and a desire for peace. PiP achieves this aim by introducing emerging honors student leaders and community change agents to recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize to expose



4

them to both theory and practice employed by those who constitute the community of Nobel Peace Laureates. **Isabella Batarseh '27** is SMCM's first PiP student ambassador. Her online course in peacework studies with her PiP cohort this fall will culminate in a trip to Oslo in December to participate in activities connected to the awarding of the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize.

[1] Elizabeth Mitchell, *Vice President for Advancement and Executive Director of the Foundation*. **[2] Renea Morris**, *Vice President for Communications and Marketing*. **[3] Sharief Hashim**, *Vice President for Athletics and Recreation*. **[4] President Phillips** with faculty members **Matthew Fehrs**, **Parisa Renaldi** and **Andrew Cognard-Black** attended the *Partners in Peace Oslo Peace Congress* in Oslo.

FACULTY & STAFF NEWS

Congratulations to these faculty who were promoted to full professor:

Katherine Koch, (educational studies)
James Mantell, (psychology)
Scott Mirabile, (psychology)
Barry Muchnick, (environmental studies)
Jennifer Tickle, (psychology)

Four SMCM faculty took part in the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Congress in Paris, France, in May:

- Assoc. Prof. of Spanish **Argelia González Hurtado** participated in the roundtable "Critical Reflection on Constructed Latinx Identities and Racialized Bodies in Visual and Textual Culture," which highlighted the recently published volume of the same title. During the session, she discussed her contribution to the collection. She also presented a

paper on Tzotzil cinema as part of a panel on regional cinemas.

- Assoc. Prof. of French **George MacLeod** organized the panel "Imagining Haiti Beyond Borders: Literature, Art, and Diasporic Worlds," where he presented research from his current project on the Haitian diaspora in Tijuana and Washington, D.C.
- Asst. Prof. of English **Jeanine Ortega** presented the paper "Mothering Otherwise: Kinship, Citizenship, and Queer Futures in Julio Torres's *Problemista*" as

part of a panel on Latin American queer cinema.

- Assoc. Prof. of Spanish **Ximena Postigo** delivered a presentation on neo-indigenist futurisms in Bolivian speculative literature during the panel "Reimagining the Andes: Dynamic Cartographies and Cultural Turns." As chair of the LASA Bolivia Section, she also led the section's business meeting, reporting on recent achievements and ongoing initiatives, and chaired a session on colonial violence in Bolivia.

José Ballesteros, chair and professor of international languages and cultures, has been appointed by



Maryland Governor Wes Moore as a member of the Governor's Commission on Hispanic and Latin American Affairs. He was appointed in June and is serving the remainder of a four-year term that began January 1, 2025. The Commission aims to advance equity, access, and opportunity for Hispanic and Latin American communities across Maryland. Ballesteros, who serves as faculty fellow for the College's Office of Belonging and Signature Scholars Programs, co-created the DeSousa-Brent Scholars Program at St. Mary's College.

Jennifer Cognard-Black, professor of English and an affiliated faculty member with the Women, Gender and Sexuality program, published an article, "Teaching Grandma Peg's Recipes," in the spring 2026 issue of *The Recipes Project: Art, Food, Magic, Science, Medicine*.

Together with colleagues Sydney Oakland and Jennifer Beers from University of Texas at Austin, Associate Professor of Psychology **Gili Freedman** recently published an article "Knowing versus doing: How much can training help people soften the blow of social rejection?" in the open-access *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* journal.



In May, Associate Professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies **Argelia González Hurtado** participated in the 62nd Congress of the Canadian Association of Hispanists, held in Salamanca, Spain. González Hurtado presented a paper on Maya cinema as part of a panel dedicated to regional cinemas in Latin America. She also took part in a roundtable discussion on her collaborative research project, "Cinematic Motherhood," during



Susan R. Johnson, *Small Combine No. 6 (Cool Cat)*, 2025, acrylic and wax painting with archival pigment print and image transfer on paper mounted on wood panel, 32" x 18"

which the research team shared updates on the project's progress and ongoing work.

Sue Johnson, professor of art, held her second solo exhibition at gallery neptune & brown in Washington, D.C., "Blueprint for Happiness." The exhibition ran from May 16 through June 20. The exhibition built on Johnson's previous series, "Symmetrical Bodies," debuting a new body of work entitled "My Teenage Years." The series, according to the artist, explores the 1960s-70s material and commercial culture. Johnson's work has been featured in over 50 solo exhibitions, over 100 group exhibitions and numerous permanent collections such as the Muscarelle Museum of Art, The Menil Collection and the Smithsonian American Art Museum Libraries.



Director of Counseling **Jessica "Jess" Jolly** presented her work at the Higher Education Suicide Prevention Coalition (HESPC) conference on May 21, at the University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania. Jolly's session was titled "Problem Gambling Prevention Strategies for University and College Populations." The regional conference, held annually, brings together higher education professionals to discuss relevant topics related to the overall wellness of students, faculty and staff on campuses and to increase efforts to prevent suicide.

Julia King, professor of anthropology, has been awarded \$100,000 from the Department of the Interior/National Park Service to develop a long-term Archaeological Resource Management Plan for the George Washington Birthplace National Monument in Colonial Beach, Virginia.



Felix Martinez, chief of police and director of public safety, earned the 2026 International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA) Award for Innovations in Community-Oriented Policing. The award, presented in Orlando, Florida, in June, honors leaders who are advancing new approaches to building trust, engagement, and safety within their communities. Among Martinez's most notable initiatives is "Beyond the Fade," which includes the "Barbershop Talk" series—creating culturally responsive spaces for open dialogue between students, campus leadership, and public safety professionals. Due to its success, the initiative is now expanding across the state of Maryland with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.



Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry **Pam Mertz** delivered her award speech for the William C. Rose Award at the annual meeting of the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) held March 7-10 at the Gaylord National Harbor Resort and Convention Center in National Harbor, Maryland. Awarded to Mertz last fall by the ASBMB, the William C. Rose Award for Exemplary Contributions to Education

recognizes an individual who, at the undergraduate and/or graduate/professional levels, demonstrates an exceptional contribution to the teaching of biochemistry and molecular biology with a demonstrated commitment to student learning and mentorship, pedagogical engagement and teaching innovation. Her recorded speech, "Finding and Building Your Community: Advance Together" can be viewed on YouTube. Mertz also gave three poster presentations during the annual meeting.

Assistant Professor of Physics **Digesh Raut** chaired the inaugural edition of the St. Mary's College Space STEM Camp, as a continuation of the free STEM Camp series for high school students from the tri-county Southern Maryland region, sponsored by The Patuxent Partnership. The instructional team also included SMCM faculty mem-

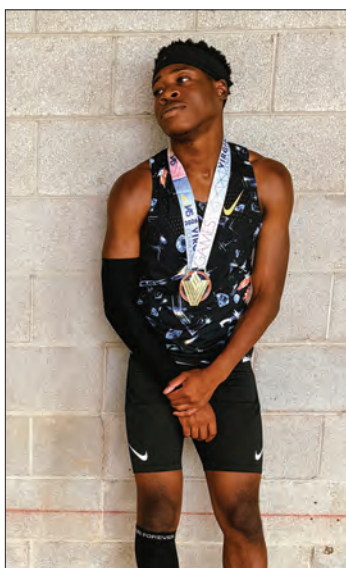


bers **Emily Barranca** (mathematics) and **Emily Brownlee** (biology), with assistance from SMCM students **Gillian Brewer '28** and **Amelia Fleming '27**. Held on campus in June, "Space Camp: From Lab to Launchpad" featured lectures, live demonstrations and interactive

hands-on activities focused on rocketry, space biology, broader space science and astronomical observations. The 28 students explored the fundamentals of rocket design, propulsion and aerodynamics by constructing and testing a variety of rocket models with different propulsion mechanisms. Students built and launched fizz rockets, stomp rockets and model rockets powered by commercial rocket engines.

Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies **Matt Wilfong** has been published in "Earth's Future" (AGU: Vol 14, Issue 7). He is co-author of "Urban Landscape Irrigation and the Future of Sustainable Cities" within that volume. The article proposes that while irrigation is necessary to sustain urban landscapes, it is often inefficiently managed in areas with water scarcity.

STUDENT NEWS



Jaedon Aso '26 became the Virginia Commonwealth Champion in the 400 meter dash in the 21 and up division during an open meet in Richmond, Virginia in July, with a time of 56.34 seconds. The open meet allowed Aso to compete against sprinters who run in NCAA Division I, 2 and 3 programs. Aso placed second in his age division in the 200 meter dash the same day, with a time of 23.92 seconds. Aso, who graduates in December, plans to compete unattached at various meets within Maryland and Virginia as he works up the ranks to one day earn a sponsorship and become a professional athlete.

Isabella Newman '27 and **Isabel Walder '27** have both received awards under the U.S. Department of State's prestigious Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship



Program to support a semester of study abroad. The Gilman Program is a highly competitive, merit-based scholarship intended to provide students with demonstrated financial need the opportunity to acquire skills that are essential to America's national security and economic prosperity.

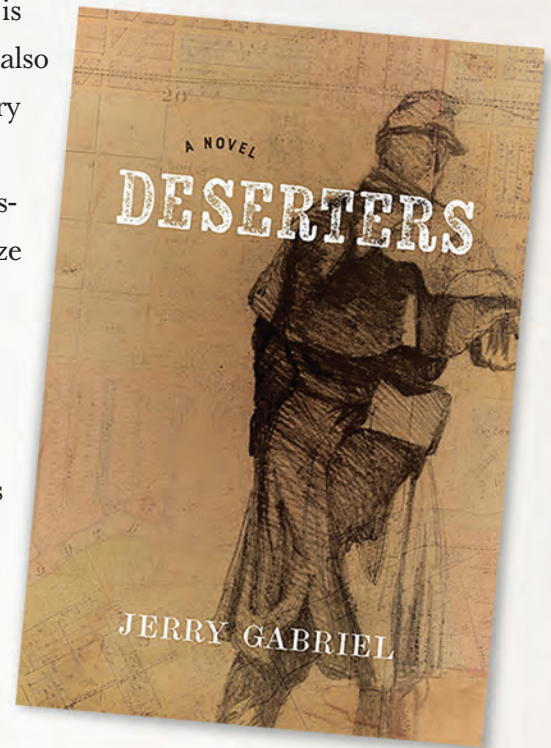
Isabella Newman will study in Perugia, Italy, during the fall 2026

semester, focusing on anthropology, ancient history, art history, environmental studies and Italian. She plans on a career as a curator in a museum, or perhaps in public events and education in the museum field.

Isabel Walder will study in Budapest, Hungary, during the spring 2027 semester. She will join the Budapest Semester in Mathematics program and looks forward to taking a class in algebraic combinatorics while there. Walder plans to pursue a Ph.D. in mathematics and become a teacher.

“Deserters: A Novel”

(Acre Books, 2026) is the latest release by Associate Professor of English **Jerry Gabriel**. He also is the author of two collections of stories, “The Let Go” (Queen’s Ferry Press, 2015) and “Drowned Boy” (Sarabande, 2010), which won the Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction, was a Barnes and Noble “Discover Great New Writers” pick and was awarded the 2011 Towson Prize for Literature. His stories have appeared in “One Story,” “Epoch,” “Fiction,” “The Missouri Review,” and “Alaska Quarterly Review,” among other publications. He has received grants and fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts (2004), the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference (2011), and the National Endowment for the Arts (2016). At St. Mary’s College, he teaches writing, is project director for “SlackWater: A Journal of Environmental and Cultural Change in Southern Maryland,” and former director of the Chesapeake Writers’ Conference.



This is an excerpt from “Deserters: A Novel.”

7

When Sean stepped onto the porch, the late-afternoon sun hung just over the hills, and heat emanated from the sunbaked boards. The stranger rested his hands on the railing and looked out at the street. He wore a once-black slouch hat—now faded a milky color—and, in spite of the temperature, a cracked leather duster. With the sun backlighting him, he appeared many shades of the same earthen hue.

Out on Main, the stage from Zenithville was pulling in. Several children held their heads out of the window, playing some kind of people-counting game. There had been no rain in weeks, and the horses and heavy wheels of the coach raised a cloud of dust in their wake, casting a wide, gritty net. The angling sun refracted through this nebula, revealing its startling particulate matter.

“Young man,” the man said without moving. “My name is Hank Carlide. I doubt you’ve heard of me.”

He turned toward Sean then, revealing his immense frame; he had to be over six feet tall. He wore a walrus mustache, which was what most gave him the lawman’s aspect—the sheriff, Blane Collison, had one, as did Collison’s new deputy. But this man had not shaved for a week, and the effect was odd, of the mustache and stubble together, a near beard. His unbuttoned duster revealed a navy Colt on either hip. From there, Sean’s eye

went to the man's horse, an enormous and beautiful spotted thing tethered to the hitch outside the gate. There, in scabbards on the animal's flanks, he saw two more firearms, lever-action Henrys, he thought, based on the stock's shape.

"You're not a friend of my father's," Sean told him. His father did have friends, of a sort, but he was a particular person, full of incongruities and prejudices and a disposition that would make a friendship with this character impossible, something obvious to Sean on first glance. This man was the embodiment of violence. Insofar as his father had friends, they were not the powerful but the tinkers, the canal men, the mill operator.

"Your father," Hank Carlide said pensively. He shook his head and paused, still watching the coach, before finally adding, "Not exactly."

"What do you want?" Sean said. He could smell the man's acrid odor from all the way across the porch, a mix of the smoke of wet wood, sweat, and dirt on the unbathed body.

"I bet a smart young'un like you can answer that question for yourself," Carlide said.

"I wouldn't have come out to meet you were I clairvoyant," Sean told him.

"Well," Carlide said, swiveling his neck to spit tobacco juice onto Mrs. Miller's azaleas, which the late-summer sun had desiccated. "I'm looking for Robert Riley."

"He's not here," Sean said quickly.

"Let me finish, young man." Carlide leaned his lower back against the railing.

"I ain't yet told you what for."

"Doesn't change anything for me," Sean said. "He's still not here."

"I doubt that's true. But I'll tell you, just in case you get it in your head to do something dumb: His name is on a list I obtained in your state's capital, compiled by the War Office in Washington, D.C., from reports that each regiment, state or federal, sends out periodically to alert provosts and other officials of a certain sort of misconduct. On this particular list are 889 names of men who have made a miscalculation. We could say these are men who have had a moment of terrible weakness. They have deserted their regiments—usually at the hour of truth. Comprendes?"

"The hour of truth," Sean repeated, as if pondering the phrase.

"When those around him are depending on him to be counted, is what I mean."

"I understand," Sean said. "It is less clear what the list has to do with my father, and above all, your jurisdiction in this matter."

Carlide grinned. "Patience, as my father said, surpasses learning."

"I would say that the contest between the two is case by case," Sean said.



At St. Mary's College, Associate Professor of English **Jerry Gabriel** teaches writing, is project director for "Slack Water: A Journal of Environmental and Cultural Change in Southern Maryland," and former director of the Chesapeake Writers' Conference.



The Chesapeake Writers' Conference (CWC) marked its thirteenth year in June 2026 with a sold-out roster of 58 participants for the week-long retreat at St. Mary's College.

Participants come with many different levels of experience, but most are trying to find a path forward with their writing, be it revising current work or soliciting a publisher.

Feedback for the conference has always been glowing, with writers offering highest praise for the faculty workshop leaders and guest speakers (along with the beautiful waterfront location).

Jerry Gabriel, former conference director and frequent CWC faculty member, says that he and current director **Crystal Oliver** "have always prioritized bringing in faculty and speakers who understand the importance of fostering a rich and supportive learning environment—and who connect with the participants both in the classroom and in less formal ways during the week—at meals or walking along the path or in between events over coffee." Those interactions, he adds, are central to what makes the CWC an extraordinary experience (and a great investment) for writers looking to expand their writing world.

Gabriel credits Oliver with helping the conference to flourish. "Crystal has done a remarkable job at making the conference visible to writers in the Mid-Atlantic and beyond, through social media and other forms of marketing," he says. "And because of this, the conference has hit a level of critical mass in terms of awareness, which is all it ever needed, because the experience speaks for itself."

Oliver (who is also a member of the SMCM English faculty) augmented CWC's social media presence (aided by student conference assistant **Allison Glaser '26** and CWC student scholars who intern with Oliver)

RIGHT: *Riverside writers at the Chesapeake Writers' Conference.*



Puffing air from his mouth, Carlide looked up the street, nearly empty now, its dust settled. "One thing is clear: You—and I would include your absent little brother in this—have been without a steady hand for an extended period. Whatever arrangement you have with these folks is not working out so well as hoped, I would say, and is laying bare the truth that what matters most is who you come from."

"Does misconduct result from the teachings or from the example set by the teachers themselves?" Sean asked. "Or is there a third possibility that it is both?"

"In my day, boys would not have thought of talking such to a gentleman."

"If you passed for a gentleman in that halcyon era," Sean said, "then the awarding of such status must've been granted as a frontier courtesy."

Carlide closed his eyes lazily. "You do much to confirm my suspicions that your father is in the bushes hereabouts," he said, opening his eyes again. "Your demeanor is at one with concealment. I have seen it many times. Frankly, I'm surprised that whatever deputy provost lives here hasn't found him out already."

"My best guess is because he's just not here," Sean said.

"It's a curious thing that you don't seem surprised I'm looking for your dear old pa."

"What is left to surprise anyone, Mr. Carlide?" Sean asked. "That twenty-five thousand men could be killed in an afternoon? In any case, you have not answered my question."

"I am a private detective, young man," he said curtly. "My employment currently is in service to my country. Mr. Lincoln has spoken on the urgency of this matter."

"That's part of an answer," Sean said. "But what is it exactly that makes you exempt from the contest and at the same time so perfectly suited to this other, less noble role?"

"Firstly, I have already served my country in battle, in Mexico."

"Ifreann na Fola," Sean said, which he knew meant something severe, though not exactly what. "That was less a war than a disagreement."

Carlide seemed wounded by this. "If you had been where I was, you would not see it that way."

Sean merely stared at him.

"There's a role for everyone in these current hostilities," Carlide said. "You'll find yours soon. I would say six months, by the looks of the peach fuzz on your lip."

"At fifty or sixty dollars a head," Sean said, "your first interest is for yourself, whatever the president has spoken on."

"Listen, you insolent cur," Carlide said mildly. "I am engaged in a very personal and taxing fight to save our Union, one man at a time. As a byproduct, I should hope to help these men avoid the gallows, for you know that is one possible outcome. And it is only thirty-five a head."

"We both know the army would be hard-pressed to dispense with a single soldier."

"Deserting one's regiment is an offense against the federal government, as you of course know. Your father, Mr. Robert Riley, Hollis, Ohio, is accused, too, of another, more troubling offense: jumping bounties."

Sean observed placidly as Carlide pulled a sheet of paper from the inside pocket of his jacket.

"Should I educate you in the finer points of this infraction?" Receiving no reply, Carlide pulled a watch chain from a vest pocket, glanced at the time. "You can see that I have been traveling for many days through rough and hostile country. What they now are calling West Virginia is as terrible a place as any three Georgias."

"You have made this bed for yourself."

Carlide exhaled audibly. "Let me bring to a close our conference, young man, by making quite clear where things stand. I have come here to find your father to return him to the proper authorities, who will then, if he is very lucky, return him to his unit, which I believe is the Ohio 485th, currently engaged in Virginia, near the Rebel capital."

"Okay," Sean said. "Go and find my father, but please stop abusing me with falsehoods and pieties. The provost is Bill Lorie. If you would like to take up your query with him, you'll find him drunk at Albert's."

"They told me you were a clever one."

"I don't need to be clever to see through you," Sean said.

Carlide lifted himself from the railing. "I will be at the hotel over yon while I smoke out your old man," he said. "I'll meanwhile have an eye on you. And your brother if he ever returns."

"Use your time as you see fit. I hope they have gotten the hotel clear of rats. Earlier in the summer, they were a terrible scourge in that part of the town." Turning toward the door, he added, "They are the Norway kind, if you've seen them. Put you in mind of a muskrat or, if you're not looking close, a small beaver." ♦



TOP: Writers group meeting during the Chesapeake Writers' Conference.

LEFT: Jerry Gabriel talking with a group at the Chesapeake Writers' Conference.

and invested in targeted paid digital advertising. "For building regional awareness, tabling in Baltimore this past spring at the Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP) Conference & Bookfair was fantastic," she says. "It was an incredible opportunity for us and for our student scholars who attended."

Oliver is tireless in her efforts to get the word out, to recruit the faculty, the publishing experts, the student scholars, and to help interested writers enroll in the CWC. She is equally tireless as host for the conference, working through the logistics of room reservations, food service, transportation, activity planning, all while making each guest feel welcome and ready to thrive as a writer.

Conference alumni often stay in touch, forming organic writing groups of their own. Last year, Oliver introduced a CWC Scholars Reading Series held on campus during the academic year to nurture her student scholars. "The event gives those scholars, gifted writers themselves, an opportunity to present their work in a formal way to the broader campus community," she says, adding that "it helps to spread the word to current students so they can get involved, either as participants or scholars themselves."

www.smcm.edu/cwc



AVOCADOS &

AVOCADO IMAGE, BERNARD DUPONT/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



JELLYFISH

BY LEE CARRISTO, EDITOR

Seahawk Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF)

Mulberry Tree magazine published highlights of SURF projects in the 2024 fall issue from that summer cohort. The selective eight-week program is funded by generous support from the Division of Academic Affairs, the Byrd SURF Fund and other internal sources at St. Mary's College.

The 2026 SURF program, co-directed by Associate Professor of Neurobiology **Sarah Latchney** and Associate Professor of English **Jerry Gabriel**, was formed of 11 students with their faculty mentors, working together on directed research and creative work. Here we highlight the research of two of this year's cohort.

WILD AVOCADO ENDOPHYTES

Biology major **Riley Strohecker '27** loves biotechnology and plans to pursue a Ph.D. to work in biofuels, films and plastics. Her SURF project reveals her determination to do just that.

Production of traditional plastics derived from fossil fuel comes with a high carbon footprint and a long carbon chain, making them slow to break down. Plastics have become a major contributor to worldwide environmental pollution. Strohecker's SURF project started from the position that a sustainable alternative to conventional plastics is polyhydroxyalkanoate (PHA), a natural, bio-renewable polymer produced inside stressed bacteria as an energy reserve. Endophytes – the bacteria and fungi living within plant tissue – show promise as high PHA producers. At the suggestion of her mentor, plant evolutionary ecologist **Lorena Torres Martinez, Ph.D.**, Strohecker investigated wild avocado endophytes.

Strohecker described her study this way:

"I performed the molecular characterization and diversity assessment of endophytic bacteria among the three *Persea* species and evaluated their ability to produce PHA....A total of 50 endophytic bacterial isolates were identified by amplifying and Sanger-sequencing the 16S rRNA gene. I discovered 11 unique bacterial species, with even distribution of species richness across *Persea* species. I evaluated the PHA production of these 11 unique species by exposing bacteria grown on petri dishes to a Sudan Black B solution. Six out of the 11 unique bacterial species were able to produce PHA, with five species newly identified as PHA producers."

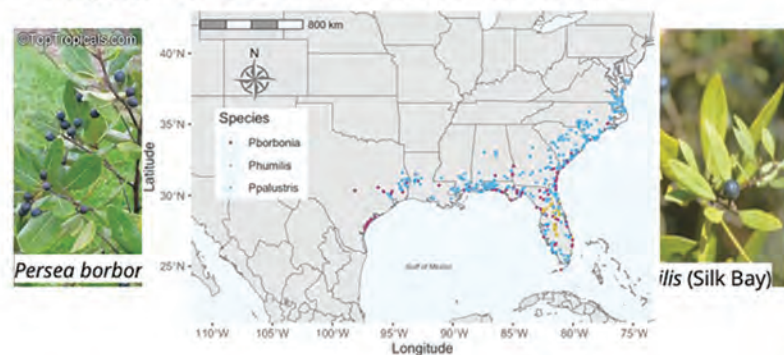
It's that final sentence that stands out: Strohecker discovered during her SURF project five species not previously identified as PHA producers.

She and Torres Martinez presented the discovery and study results at the Maryland Native Plant Society Conference held at the University of Maryland College Park on Sept. 12-13.

This fall, Strohecker continues her investigation as her St. Mary's Project. Using fermentation and chloroform extraction methods, she'll further assess the viability of the PHA-producing endophytes of wild avocados for their potential in sustainable bioplastics.



Endophytes of Wild Avocados in the US



ABOVE: This fall, Strohecker continues her investigation as her St. Mary's Project. RIGHT: Using fermentation and chloroform extraction methods, she'll further assess the viability of the PHA-producing endophytes of wild avocados for their potential in sustainable bioplastics.





JELLYFISH

Mentored by **Lauren Cook, Ph.D.**, marine science major **Liam Sanders '27** investigated nitrogen's effect on Atlantic Bay Nettle (jellyfish) abundance in the St. Mary's River. Citing past research suggesting that jellyfish thrive under high-nutrient conditions that may cause low-oxygen environments, he hypothesized that he would find this to be true during his test period.

"Jellyfish blooms happen for many reasons. One of those reasons may be eutrophication. Eutrophication is the enrichment of water by excess nutrients like phosphorous and nitrogen," Sanders explained, adding that sometimes the increased nitrogen causes large algal blooms. "Once these algal blooms die off, they sink to the bottom, where bacteria consume lots of oxygen decomposing the dead algae. This can create oxygen dead zones (hypoxia). These dead zones kill off other species, like stationary organisms such as oysters and barnacles, and drive off fish, but can increase jellyfish concentration since they can tolerate low oxygen. So, more nitrogen could indirectly create an environment favoring jellyfish."

However, Sanders found the nitrogen levels in the river to be extremely low during his test period. "This was great news from a water-quality standpoint but did not allow me to experiment with my hypothesis under high nitrogen concentrations as I had wanted," he admitted. "That's just how natural sciences go sometimes. You don't always get to witness the results you were looking for and are sometimes left with more questions than answers."

He knew from his research that water temperature and salinity together influenced jellyfish abundance in the Chesapeake Bay (optimal conditions for jellyfish being 78.8-86 degrees Fahrenheit and 10-16 parts per thousand), so he looked there as a next step.

Like excess nitrogen, warmer water temperatures also can cause hypoxia, since warm water does not hold as much dissolved oxygen as cool does. Water temperature also contributes to water stratification. "Water stratification is when the water column separates into layers based on differences in temperature and/or salinity," Sanders explained. "When there isn't stratification, surface water mixes with deeper water replacing oxygen throughout the water column. When stratification occurs, there is a separation between oxygenated surface water and deeper water. During this time, bacteria use oxygen to break down organic material which lowers the oxygen levels in deeper water, creating a dead zone."

Now in his senior year, Sanders will pursue through his St. Mary's Project the connection of hypoxia caused by water stratification and jellyfish abundance. ♦



TOP: Sanders will investigate as his St. Mary's Project the connection of hypoxia caused by water stratification and jellyfish abundance. BOTTOM: Assoc. Prof. of Marine Science **Cassie Gurbisz** and students collect water samples from the St. Mary's River.



Spencer Way '07 appears as the current Gwynn Park basketball coach in “Beyond Banners” the new documentary by first-time filmmaker **Andre Jackson '04**.

THE POWER O

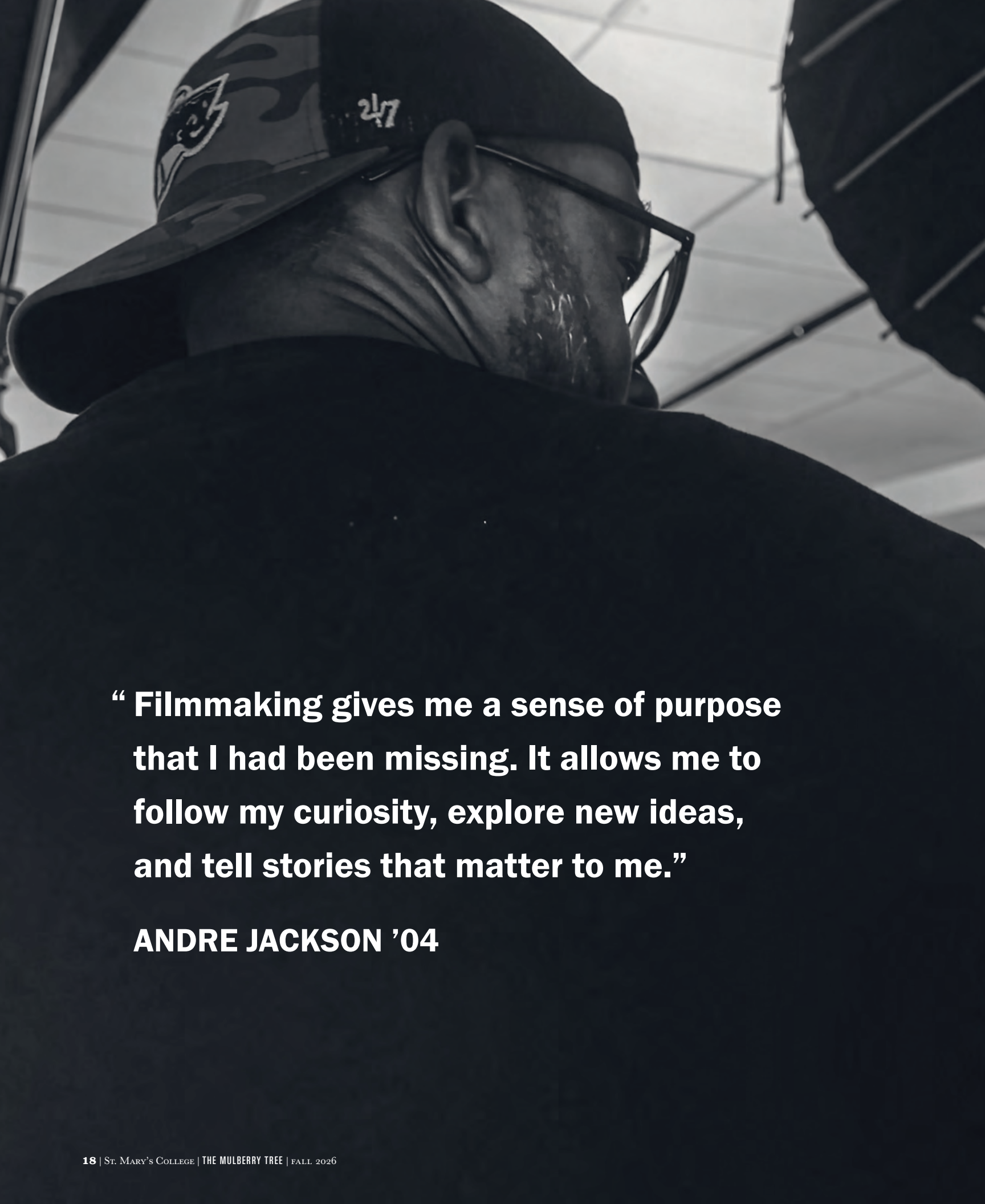
“Beyond Banners” is a new documentary from first-time filmmaker **Andre Jackson '04**, exploring the power of community through the story of the Gwynn Park High School basketball powerhouse, with 10 state championship titles over a 20-year period.

The film includes St. Mary’s College alumni and Seahawks Hall of Famers **Walter “Shorty” Simmons '75** and **Donnee Gray '76**, who got their start at Gwynn Park. **Michael Glick '88** and **Spencer Way '07** also appear as former and current Gwynn Park coaches, respectively. Tubby Smith, who coached Gwynn Park rival Great Mills in the 1970s, also appears in the film.

The Mulberry Tree magazine caught up with Jackson in August to learn more.



F COMMUNITY



“ Filmmaking gives me a sense of purpose that I had been missing. It allows me to follow my curiosity, explore new ideas, and tell stories that matter to me.”

ANDRE JACKSON '04

From Human Studies to Cybersecurity

I've always been interested in why people make the decisions they do. At St. Mary's College, that curiosity drew me to human studies, an interdisciplinary program in psychology, sociology and anthropology.

The September 11 attacks occurred one year before I arrived at SMCM. As the country responded, I began to see how my interest in human behavior could be applied to the growing field of counterterrorism.

After graduating in 2004, I joined a federal contractor supporting FEMA, where I helped develop counterterrorism training programs for state and local first responders.

By 2011, cybersecurity had become an increasingly important national security issue. I moved into a consulting role, helping the federal government acquire cybersecurity products and services. That path eventually led me to roles at Capital One and Amazon.

From Cybersecurity to Filmmaking

After nearly twenty years in security and technology, including almost five years at Amazon, I knew I was ready for a different chapter.

My path into documentary filmmaking was unexpected. The idea for "Beyond Banners" came while I was sitting in a barber's chair. My barber said they did not want their child to attend Gwynn Park [High School] because it was considered a "football school." I could not shake that comment. It made me think about the basketball program that helped shape me and I felt a responsibility to document the program's history for future generations.



TOP: Director of Photography Everett Ray, right, and a crew member line up a shot during filming of "Beyond Banners" in the Gwynn Park community of Prince George's County. ABOVE: Gwynn Park High School Principal Naima Hopkins-Vinson. OPPOSITE: Andre Jackson on set.



I founded ANSON Pictures in late 2024 and resigned from Amazon in April 2025 to pursue the documentary full time. It was a leap of faith, but it was the right decision.

A Tough New Job

Directing and producing “Beyond Banners” required me to be intentional, resourceful and persistent. I had to build a crew, secure interviews, find locations, obtain written approvals, raise money, and call in favors when I did not have the budget or industry connections to do things the traditional way. I was fortunate to have the support of the Gwynn Park community and its alumni, which made an enormous difference.

I was also careful about who I brought onto the team. Because I was so close to the subject, I wanted people around me who were not. My assistant director and editor knew very little about basketball and had no connection to Gwynn Park. They asked questions I would not have thought to ask because I already knew the people and the place. Their perspective helped us tell the story in a way that people outside the community could understand.

I also had to learn nearly every part of filmmaking as I went, including directing interviews, planning shoots, managing a crew, raising money, working through the editing process, and thinking about distribution. At Amazon and Capital One, I was accustomed to having established teams and resources around me. With “Beyond Banners,” most things began and ended with me.

Ejected from the Game — Nearly

This past spring, Jackson survived back-to-back cardiac arrests. Ten days after leaving the hospital, he returned to the set.

The experience changed what finishing the film meant to me. Before the cardiac

“Looking back, I appreciate how much SMCM prepared me for this work. The college taught me to ask better questions, examine ideas from different perspectives, and let evidence rather than assumptions shape my conclusions.”

arrests, I was focused on making the best film I could. Afterward, I understood that time is not promised. Finishing “Beyond Banners” became more urgent. I was grateful to still have the opportunity.

The experience also changed how I led. Too much of the film lived in my head, so I became more intentional about involving my wife, Rashea, who is also an executive producer, and my assistant director, Sue O’Hora, in key decisions. I wanted them to understand where things stood and how to carry the film forward if I couldn’t.

Documenting the Life Force of a Community

I began the film expecting to hear stories about great teams, important games and championship seasons. Those stories were there, but people kept returning to something deeper. They talked about coaches who became father figures, generations of families who filled the gym, and former players who returned to support the next generation.

Basketball was no longer the destination. It became the lens into a larger story about family, mentorship, and the people who kept showing up for one another.

The film also looks beyond Gwynn Park at how the Amateur Athletic Union, recruiting, transfers and Name/Image/Likeness deals are changing public school basketball and the communities around it. My hope is that someone watches “Beyond Banners” and decides their own community is worth showing up for. ❖

OPPOSITE PAGE: *Jackson interviews former Gwynn Park head coach Larry Gandee (1968-1981)*

Follow the story:
beyondbannersdocumentary.com

ALUMNI CONNECTION

CLASS NOTES

1970s

Chris Kohler '73 published his second multicultural suspense novel, "Whistling Cay: For Love or Gold?" The novel takes place in the United States and British Virgin Islands, where Chris taught three aquatic ecology courses for the School for Field Studies and led two Earthwatch programs. The novel is available on Amazon in hardcover, paperback and Kindle e-book forms.

1980s

Peggy Fowler '89 was named a house director in the housing and residential life department at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Peggy previously worked at Dulles International Airport for 15 years and Tulane University for three years.

1990s

Alasdair Brooks '90 was named curator of the upcoming Museum of Baptism at the UNESCO World Heritage site in Juwafat al-Kafrayn, Jordan. Known as "Bethany Beyond the Jordan," this archaeological site sits on the eastern bank of the Jordan River and is believed to be the location of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. Archaeology at the site dates from the Chalcolithic through Ottoman periods, but the core archaeological focus is a series of late Roman through Byzantine church ruins which mark the traditional baptism site. The area is being redeveloped as part of a major



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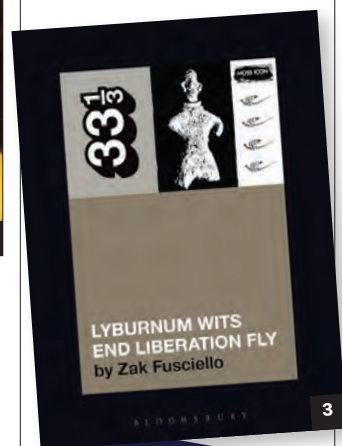
initiative backed by the Jordanian government to significantly improve the visitor experience offered at the site. Alasdair will lead the curatorial content and logistical support for the new museum, which is due to open in January 2030 to commemorate the 2000th anniversary of Jesus' baptism.

Robin Flanigan '92 [1]

published her fifth book, "Secret Rochester: A Guide to the Weird, Wonderful, and Obscure," with Reedy Press. In addition to being a freelance journalist, Robin has also authored three other books, including the celebrity-endorsed children's book, "M is for Mindful," which is used in homes, schools and therapy offices.

Illene Frank '96 [2] was appointed executive director and CEO of the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History in May. The Connecticut Museum of Culture and History is a private, nonprofit organization established in 1825, located in the historic West End of Hartford.

Illene has served the museum for a decade in previous positions as the deputy executive director and chief strategy officer and the chief curator. During this time, the museum received state and national recognition. In her new role, she will oversee the museum's staff and budget, as well as continue working with all stakeholders to support the museum's long-term goals and strategic planning.



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Zak Fuscillo '96 [3] published his first book, titled "Lynburnum Wits End Liberation Fly," which explores the evolution and development of the legendary Annapolis post-punk band, Moss Icon, and the titular 1993 album. The book is part of Bloomsbury's 33 1/3 series, which is a series of short books about popular music through history. The book will be available for purchase in November through the Bloomsbury website.

2000s

Jody Costa Snyder '02 [4] published a book for professional marketers, titled "Marketing Maestro: A New Approach to Orchestrating Your B2B Career." The book will be available for purchase in October.

Melissa Fourcade Adams '04

[5] published her debut novel, "Meet Me in the Graveyard," a paranormal coming-of-age romance set at St. Mary's College of Maryland. The story follows Colby, a ghost who appeals to Emmy, a freshman, to help him pass on to the afterlife. Secondary characters include real figures from St. Mary's County history, including Moll Dyer and a Yacomico indigenous man. "Meet Me in the Graveyard" is available on Amazon in hardcover, paperback and Kindle e-book forms.

Stephanie M. Simmons

Chesney '05 was named the vice office managing partner of the Boston office of Cozen O'Connor, as well as the co-chair for the Strategic Risk & Complex Litigation Group of Cozen O'Connor, a full-service law firm based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



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George Connelly '07 was appointed to the Harrietstown Town Council near Saranac Lake, New York. He also cleared the democratic primary to appear on the ballot in November, running unopposed. Previously, George worked on local, state and federal campaigns and did fundraising and campaign management. Putting his political science degree to good use, George is proud to be practicing local government in his new appointment.

Aubrey Delaney '07 and Amanda Collins Pierce '08

[6] discovered nine years ago that they live down the street from each other in Durham, North Carolina, and now serve together on the PTA board for their future Seahawks' school.



Robert "T.J." Jordan '08 has been named head basketball coach for McDaniel College in Westminster, Maryland. T.J. was previously head coach for Notre Dame of Maryland University.

2010s

Stephanie Klapper '10 [7] was named a 2026 Leading Woman Under 40 by The Daily Record. Winners were selected based on their professional experience, community involvement and commitment to inspiring change. Stephanie has advocated for access to quality, affordable health care for all Marylanders since 2014 with the Maryland Health Care for All Coalition.



Monica Louzon '12 [8] published her fifteenth speculative Spanish-English translation in March 2026 with foofaraw press. Her translations, stories, essays and poems have appeared in over 35 publications around the world, and her story "9 Dystopias" was a Best Microfiction 2023 winner. She has three more speculative translations forthcoming in 2026. To learn more about Monica and her work, please visit <https://linktr.ee/molowrites>.

Alex Walls '13 [9] was promoted to the rank of major in the United States Marine Corps on Jan. 1, 2026. He also took command of the Headquarters Company, Force Headquarters Group, Marine Corps Forces Cyber Command aboard Fort George G. Meade in Maryland.

Five recent alumni have been tapped for the Peace Corps:

Ariana Lecouras '25 will work in Paraguay as a community environmental promoter.

Michael Wade '25 is planning to work in Nepal in the community forestry program.

Emma Shepard '26 will head to Namibia as a health promoter, focused on HIV/AIDS prevention and training.

Allison Thress '26 will serve in The Gambia as a primary education teacher trainer, working alongside local teachers to refine teaching strategies.

Cho-Cho Williams '26 will serve in Kosovo as a community development facilitator.

Alumni Council Profile

By Cathy Hernandez Ray '78

Ken Benjes '11, MAT '12, serves on the Alumni Council's Executive Committee as the Vice President of Chapter Activities. In conjunction with the Alumni Relations Office, he liaises with the alumni chapter presidents to help identify, plan and coordinate their local chapter events. These events include Bay to Bay Service Day projects, faculty lectures and social gatherings like the annual Orioles game hosted by the Baltimore chapter.



Originally from Middle River, Ken is married to fellow St. Mary's College graduate **Alexa Milroy, '12**. They currently live in the Butchers Hill neighborhood of Baltimore, along with their two cats, Larry and George. He is the general manager of the Roland Park Swimming Pool during the summer, and "in the off season" is entering his fifteenth year as a high school psychology teacher in Baltimore County.

Ken graduated in 2011 with a history major/educational studies minor, and in 2012 received his Master of Art in Teaching (MAT) in secondary education. Extracurricular activities included St. Mary's Ultimate Team (SMUT), Hawk Radio, Student Government Association (SGA) vice-president, and writing and maintaining a blog, SMCM LOL.

Joining the council was an opportunity to reconnect. "I wanted to reconnect with my alma mater and when the position became available, I took on the role of vice president of chapter activities primarily to ensure we restarted the annual Baltimore Orioles game (Mission accomplished!). It's been great supporting the MAT program's summer camp, which is the first time our new teachers get to interact with students. I also LOVE getting to mentor a student each year; it's so fun hearing about what's going on around campus while giving them life advice."

St. Mary's College was a place that gave him the freedom to experiment and express himself. He circles back to his blog as one of his favorite memories, an experience that helped shape his career. He posted campus news that he describes as "somewhere between The Onion and yellow journalism." From the first post (a smoothie from the Daily Grind review) and as the blog evolved, "I learned how to write, cultivate an audience, and develop a communication style that has been huge in my professional career. That singular project changed the trajectory of my life in many ways."

Ken thinks the College's uniqueness comes from a variety of sources. "St. Mary's is this little village where you can do whatever you want, if you have the will and ability. Look at the people who started Bottom County festival, who started the campus farm, who transformed Hawk Radio into an internet station. You can just do whatever you want, fail, flail, and then succeed here," he explained. "I think there's a lot more room for that at St. Mary's than other places. The people who started and worked on the campus farm? Still farming. Brooks, who transformed Hawk Radio, is still in that A/V industry and thriving. Paul Reed Smith was building guitars on campus and now runs a multi-million-dollar custom guitar company!"

He vividly recalled his orientation weekend and the Orientation Leaders telling them, "'this is the greatest place, and you only get four years of it, five if you're lucky' and we took that as gospel immediately, imbued it into our souls, and never stopped."

For Ken, it all started at a small village where you can pursue projects and keep pushing until it works, like writing a blog and watching it take hold.

Alumni Awards

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 Bonnie M. Green Alumni Center.

Nominations for the 2027 alumni awards will open this fall. For more information about nominating a deserving candidate for any of the listed three awards, please visit www.smcm.edu/alumni/get-involved or contact the Office of Alumni Relations at 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 2026 recipient of the Outstanding Young Alumni Award is **Captain Andrew Wilhelm '16**, a prolific leader in the U.S. Army. Since his time majoring in public policy at St. Mary's College of Maryland, Andrew has climbed up the ranks as an officer, including impressive titles

such as platoon leader, executive officer, brigade engineer and company commander. Additionally, during his service with the 82nd Airborne Division, Andrew commanded airborne engineer units responsible for maintaining readiness to deploy worldwide on short notice in support of critical military operations. Today, Andrew guides the professional development and career progression of the Army's future leaders as the Junior Captains Career Manager with the U.S. Army Human Resources Command at Fort Knox. Throughout his illustrious career in the U.S. Army, Andrew has demonstrated his commitment to leadership, service, integrity, empowering others, trust, accountability, inclusion and professional growth.

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 2026 recipient of the Society of Distinguished Alumni Award is **Diana Bloom Hawley '96**.

Diana often credits her time at St. Mary's College of Maryland, where she majored in psychology with a concentration in child development, as a large part of the development of her

leadership, critical thinking and teamwork skills that have been essential to her career journey and success. In 2018, she was elected to the Cecil County Board of Education and re-elected in 2022, serving as both vice president and president and championing educational excellence, student achievement and equitable opportunities for all learners. Diana currently serves as President of the Maryland Association of Boards of Education, representing school systems and students across the state, and advocating for strong public schools and meaningful educational opportunities. In addition to her dedication to public education, Diana is a consistently engaged St. Mary's College of Maryland alum, previously serving both on the Alumni Council and as the chapter president of the Washington D.C. Metro Alumni Chapter. Diana has committed her career to the philosophy that every student deserves the opportunity to learn, grow and reach their full potential, and she embodies the St. Mary's Way through her leadership, advocacy and service to public education.

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 2026 recipient of the Honorary Alumni Award is **Jeffrey J. Byrd, PhD**, who devoted more than 35 years to St. Mary's College of Maryland, not only as a professor, but also as a mentor, author, researcher, administrator and overall campus leader. Jeff joined the faculty as a biology professor in 1990, teaching courses in microbiology, genetics, virology and infectious diseases. Beyond the classroom, Jeff served as chair of the biology department, associate provost and interim vice president for the Division of Academic Affairs. Outside of his service to St. Mary's College of Maryland, Jeff also served as editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Microbiology & Biology Education* and as commissioner for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. During his time at St. Mary's College of Maryland, Jeff was an advocate for undergraduate research and student success, mentoring many St. Mary's Projects and establishing opportunities for students to pursue research and scientific discovery. Additionally, Jeff supported initiatives outside academics, including athletics, alumni events and campus traditions. Since retiring, Jeff continues to serve St. Mary's College of Maryland as professor emeritus of biology. Jeff's legacy of generosity, leadership and learning lives on in the countless students, faculty and staff that he mentored.



Kezia Osunsade '18 joined Darden Restaurants as their senior counsel, securities and finance. In this role, she focuses on corporate governance, securities law and SEC disclosure matters. Based in Orlando, Florida, Kezia supports the company's public company and compliance functions across its portfolio of restaurant brands, including Olive Garden, Ruth's Chris Steak House, LongHorn Steakhouse and The Capital Grille.

Reilly Cook '19 [10] was awarded Coach of the Year for her work as the SMCM Equestrian Hunt Seat Team Coach in the Intercollegiate Horse Showing Association Zone 4 Region 1 (Z4R1). She has been coaching the SMCM equestrian team for six years. Within this time, she has taken members of the team to regional finals almost every year and to Zone Championship finals in 2024 and 2025. This was her first year as the head coach; she previously served five years as assistant coach. The award was granted at the Z4R1 Regional Championships, where intermediate rider **Sara Tucker '28** competed and won eighth place in Limit Equitation Under Saddle.

2020s

Gerald Sayles III '21 works as a library technician at the Library of Virginia. He is a recent graduate from Louisiana State University with an M.L.I.S. along with a graduate certificate in archival studies. Gerald earned an M.A. in World War II Studies at Arizona State University in fall 2022. This past year he volunteered as a project participant with the Congressional Research Service's metadata program, manually capturing the metadata of historical bill summaries dating back to 1935 to make them machine-digestible.

Darah Schillinger '22, community-engaged learning coordinator at St. Mary's College of Maryland, graduated from the Leadership Southern Maryland Emerging Leaders Program this past spring.

Brayan Ruiz Lopez '24, doctoral candidate in neurobiology at Duke University, is a 2026 recipient of the Ruth K. Broad Foundation Research Award for Graduate Students. The year-long award supports graduate students conducting high-potential basic and translational neuroscience research and provides funding for stipend, health insurance, and tuition remission. Brayan's research investigates the molecular identities and functional properties of interstitial white matter neurons in the human neocortex.

Elise Kinyanjui '25 published an article in *Alzheimer's & Dementia*. Her paper, "The influence of midlife multimorbidity clusters and dementia risk: The ARIC Study," examines how different midlife comorbidities impact dementia risk using a machine-learning approach. The study uses a machine learning model to analyze data from

the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) cohort, which is an ongoing community-based prospective study that began in the 1980s. Elise is a postbaccalaureate research fellow at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke in Bethesda, Maryland, who plans to study neuroepidemiology in graduate school.

MARRIAGES & UNIONS

Tristan Horrom '06 [1] and Taylor Brown were married on Sept. 7, 2025, at the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore, Maryland. **Mark McAllister '06** performed the ceremony, and **Alex Horrom '03** and **Travis Horrom '08** were groomsmen. Alumni in attendance included **Gwen Calhoun '06**, **Don Johnson '06**, **Seth Matheson '06**, **Annie Soper '06**, **Charlie Soper '06**, **Alex Tsikerdanos '06**, **Colleen Tsikerdanos '06**, **Gina Dreyer '07** and **Tori Marshall '08**. The couple currently reside in Parkville, Maryland.

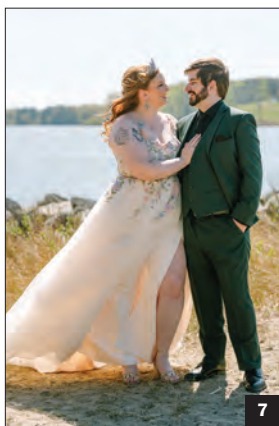
Jessica "Jessy" Schroeder '12 [2] and Alex Grube were married on Apr. 25, 2026, in Baltimore, Maryland. **Lyndsay Duffey '12** was a bridesmaid, and other alumni in attendance included **Megan Krzys '11**, **Kimmy Consiglio '12**, **Laura Dougan '12**, **Adrienne Gordon '12**, **Erika Hammarlund '12**, **Andy Krzys '13** and **Taylor Schafer '15**. The couple honeymooned in Japan and currently reside in Baltimore, Maryland.



Lindsey Siferd Knight '13 [3] and Caleb Knight were married on Jul. 20, 2026, at The Yard in Beacon, New York. The couple met in a poetry master of fine arts program at Columbia University and have since visited SMCM several times together during the annual Alumni Council summer retreat. **Josh Santangelo '13** officiated, and **Ciara Willett '14** was the maid of honor. Other alumni in attendance included **Ben Casto '10**, **Michael Tornabene '11**, **Joseph Santangelo '13** and **Katie Casto '15**. The couple honeymooned at several national parks in Utah and Arizona and currently reside in New York City.



David Kersey '15 [4] and Mariah Saunders were married on Aug. 16, 2025, in Aaronsburg, Pennsylvania, at David's family's farm, Patwork Farm. **Collin Hickey '15** and **Brian Oakey '15** were groomsmen, and **Stephen Trimnell '15** was in attendance. The couple honeymooned in Japan and Taiwan and currently reside in State College, Pennsylvania.



Rylinn Sorini '16 and **Nick Conine '17 [5]** were married on Jun. 21, 2025, in Cambridge, Maryland, with many alumni in attendance to celebrate their special day. The couple currently reside in Laurel, Maryland.

Beatrice Burroughs '19 and **Alec Bernstein '19 [6]** were married on Apr. 25, 2026, in Bethesda, Maryland. Alumni in attendance included **Cara Freibaum Homick '18**, **Patrick Martin '18**, **Ellie Bauer '19**, **Colin Cassady '19** and **Kelsey Joyce '19**. The couple currently reside in Silver Spring, Maryland.



Rose Glenn '19 and **Jason Arndt '20 [7]** were married on Apr. 11, 2026, at Historic St. Mary's City, Maryland. The best men were **Griffin Bentzel '20** and **Daniel Arndt**. The groom's wedding party included **Sophie Bernhiesel '20**, **Ali Khan '20** and **Kay Virginia '20**. The bride's wedding party included the maid of honor, **Lucy Kriner**, and **Noel Gebelein '18**, **Tim Baer '19**, **Dan Belson '19** and **Evie Hackett**. There were numerous other alumni in attendance. The couple currently reside in Baltimore, Maryland with their three cats.

Olivia Sothoron Garner '21, **MAT '22** and **Devin Garner '21**, **MAT '22 [8]** were married on Jun. 20, 2026, at Historic St. Mary's City, Maryland. Professor of English **Jennifer Cognard-Black** officiated the ceremony. **Gretchen Young '21**, **MAT '22** was a bridesmaid, and **Zach Smith '20**, **MAT '21** was a groomsman. There were many other alumni in attendance, and Professor of Sociology **Andrew Cognard-Black** attended as well. The couple honeymooned across the Mediterranean in Italy, France and Spain and currently reside in Ellicott City, Maryland, where they both teach English.

BIRTHS & ADOPTIONS

Gwendolyn Calhoon '06 and **Mark McAllister '06 [1]** welcomed a daughter, **Isla Kestrel McAllister**, on July 23, 2024. The family currently resides in Portland, Maine.

Tara Brown White '08 [2] and **Chad White** welcomed a son, **Michael Anthony White**, on March 25, 2026. He joins his older sister **Keira**, who is now three. The family currently resides in Greencastle, Pennsylvania.

Verioska Jaatsy Tominack '11 [3] and **Mark Tominack** welcomed a son, **Raphael Luka Tominack**, on Jan. 24, 2026. **Raphael** was born in Leonardtown, Maryland and joins his older siblings, **Alina** and **Teresa**. The family currently resides in Mechanicsville, Maryland.



Brianna Buckingham Brand '13 [4] and **Berrett Brand** welcomed **Helen "Ellie" Brand** on Dec. 26, 2025. **Ellie** was delivered safely by **Dr. Stephanie Payton-Petersen '14**. She joins her older brother **Connor**, who was born in 2024. The family currently resides in Potomac, Maryland.



Amanda Jengo '14 and **Michael Killius '14 [5]** welcomed a son, **Robert "Robbie" James Jengo Killius**, on Feb. 17, 2026. **Robbie** was born in Charlottesville, Virginia, but the family currently resides in Miami, Florida.



David Waters '15 [6] and Mandi Waters welcomed a daughter, Audre Marian Rice Waters, on April 1, 2026. Audre is the couple's first child, and she was born in St. Louis, Missouri, where the family currently resides.

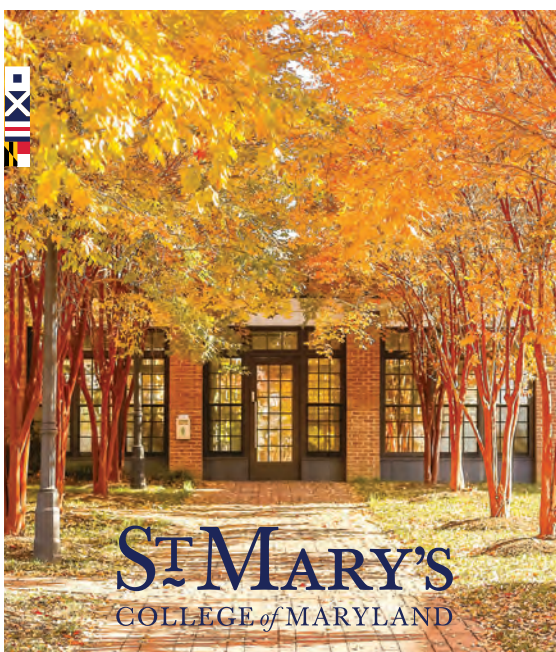


Sebastian Bauer '17 and **Jessie Vislay Bauer '19 [7]** welcomed their first child, Henry Roy Bauer, on April 8, 2026. The family currently resides in Anne Arundel County in Maryland.

IN MEMORIAM

Andrew Wainwright '92 died on May 3, 2026, at the age of 56 in a racing accident in NORRA Baja 1000. Andrew was dedicated to addiction recovery, founding both Assistance in Recovery (AiR) and Humankind. Andrew loved literature and was working on a fictional novel before his death titled "The Amends Tour." He also loved adventure, including off-roading, racing, fly-fishing and skiing. He is survived by his wife, Jaclyn, and his two children, Scout and Augie.

Tara Anika Waters '98 died on Feb. 14, 2026, at the age of 49 in Columbia, Maryland. An economics major at St. Mary's College, Tara was employed by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. She loved to read and watch figure skating competitions. Tara is survived by her parents, Kenneth and Rose Waters; her siblings, Kafi Waters and Kenneth Perry Waters; her aunts, Joan Jordan, Kim Russell, Karen Moore; her uncles, Lawrence A. Jordan and Michael Jordan; and her many cousins.



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(ALMOST) REMEMBERING 50 YEARS OF LACROSSE

BY LEE CAPRISTO, EDITOR

Thank you to the alums who responded to 1970-71 lacrosse team puzzle in the spring issue.

Roland Hauser '74 shared this poster, hand drawn in 1971 by art professor and coach Tom Rowe, saying "Tom Rowe, the father of lacrosse at St. Mary's, would put signs like this up in thew student union to draw attention to the new sport for the campus!"

Dennis Nicholson '74 wrote that the first two seasons of men's lacrosse were as a club sport, and financial support came from players doing pizza and beer sales. He shared this team photo from 1974 that includes coach Tom Rowe (with camera hanging from his neck).

Who is #24:
Phil Howard

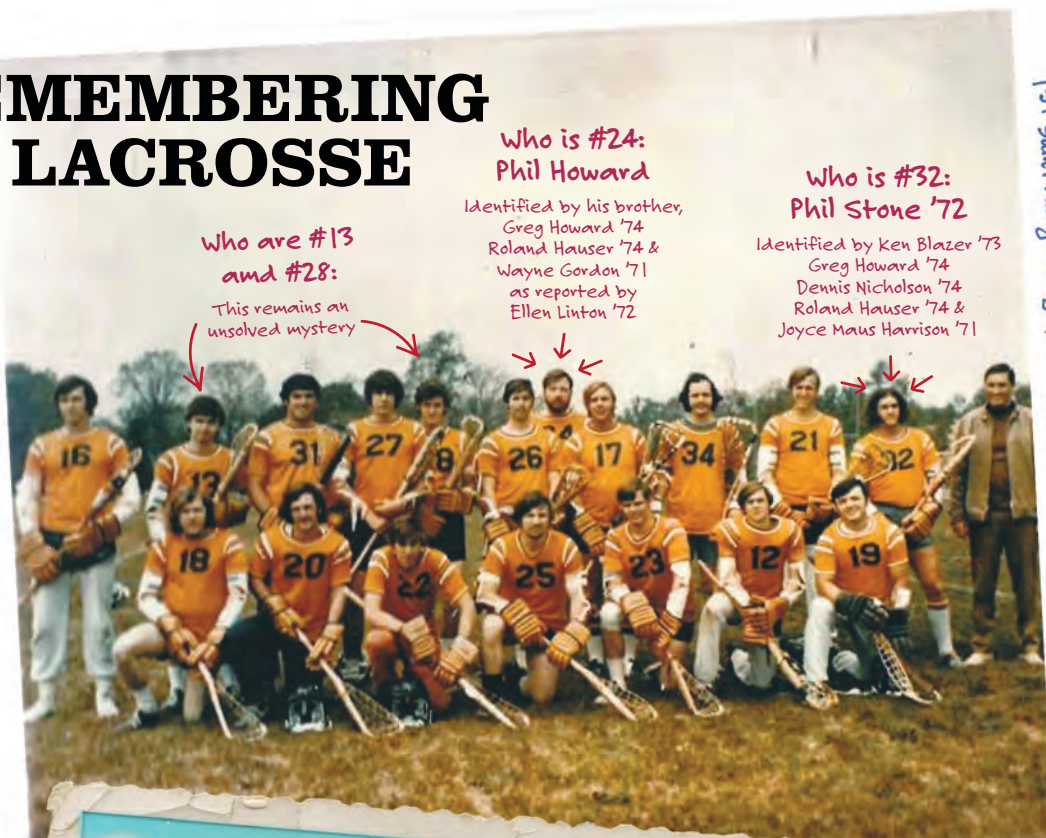
Identified by his brother,
Greg Howard '74
Roland Hauser '74 &
Wayne Gordon '71
as reported by
Ellen Linton '72

Who is #32:
Phil Stone '72

Identified by Ken Blazer '73
Greg Howard '74
Dennis Nicholson '74
Roland Hauser '74 &
Joyce Maus Harrison '71

Who are #13
and #28:

This remains an
unsolved mystery



1st Saint Mary's College of Maryland 1970-1971



1971 HAND PRINTED POSTER BY TOM ROWE
PHOTO COURTESY ROLAND HAUSER '74



1974 ST. MARY'S COLLEGE OF MARYLAND LACROSSE TEAM
PHOTO COURTESY DENNIS NICHOLSON '74

BIG EVENTS AT SMCM



THE TALLIS SCHOLARS



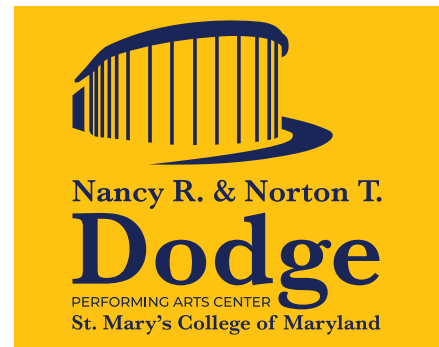
THE REAGAN YEARS



SMCM JAZZ ENSEMBLE



FIVE NOTE THEORY



SMCM ORCHESTRA



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Find out the latest on these performances and more at:
smcm.edu/events

SATURDAY, OCT. 10

FIVE NOTE THEORY | 7 P.M.
Vocal jazz ensemble

FRIDAY, OCT. 30

SMCM ORCHESTRA | 7 P.M.

SATURDAY, NOV. 7

THE REAGAN YEARS | 7 P.M.
The East Coast's original 80s pop-rock tribute band.

TUESDAY, NOV. 10

PRESIDENTIAL LECTURE SERIES | 7 P.M.

FRIDAY, NOV. 13

SMCM JAZZ ENSEMBLE | 7 P.M.

FRIDAY, DEC. 4

SMCM ORCHESTRA | 7 P.M.

SATURDAY, DEC. 5

SMCM SINGERS | 7 P.M.

SUNDAY, DEC. 6

THE TALLIS SCHOLARS | 7 P.M.
Early music vocal ensemble

MONDAY, JAN. 18

MLK PRAYER CELEBRATION | 9 A.M.

FRIDAY, FEB. 12

CEYLON Y SU CHARANGA | 7 P.M.

SATURDAY, MAR. 6

DANÚ | 7 P.M.
Traditional Irish music

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