MEETING THE NEEDS OF OTHERS

The Quiet Leadership of the Rev. Thomas Phelan
Coach Fridgen and the entire Rensselaer 1994-95 hockey team, congratulations on winning the ECAC Championship! Once again, you've made us proud.

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The Changing Face of Admissions

Hats off to our 1995 graduates! With pride and hearty congratulations we wish you the best as you leave to build on your successes at Rensselaer with challenging new careers.

As we wave goodbye to our newest alumni, we turn our thoughts to the bright young faces of our newly recruited students and the hopes and potential they hold for their futures as they pack for their first college year.

This past year we have been doing more than just thinking about the students we attract to Rensselaer and our efforts to admit the best and the brightest. Like universities nationwide, we have re-examined our recruitment efforts in light of diminishing tuition revenues and heightened competition for students. I am proud to say that at Rensselaer, we are leading the way in reshaping admissions efforts to react quickly, effectively, and ethically to a competitive marketplace.

In recent articles in The Chronicle of Higher Education and The Wall Street Journal, admissions officers were interviewed from around the country. These professionals were frank about their view of admissions becoming a numbers game—a game where the goal was to encourage a huge volume of inquiries from students who might not have any of the skills or interests necessary for success in order to select the smallest percentage of students for acceptance. We, at Rensselaer, think that acceptance ratio is a metric that universities in general, and certainly Rensselaer, specifically, can no longer afford. Just as businesses worldwide realized that you must target your message, so, too, is Rensselaer changing the very nature and thrust of its outreach to the students who will enhance the Rensselaer community for generations to come.

Under the dynamic leadership of David Haviland ’64, vice president for student life, and Admissions Dean Teresa Duffy, we have redirected our recruitment activities to reach the right students for Rensselaer.

Among our refocused efforts, we have redeployed our admissions counselors to cover strategic geographic and demographic areas. We are installing the latest computer technology that will allow us to better track our more than 35,000 inquiries each year.

Rensselaer’s admissions staff, in the spirit of the re-engineering happening all over campus, has restructured time-consuming tasks, such as application processing and transfer credit validation, so that the work is completed in half the time. This allows for quicker response and more personal attention to those students we want most.

We have redesigned our admissions publications with bright graphics and active text to more clearly, and accurately, describe the excitement of studying at Rensselaer. These nationally award-winning publications have changed the way we talk to prospective students. So, too, have our efforts in electronic communications. We are developing an electronic application to allow students to apply to Rensselaer using computer disks that they complete in their homes or schools. Also, a campus team is creating an “admissions magazine” on CD-ROM to communicate with students who are comfortable with these advances in computer technology.

And I am pleased to announce the establishment of the Dean’s Scholar Awards, merit scholarships for the most academically gifted students. These awards, in conjunction with the Emily Roebling Scholarships for women and the Rensselaer Medal Program, underscore how serious we are about continuing the excellent quality of students who attend Rensselaer.

And already there is good news to report! Statistics on the class Rensselaer has accepted for 1995-96 are extremely positive. The average SAT score of our accepted students is 300 points above the national average; 65 percent of the accepted students rank in the top 10 percent of their high school class; and we have once again accepted a strong component of qualified women.

These are steps in the right direction for Rensselaer. The more clearly we communicate our mission to potential students, the better match we will make between students who enroll at Rensselaer and the educational experience they will receive. We want to accept students who have the ability and interest to do well—and to thrive—at Rensselaer.

There is one more important recruitment avenue that I have not yet mentioned. We have pledged a more consistent outreach to alumni across the country who generously offer their time and talents to help us identify and attract outstanding students from their regions. The role model that you, as alumni, provide to prospective students, as well as your enthusiasm and firsthand knowledge, have made you highly effective admissions ambassadors. If you are interested in helping our admissions efforts, Dean Teresa Duffy would love to hear from you. She can be reached in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions at (518) 276-6216, or you can contact her by e-mail at duffyt@rpi.edu.
Thanks for the Memories

Meg Galien’s excellent look back at the Class of ’70 [“Voices of a Generation,” March ’95] stirred some long-dormant memories of life at “the Tute.” In the spring of 1970, I was a high school senior, living in a small town about 45 minutes from RPI’s campus. I had been accepted at RPI, and had made my decision to attend.

I recall watching reports of one of the on-campus protests on a local TV station. As I sat there with my father, I remember thinking how cool it would be to be a student protestor. Fathers, however, tended to take rather dim views of such carryings-on, and my own father was no exception. Watching the events unfold in the news report, he piped up, “You’re not going to pull that crap when YOU get to RPI, are you?” Summoning all the courage and naiveté that come with being 18 years of age, I honestly and regretfully replied, “Well, if it’s for something really important, I suppose I might.”

My father didn’t often explode, but when he did the earth was charred for miles in every direction. That was the first of several memorable occasions in which he threatened to withhold tuition payments in response to entirely inappropriate behavior on my part. I made a mental note to someday thank the irresponsible Class of 1970 for igniting such anger in a parent—specifically, my parent.

One year later, as part of the Class of ’74, there occurred the annual student occupation of the Pittsburgh Building. Following in the tradition of our predecessors, my dorm mates were hanging out of its upper-story windows, waving obliquely to the cameras of the same local TV station. They urged me to follow them inside. But I stood my ground, knowing well that if my face showed up on the 6 o’clock news as a student occupier of the RPI administration building, I’d see the surface of Mars sooner than I’d see next semester’s tuition check. My desire to earn a degree, at least on that day, outweighed my desire to make a political statement.

Thanks, Class of ’70, for opening our eyes a little. Thanks for some wonderful memories. As my Dad looks down from his eternal home, he may be chuckling and thanking you, too.

Then again, he may be figuring out some way to retroactively yank my spring ’74 tuition payment.

William B. Bradbury ’74
Newtown, Pa.

I found your article “Voices of a Generation” to be subtly demeaning and reactionary. Why was there no mention of the takeover of the Student Affairs/Admissions Building or WRPI’s role in the underground communications network among activists on different campuses?

Next year, will you mention the takeover of the Administration Building?

You might review RPI This Week, vol. 71, No. 19, June 7, 1971 in this regard.

John V. Scialli ’74
Phoenix, Ariz.

Patent Law a Good Career Choice

I truly enjoyed your recent article about patents [“Patently Unobvious,” March ’95], and the interesting dealings with the patent system that have been experienced by RPI alumni and even RPI itself.

It brought to mind the fact that RPI could be and should be doing so much more in alerting students to the possibility of interesting and rewarding careers as patent lawyers. To me, the most telling point in the article was the fact that patent examiner Dr. Raj Bawa ’90 began what appears to be a promising career through a “chance encounter” with a Patent Office official.

As an undergraduate at RPI in the ’60s, I had no idea that my engineering degree could become the foundation upon which a career in patent law might be built. While there was ample information at RPI about technical careers and advanced technical studies, I recall nothing about the possible benefits of a technical degree in the legal field.

Ironically, as an adjunct law professor, I meet many able law students who are extremely interested in going into patent law, but who cannot do so because they do not have an undergraduate degree in science or engineering. RPI graduates could pursue these opportunities, but may not be doing so for the sad and simple reason that they are not aware of them. Sadder still, while the legal profession has gone through contractions and difficulties in recent years, the patent segment has enjoyed continued growth and prosperity, caused in large measure by the simple fact that there are not enough good lawyers with good technical backgrounds to go around.

Roy H. Wepner ’68
Scotch Plains, N.J.

I am very happy to report that the story about patenting has resulted in several inquiries from alumni. It is very exciting to see the interest the Rensselaer community has regarding this.

With the help of Nick Mesiti ’85, a patent attorney, we identified over 200 alumni who are patent attorneys. This fact, along with the many inventors indicated in the previous story on inventions [“The Stuff of Life,” March ’94], shows that Rensselaer alumni are having a significant impact on transferring technology to benefit society.

One person needs to be mentioned. He is Edward F. McKie Jr. ’48. Ed is the attorney who successfully defended General Electric before the Supreme Court in the case described in your article. In this case the Supreme Court ruled that General Electric’s genetically modified microorganism could be patented.

We are delighted that Ed McKie offered to visit Rensselaer in April to give a seminar on patent law.

Charles Rancourt ’70
Rensselaer’s Office of Patents & Licensing

In order to provide space for as many letters as possible, we often must edit them for length. Please address correspondence to: Rensselaer, Office of News and Communications, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY 12180, or e-mail at alum.mag@rpi.edu.
A Legacy of Leadership

"Commencement" means a beginning, but college commencement for many in Rensselaer’s Class of 1995 feels like an ending. As they graduate, many will reminisce fondly about the last four years they’ve spent here. But most will also look ahead with confidence at the future Rensselaer has prepared them for.

Involvement in extracurricular activities, for four leaders in the Class of ’95, has made all the difference. Whether as class representatives or members of campus committees, the students say they were given many opportunities to prove themselves as important partners in the Institute.

President R. Byron Pipes notes, “The Class of ’95 has been very helpful in the restructuring process. They were willing to give of themselves, showing long-term vision and maturity uncommon to their age. Their legacy of leadership will help future students to become citizens connected to the Rensselaer community.”

“The greatest part of Rensselaer is that students can be involved in change,” says Grand Marshal Sonny Jandial. “Rensselaer has changed directions and knows where it wants to go. Under the new leadership, it will get there.”

Michael Poots, class president and engineering physics major, believes Rensselaer changed him. “Rensselaer has given me confidence that I can make it through anything,” he says.

Poots is also president of the Interfraternity and Undergraduate Councils. “Rensselaer gives students the chance to participate and to lead,” he says. “And Dr. Pipes is especially interested in what we have to say, which is unique.”

“He’s come to several of our lacrosse games,” adds Rebecca Carrier. “I’ll remember that!” A varsity women’s lacrosse player, class council member, and residence life associate, Carrier is a strong leader. Yet despite her heavy load, she has a 4.0 cumulative average in chemical engineering and was a recipient of a 1994 Founders Award. “Rensselaer has helped me prove to myself that I can get the job done,” she says.

Commencement Speaker

Astronaut G. David Low was chosen by the Class of ’95 to speak at Rensselaer’s 189th commencement. Son of the late Rensselaer President George M. Low ’48, David Low is manager of the NASA Extravehicular Activity Project Integration and Operations Office and a veteran of three space-shuttle missions. He has received numerous NASA citations and has logged more than 714 hours in space. Rensselaer awarded Low an honorary doctorate in engineering at commencement.

One student who will leave a rather unique mark on Rensselaer is Erin Edwards, a computer systems engineer who conceived the GM Week Carnival during her sophomore year. “When I first suggested the carnival, some said, ‘yeah, right.’ But the president said, ‘Just do it.’ “This school made it happen,” Edwards says. “Nowhere else could a sophomore make such a big difference.”

Another sophomore wanted to make a difference – in himself. Two years ago, Jandial made a list of what he wanted to take away from Rensselaer. “I decided that computer skills, analytical skills, financial savvy, problem solving, and leadership skills were essential,” he says. “Rensselaer has given me all of these.”

The future holds many opportunities for members of the newest class of Rensselaer alumni. Most can take their pick of the best companies and graduate schools.

“Rensselaer was a transformation for me,” remarks Edwards. “Without it, I would have been just one in the crowd. But I got 11 job offers, and now I can pick wherever I want to go!”

–Julie Berry ’95
"If I Only Had a Heart"

When it comes to writing books, artificial intelligence programs share a problem with Oz's tin man — they don't have a heart.

"The computer doesn't know about love, passion, betrayal," says Selmer Bringsjord, member of a team at Rensselaer now four years into a 10-year project to develop a computer-written novel. "Our story generator understands story structures and story plots, but it's very unsophisticated when it comes to basic concepts that describe human behavior."

To address that problem, Bringsjord and graduate student David Ferruci have decided to focus on teaching the computer one basic concept — betrayal.

"We have come to the realization that unless you can render literary concepts in entirely mathematical terms, the machine is not going to suddenly come to understand these things," Bringsjord explains. "Connectionists think you can teach artificial intelligence to learn patterns and get the machine to understand a concept. We are taking a logicist approach, and we actually are going to install information that represents the concept of betrayal."

The result, the two hope, will be a story generator capable of writing simple short stories with a theme of betrayal. The story generator writes about a pre-determined set of characters and events chosen from the experiences of one of Bringsjord's graduate students.

David Porush, professor of literature and a member of the team working on an artificial storyteller, is the principal architect of the GAMEWORLD story generating system, featured recently on the TV show Beyond 2000.

"Before you can figure out what's wrong in the cell, you have to learn how it's supposed to work," Frye says. "But Mother Nature is very complex. If we try to remove an ion channel to study how it works, the channel falls apart."

So Frye and her researchers are making ion channels that mimic those created by nature. The "biomimetic" ion channels she has produced transport sodium ions across membranes, as can be seen using nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy.

Frye is now perfecting the artificially produced ion channels in hope of being able to increase or retard the selective transport of ions. That will be another step in understanding how ion transport works and the nature of health and disease.

Cystic fibrosis, epilepsy, and other common diseases will be better understood as scientists learn how ions enter and leave cells in the human body, according to Leah Frye, associate professor of chemistry at Rensselaer.

Scientists know that the most common method of ion transport is through channels in the membrane that surrounds the cell. Through these channels, ions, such as sodium cations, are transported into and out of the cell. (Positively charged ions are called cations. Anions are negatively charged.)

Disease may result when ion channels malfunction or are improperly formed from the start. In cystic fibrosis, for example, chloride ions are not properly transported across cellular membranes in the lungs. As a result, a viscous coating develops that prevents proper breathing, Frye says. "Before you can figure out what's wrong in the cell, you have to learn how it's supposed to work," Frye says. "But Mother Nature is very complex. If we try to remove an ion channel to study how it works, the channel falls apart."

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Engineering Renaissance Begins

Rensselaer's School of Engineering embarked on an exciting new Engineering Renaissance at Rensselaer (ER$^2$) program Jan. 1.

During this ambitious five-year program, the school plans to improve quality by reducing undergraduate enrollment from 2,800 to 2,200, expanding full-time graduate enrollment by 300, adding 26 new engineering faculty positions, and swelling annual research funding from $27 million a year to $37 million a year.

Other key elements of the program, according to Engineering Dean Richard T. Lahey Jr. '64, include development of more studio-type interactive learning courses within the School of Engineering, creation of six new endowed faculty chairs, and construction of a multidisciplinary design laboratory that is expected to occupy at least 10,000 square feet.

Lahey says ER$^2$, the first major growth initiative in the School of Engineering since the 1975-80 BUILD program, is essential to Rensselaer's survival as one of the nation's top engineering schools.

The ER$^2$ program will be funded by increasing research support and the number of graduate students. The school will receive a 10 percent overhead return on new research and a 50 percent return on additional tuition from new graduate students to cover the new faculty costs of ER$^2$.

Yearly goals have been set for these increased revenues, and the success of the ER$^2$ program depends on engineering meeting these goals.

Key goals of ER$^2$, Lahey says, are to reduce the undergraduate student/faculty ratio in engineering, to concentrate new faculty hires and increased research in focused "Spires of Excellence," to bring in outstanding young professors capable of winning National Young Investigator or other prestigious awards, to adequately reward all productive faculty members, and to establish an undergraduate program that produces "broadly based, analytically oriented engineers who possess excellent communication and people skills and can 'hit the road running' from their first day on the job."

New Architecture Dean Named


"As the unanimous selection of the search committee, Professor Balfour brings the important characteristics of both a successful academic leader and a deep architectural scholar," says Rensselaer President R. Byron Pipes. "I am delighted by this choice."

"Among the many issues that attracted me to Rensselaer," Balfour says, "three stand out. First, the faculty is gifted. Second, the school is in the midst of a complex urban region, allowing wide experience in the social and urban condition.

"And foremost," Balfour continues, "are the implications that stem from architecture being taught within the context of a great engineering school. These are times of disturbing shifts in the character of reality, and I believe that the fundamental changes in architecture and the city in the coming decades will be driven above all by developments in technology."

Alan Balfour, new dean of architecture at Rensselaer

Balfour, former dean of architecture at Rice University and former director of architecture programs at Georgia Institute of Technology, replaces Donald Watson, who is stepping down as dean to return to teaching and research.

Balfour was named chairman of the Architectural Association School in 1991 at a time when the school was facing many difficulties, enrollment had been declining, and a sizable debt posed the threat of closure. He was asked to build and strengthen
the reputation of the teaching program and, by so doing, increase enrollment and resolve the debt.

By the beginning of the 1994-95 year, student enrollment had risen by 20 percent, annual income had increased by 15.5 percent, and the debt was all but paid off.

Balfour also helped launch a capital campaign and oversaw the reassessment and revision of the teaching program, including the addition of new post-graduate programs in history and theory, graduate design, and environmental access.

At the same time, he completed the book *Berlin: World City*, now in production, which reviews all the architectural activity in Berlin since the wall came down, and he lectured in many parts of the world on Berlin, urbanism, and other topics. He is currently working on *Rome Not Rome*, a collection of 10 essays pivoting around the negation of Rome in Augustine’s *The City of God*.


Balfour received a diploma in architecture from the School of Architecture at Edinburgh College of Art, Scotland, and a master’s degree from the Princeton School of Architecture, which he attended as a Fulbright Scholar.

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**Bob O’Keefe**

associate professor of decision sciences and engineering systems, set up the page to list “Interesting Business Sites on the Web.” He limits his choices to 50 and tries to offer a smorgasbord that includes large “name” companies, small companies, financial services, advertising and marketing, arts and entertainment, publishing, consulting services, virtual malls, event information, travel, and public corporations.

O’Keefe’s page is at http://www.rpi.edu/~okeefe/business.html.

Once on this page, browsers can be connected directly to the various web pages at sites across the country by clicking on the desired listing.

The list is updated monthly, and a “pick of the month” offers a particularly unusual use of web technology. In February, for example, O’Keefe featured “Sundquist Inaugural 95,” a page promoting inaugural activities of Don Sundquist, the new Tennessee governor. Other current entries include a Pizza Hut site in California where browsers can order electronically; the Internet Wine Rack, which offers e-mail credit card orders; the Seattle Mariners, the first major-league team on the web; and MCA Universal, where computer owners with sound capability can hear Arnold Schwarzenegger speak lines from *Junior*.

The World Wide Web is growing so rapidly that road maps are needed, O’Keefe says. Existing lists of commercial sites were so extensive that finding interesting and different pages had become “something of a lottery,” he says. He created his short list to help his students keep up. His list is now in use by MBA students at several other universities as well as by business executives.

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**Getting a Handle on the Web**

A World Wide Web page created as a teaching tool for an executive MBA class at Rensselaer has become a popular reference for business executives across the country who want a quick guide to how colleagues and competitors are using the latest Internet technology.

Bob O’Keefe,

A group of Rensselaer engineering students took time out of their busy schedules in February for a fun community service project. The students volunteered to help Boy Scouts from two local troops earn their engineering badges by helping them complete specific requirements. Here, civil engineering major Alan Zytowski helps a Boy Scout learn about a theodolite.
Anyone who lives to be 100 has seen a lot of history in the making. Some, like Lewis B. Combs ’16, who celebrated his centennial birthday April 7, have played a lasting role in the making of that history.

Combs can reflect with pride on 10 decades of memories, from his days growing up in Manchester Center, Vt., when he caddied for Abe Lincoln’s son, Robert Todd Lincoln, to his 30-year career in the Navy, spanning two world wars, from which he retired as a rear admiral and recipient of the Distinguished Service Medal, to his subsequent career as head of the civil engineering department at Rensselaer.

Lifetime friends and admirers from the U.S. Navy, Rensselaer, and even Willard Scott of NBC’s Today show sent birthday greetings to Combs, known affectionately to many as “Lewie” and praised for his role in founding the Navy Seabees during World War II.

As assistant chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks from 1938 to 1946, Combs played a major role in the expansion of the Civil Engineer Corps (CEC) and the development of the Naval Construction Battalions, known as the Seabees, which recruited experienced construction specialists and trained them to defend themselves and their construction sites.

In 1992 Combs was guest of honor at a VFW celebration in his home town, Red Hook, N.Y., honoring his 97th birthday and the 50th anniversary of the Seabees. He told the gathering that the Seabees had acquired a reputation for being able to repair everything except a broken heart.

“The Seabees can do the difficult immediately. The impossible takes a little longer,” he said. “Can do” became the motto of the Seabees.

In 1943 Combs befriended John Wayne when he served as technical adviser to the film The Fighting Seabees. “We got along well,” said Combs. “I respected the Duke and was very fond of him.”

In 1946 President Harry S. Truman awarded Combs the Distinguished Service Medal in recognition of his accomplishments during the war, citing him as “a brilliant engineer and inspiring leader.”

Combs retired from active duty in 1947 and immediately joined Rensselaer as head of the civil engineering department, a position he held until retiring in 1963. In addition to the regular undergraduate and graduate programs, he supervised a special CEC Qualification Program for Naval Academy and Coast Guard Academy graduates.

“Although Laura and I had no children of our own to send to RPI, I did have my fingerprint on a lot of graduates, both B.C.E. and M.C.E., who attended during my tenure as head of the department,” said Combs. “This included 395 young officers of the Civil Engineer Corps.” Several of these graduates went on to become U.S. Navy chiefs of civil engineers.

Combs has continued his allegiance to his alma mater even beyond retirement, becoming an active member of the 50 Year Club and returning to countless reunions. The feelings of esteem between Combs and Rensselaer have been mutual.

“One of the highlights of my life was October 1945, when I gave the commencement address to the Class of ’46, which graduated early during WWII, and when the honorary degree of doctor of engineering was conferred on me by my good friend, President ‘Liver’ Houston,” said Combs.

Combs lives in Red Hook with his wife of 70 years, the former Laura B. Warden of Rensselaer, N.Y.
Answering the Jonsson Challenge

Donors are closing in on their $10 million target

In September 1992, J. Erik Jonsson ’22, the most generous individual benefactor in Rensselaer history, pledged $5 million to the School of Management if other supporters gave an additional $10 million to the school. After just 18 months, donors have contributed more than $7 million toward the “Jonsson challenge.”

Joseph Morone, dean of management, credits John Broadbent’59, chair of the school’s advisory committee and himself a key donor to the school, with promoting the Jonsson challenge to key audiences and alumni.

Donations to the challenge will support the school in various ways. Warren Bruggeman ’46 has funded a new chaired professorship in entrepreneurship. A professorship in management and technology was given in honor of Robert Bozzone ’55, vice chairman of Allegheny Ludlum Corp., by company employees. Bozzone has also supported fellowships for management students. Both Bozzone and Bruggeman serve on Rensselaer’s board of trustees.

Other gifts include: a fellowship to support a woman entrepreneur given by Michael Herman ’62; a gift for fellowships by Ronald Posner ’64; and a gift by John Daly ’43 to the Center for the Study of Management and Technology. In addition, Paul Severino ’69 has been a major supporter of the school and an active member of its advisory council.

Jonsson is founder of Texas Instruments, former mayor of Dallas, and former chairman of Rensselaer’s board.

Corporate Match Increases Student Support

Raymond Weisner ’75 and Richard Gottardi ’68 have been both generous and creative in their giving this year. Each found a way to leverage personal generosity with corporate philanthropy to provide much-needed scholarship support through Rensselaer’s Adopt-A-Scholar program.

Weisner, co-chair of the gifts campaign for his class reunion this year and national phonathon vice chair, donated $2,500, which was matched by his employer, MetLife. He also convinced his wife, Carole, to give $2,500—which her employer, Consolidated Edison, matched. As a result of this giving spearheaded by the Weisners, two students have been “adopted” and have received scholarship support in the current year.

“Adopt-A-Scholar is the most exciting way to give and know that your dollars are being used and appreciated,” says Weisner. “It really reinforces the positive impact that giving can have.”

Gottardi’s contribution of $2,500 was matched at a rate of three to one by his employer, Exxon. The result: Another $10,000 in scholarship for two more deserving students.

Gottardi says he gave in part because his own Rensselaer education was partially funded by the company that employed him at the time. Unable to afford college after high school, he took an industrial job. His employer paid for him to study at Rensselaer. He was so excited with the Rensselaer experience that he enrolled as a full-time day student for his final two years.

Donors can “adopt” scholars by making a four-year commitment of $20,000, which will provide a $5,000 scholarship to one student for all four years. Alternatively, a $5,000 gift in one year will support one student in that year. In 1994-95, 22 donors have contributed $195,000 to adopt 39 scholars.
# OFFICE SHEET
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Fred Burnette  
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SN: 4406.95
Meet Fred Burnette '84, a computer scientist turned modern-day dairy farmer.

It's 6:00 a.m. The spring sun will soon peek over the horizon and break the frost that covers the ground like a blanket of lace. The last place one would expect to find a Rensselaer alumnus with a master's in computer science is rounding up 150 Holstein dairy cows for the morning milking. But this is where Fred Burnette '84 can be found almost every morning of the year.

BY ANDREW JAY '84
Up close, the first thing one notices is how large the black-and-white bovines are. Weighing in at 1,300 pounds each, they are surprisingly big and the power engendered by their size is quickly apparent. They exhaust their breath with the force of a bellows and collectively warm the milking parlor. Although cautious around people, they are creatures of habit and patiently oblige the milking routine.

On a typical day, Burnette rises at 5:30 a.m., dresses in several warm layers, and eats a large bowl of cereal. He strides into the dark barnyard to wake the sleeping cows, ushering them into a holding pen for milking.

Afternoons are divided between farm maintenance, herd management, and field work. The work is physical, and Burnette moves the heavy hay bales with deceptive ease. In the late afternoon he talks with the evening milker, discussing changes in the health status of particular cows. After dinner, the farmer either does paperwork or returns to the barn to artificially inseminate cows.

Seven years ago Burnette was a computer scientist working on radar imaging at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif. Through work, he met Elizabeth Smith, a Cornell engineer. As the couple began to rethink their careers, they visited Smith's family farm in the small town of Addison, Mich. The 2,000-acre farm once had supported an active dairy but the buildings were in disrepair. After several visits, Burnette's interest in agriculture grew. Following their marriage in 1990, Fred and Elizabeth decided to use the farm as a home base while they determined their future.

“Little did I know that we would decide to stay,” says Burnette.

After moving to the farm, the Burnettes tasted life in rural America. Fred began working with area farmers, exploring their ideas and reading up on the dairy industry. He quickly grasped the scientific basis of farming.

“Animal feeding requires careful calculation of protein, energy, fiber, and moisture content for optimum milk production,” says Burnette. “Successful dairy farming requires a thorough knowledge of herd health, reproduction, nutrition, machinery maintenance, business, and crop production.”

Burnette's training in science and engineering provided a solid background for learning these new areas.

“As I looked around, I saw that the successful farms were those that worked harder and worked smarter,” says Burnette. “I don’t have a farming background, so I knew I had to substitute brain-power for experience.”

After six months Burnette decided to try animal management and began raising steers for milking. Dairy farmers keep their female calves for milking, but many sell off the steers to others to raise. Fred and Elizabeth acquired their first shipment of 50 calves in April 1991 and after that their life was not their own. They fell into a routine of twice-daily feeding, eventually increasing the number of head to 120. Young calves are prone to disease and require extra attention; Burnette learned about disease diagnosis, treatment, and prevention.

The local farmers found the young couple to be an interesting oddity and followed their progress with interest.

“My neighbors were surprised to learn that we were using an unusual feeding regimen that reduces the time required to grow a steer to the 1,100-pound size required for market,” says Burnette.

While tending the steers, Burnette also gained on-the-job dairy experience working at the nearby dairy farm of Vern Brown. Here, Burnette (who was known in his RPI days as a late sleeper), became accustomed to the unrelenting regimen of milking the Holsteins at 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. every day.

Brown, a lawyer and graduate of Georgetown and the University of Michigan, felt a kindred spirit in Fred Burnette.

“Fred has shown a lot of drive. He has become very knowledgeable about the business and has used the information to his advantage. Frankly, he
"We felt we could be profitable if we kept our cows comfortable, healthy, and productive," says Burnette.

After a year in Addison, the Burnettes decided to make a full commitment to dairy farming. "We felt we could be profitable if we kept our cows comfortable, healthy, and productive," says Burnette.

They began fixing up the farm's milking parlor, which had been vacant for 10 years. Having learned that in the '80s many farmers borrowed themselves out of business, they focused on minimizing their capital expenditures. They repaired the parlor on a shoestring, going so far as to have milk buyers purchase the equipment and lend it to them at no charge.

"I had to balance the cost versus benefit of technology. There is a plethora of equipment available, which can quickly add up to huge sums," says Burnette, who continues to perform cost benefit analyses on every purchase.

"The only way to be profitable is to keep costs down," says Burnette. "The margins for error are narrow. Dairy is a very capital-intensive business."

On Feb. 24, 1992, 18 months after the Burnettes arrived in Addison, Maple Drive Dairy acquired its first 30 milking cows and began operation. Initially the cows were reluctant to enter the milking parlor, which was new to them. If cows aren't milked regularly their production drops off rapidly, so it was a critical moment.

The locals, who had been so bemused by Burnette, turned out to help in classic Midwestern style. They coaxed the cows through the initial milkings. Elizabeth took one of the early evenings off to see Garrison Keillor tape the Prairie Home Companion radio show in Ann Arbor. Over the air Keillor read words of encouragement to Burnette as he struggled with the recalcitrant cows. Eventually, the cows settled in and have become very comfortable around people. Their natural curiosity will draw them near, but only a few will allow themselves to be petted.

The Maple Drive Dairy herd has grown to more than 150 cows passing through the milking parlor and 250 total animals. Dairy is a very competitive industry and on average three farms close every day. In three years Burnette has built the farm to be twice the size of the national average.

Burnette has drawn on his Rensselaer experience in many ways. His extensive computer background has enabled him to develop numerous quantitative models to evaluate opportunities and manage finances. Growing a business that is capital intensive requires astute financial management. When Burnette negotiated to buy out his neighbor's farm, he created intricate cash flow projections with several scenarios for different milk prices.

These models have helped to shape the strategy of the farm and its fundamental tenet of providing a healthful environment for the cows.

"Healthy, comfortable cows produce more milk and have healthier offspring," says Burnette.

A number of Burnette's classmates have passed through Addison, usually as they traveled back and forth between the coasts changing jobs. Many have pitched in; their reactions are mixed. Says one, "It's fun to visit, but it looks like an awful lot of work to me." However, reaching the critical mass of 150 cows has permitted the Burnettes to hire the help that allows them to get away for an occasional weekend off.

Fred and Elizabeth encourage visitors to sample the farming life. "Most guests make the morning milking every day. I think they enjoy the quiet country sunrise."

Maple Drive Dairy faces challenges typically found in a consolidating industry. Economies of scale are forcing the dairy farm to grow in order to stay competitive.

"We, dairy farmers, take the price the market will pay us," says Burnette. "Therefore, when prices go down, the low-cost producers can still turn a profit and survive while the inefficient farms sell out. Milk price volatility always is a concern, however."

The farm does not use the controversial Bovine Somatotrophic Hormone (BST) to artificially increase milk production. "Higher production means higher stress on the cows. The use of BST results in poor reproductive performance, poor cow health, and decreased herd life, not to mention the cost of the BST injections and the extra feed required," says Burnette. "When I added up all the costs, I determined that BST is not profitable."

Asked if they would like to return to the full-time 9-to-5 world, both Burnettes emphatically say, "No thanks!" They find their day-to-day farming lifestyle a benefit with infinite value. Says Elizabeth, "We work together, we run our own show, and we get to live in this beautiful Michigan countryside."

Fred Burnette's plans for the future center around continuing to grow the business. For now, this modern-day farmer surveys his life and livestock with the contented air of one who has successfully incorporated the science and technology of his training into the science and art of dairy farming.

Andrew Jay '84 is an analyst covering medical device companies at Alex Brown & Sons.
In 1959 a young American priest working on his doctorate in philosophy at Oxford received a letter from his bishop. "Come home," it said. "I was disappointed. But in those days, a bishop told you what to do and you did it. So I came home and he sent me here."

"Here" being Rensselaer, of course. That marked the beginning of a remarkable 36-year career at Rensselaer for the Rev. Thomas Phelan, dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. On June 30 he will leave the dean's office and assume a new role as Institute Dean, Institute Historian, and senior adviser to the president.

"Tom Phelan brought leadership and commitment to his role as dean and a unique character to his school," says Rensselaer President R. Byron Pipes. "As he prepares to assume new duties, we look forward to enjoying the benefit of his long experience and love of the Institute."

Phelan's legacy to Rensselaer includes building the Chapel + Cultural Center, renovating the Russell Sage Laboratory to bring the School of H&SS onto the main campus, and developing a strong faculty focused on bridging the humanities and technology.

To New York's Capital Region he is known as the founding president of the Hudson Mohawk Industrial Gateway, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and fostering pride in the local communities that played a major role in the Industrial Revolution. Phelan also has served as chairman of WMHT Educational Telecommunications, chair of the Architecture and Building Commission of the Diocese of Albany, president of the Catholic Art Association, and leader or member of a host of ecumenical, mental health, historic, and educational groups.

To students of history, Phelan's academic writings fall into three categories: historical theology, American material culture (especially as it reflects our industrial heritage), and higher education. He is perhaps best known for his writings on the American Industrial Revolution, using the Troy area as a model for understanding the implications of industrialization in U.S. history.

To countless individuals he remains priest, counselor, teacher, visionary, gourmet cook, antique collector, and friend. He's married at least a thousand students, baptized their children, and writes dozens of personal letters a week.

ANSWERING THE CALL

RAISED TO CONTRIBUTE

Phelan was born April 11, 1925, the eldest of seven children of a Rensselaer, N.Y., family physician. He came by his social consciousness naturally. "My family brought us up to contribute," he says simply, "and in college I decided to give the priesthood a try."

Phelan attended area public and parochial schools and received an A.B. in English from the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass. Following service as a tactical radar officer with the U.S. Navy in the Pacific during World War II, he entered the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., where he earned the S.T.L. in theology in 1951. Ordination later that year was followed by assignments in the Albany Diocese; doctoral work in England came a few years later.

In 1959 Phelan was called home to become the resident Catholic chaplain at Rensselaer and the young priest soon began to make lasting impressions on the students he met.

"What really struck me about Tom as a priest and a counselor was his remarkable ability to translate the ideas of the New Testament into our lives," says
Joe DiStefano '62, professor of business administration at The University of Western Ontario and a former Rensselaer trustee.

"I was a sophomore engineering student and going through a very difficult period in my life when Father Tom came to RPI," Rensselaer board member Art Gajarsa '62 recalls. "I wanted to change majors and thought about transferring to another university.

"I was guided by Tom to finish engineering at RPI and get all the benefits of that excellent education and then expand in graduate school," Gajarsa continues. "He gave me a reading list and loaned me his own books. I went on in economics and then to law school." Today Gajarsa is partner in a law firm with offices in Maryland, Virginia, Rome, Milan, and Washington, D.C.

"Tom's intelligence is so deep and so broad—he can talk about almost any subject in the world," says Gajarsa. "But he never talks down to you. He raises you up to his level."

DiStefano concurs. "I am humbled to think that Tom talks about me as his friend. I've always considered him my friend, but to this day—I'm 55 with a long career of my own established—I still think of myself as his student."

Sivaporn Dardarananda '68 retired from his position as president of Thai Investment Securities Co. Ltd. in Bangkok and is now a director with Thai Airways and Dole. Dardarananda is a lead donor to the Thomas Phelan Endowed Chair in Humanities and Social Sciences, which was established to support a premier scholar and teacher at Rensselaer as a tribute to Phelan's works and passion for the humanities.

"I am truly indebted to Father Phelan for making my life what it is," Dardarananda says. "He preached love and helping people. His arms stretch all the way to include everyone with love. Father Phelan taught me to live life, not to let things pass by."

PLANTING FLOWERS
The impact Phelan had on students came not only from his sermons, but from the work he did across campus as well.

"You have to remember that in the '60s RPI was such a wasteland culturally," Phelan says. "There was hardly a flower growing on campus, much less
the arts. Almost the only thing that flowered here outside of classes was hard partying on Saturday nights.

"So," Phelan continues, "we began the Festival of Religion and the Arts." With Herb Hodgson, one of the Protestant chaplains, Phelan organized plays, films, and "always something wild liturgically. Faculty got involved. It was a challenge to excite students about art, drama, music. That's where Herb and I made our dent on the place. We were doing what we needed to do and we were doing what RPI needed to have done."

At the time there weren't many facilities on campus to accommodate programs like that. Mass was being held in a chapel on Peoples Avenue belonging to a local convenant. When Rensselaer bought that property, President Folsom offered the group the 15th Street Lounge (now the Playhouse), but only for three years. The Rensselaer Newman Foundation, a group of Catholic students, faculty, and alumni, decided it was time to build.

Steve Wiberley '48, professor emeritus of chemistry and an active Newman member, was involved from the beginning. "We managed to assemble a piece of property on Burdett Avenue—we even moved a house off the land. Then we had to raise the money to build. We got in Tom's yellow Volksvagen and drove all around the Northeast." They raised $500,000 for construction.

Now in its 26th year, the award-winning Chapel + Cultural Center hosts exhibitions and performances, foreign student gatherings, weddings of every denomination, and is home to Christ Sun of Justice University Parish. Phelan has been pastor of the parish since 1971.

**SHAPING A SCHOOL**

In 1972, Phelan's career took another turn. The School of Humanities and Social Sciences was without a dean, Joe DiStefano was new on the board of trustees then. "President Grosh came to me to ask what I thought about making Tom dean," he says. "I told him I thought it would be seen as an inspired decision. History confirms that it was."

Robin Martin '71, president and CEO of the Deer River Group and Rensselaer board member, also lauds the selection of Phelan as dean. "His feeling has always been that there's an important role for the humanities at RPI and the program's going to be first-class."

Phelan knew that H&SS should not attempt to be best at everything. Instead, he focused on shaping a school that would serve the unique needs of Rensselaer students.

Shirley Gorenstein, chair of the Department of Science and Technology Studies (STS), believes making that decision was one of the most important things Phelan has done for Rensselaer. "Tom encouraged our departments to hire people whose research connected to science and technology. What had been a traditional liberal arts program began to evolve into a humanities and social sciences school geared specifically for a technological university," she says. "In that way he has given the school its unique character."

The school grew significantly during the Phelan years. The faculty increased by 30 percent. Two departments, the Arts and STS, were added, and today there are four more degree programs: the bachelor's, master's, and doctorate in STS; and the Master of Fine Arts in Integrated Electronic Arts.

In 1983 the School moved from West Hall on the edge of campus into the completely renovated Russell Sage Laboratory. The relocation had symbolic overtones and brought H&SS into the mainstream physically and academically, Gorenstein says.

That same year Phelan launched a five-year effort to revamp the H&SS Core Program, the courses required of all Rensselaer graduates. Unveiled in 1988, the new curriculum sought to "contribute to the realization of student potential as leaders in the professions and in society at large." Teaching would rely heavily on small groups and collaborative work by students.

Dr. Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, called it "one of the most creative and exciting curricular reform efforts" he had seen.

"In many ways Tom has been ahead of his time," says Martin. "Things like writing-across-the-curriculum, interactive learning—he was talking about these things years ago. And now they're being integrated into the entire Rensselaer curriculum."

**THE SERVANT LEADER**

Phelan's work through the years has not gone unnoticed—his contributions have earned him numerous honors. He was elected a fellow of the Society for the Arts, Religion and Contemporary Culture (a prestigious group that includes Robert Penn Warren, Yehudi Menuhin, and Erich Fromm) in 1972. He has been awarded the Albany League of Arts Award for Distinguished Contributions to the Arts, the Albert Fox Demers Medal for distinguished service to Rensselaer, the first Community Service Award from the Hudson-Mohawk Consortium of Colleges and Universities, and the Citizens Laureate Award from the State University of New York Foundation at Albany.

But Phelan is a soft-spoken, gracious man who, despite his accomplishments, manages to keep a low profile. "I've really just done whatever the circumstances presented," he says quietly. "I just keep moving forward."

"He's a servant leader," explains DiStefano. "He leads with a concern for the people first, not with his leadership first. He sees ahead by understanding the people he's serving."

"Christianity is action," Phelan says. "And love is service. The New Testament says you can't say you love God and not love your neighbor. I substitute the word 'serve' because I think that's the way love is defined—meeting the needs of others."

*A campus reception to dedicate the Phelan chair was held on April 13. Look for details—and the introduction of the new dean of H&SS—in our September issue.*

Bruce Adams contributed to this article.
Class Notes

Class Notes Deleted for Privacy Concerns
Meet the New RAA President

Mark Feinstein ’77 may be the new president of the Rensselaer Alumni Association, but he’s been a familiar face on campus since he was Grand Marshal in 1977-78. He brings nearly 20 years of experience and involvement with the RAA to his presidency.

Feinstein graduated in 1977 with a bachelor’s degree in management engineering and received his MBA in 1978. He is president of Northeast Management Inc. and a partner in DJM Management, which owns and operates several video stores and Discovery Zone play centers. He lives with his family in Providence, R.I.

Feinstein’s volunteer activity on the RAA board started in 1987 with service as vice president and member of several committees. He is also treasurer of the Southeastern New England Alumni Club, and a member of the Rensselaer Council and other Rensselaer development programs. He was awarded the Alumni Key in 1990.

He sees the RAA as a conduit for “keeping in touch,” not only with classmates but also with faculty and staff members, alumni from other classes, and business contacts. One of Feinstein’s goals for his presidency is to continue to expand the use of the Internet for information sharing, both alumni-to-alumni and alumni-to-Rensselaer. “The more information everybody has, the stronger the relationship,” he states.

As he welcomes Rensselaer’s newest alumni, the Class of 1995, into the RAA, Feinstein hopes to reap the benefits of the leadership they exhibited as students (see story, page 4). “The school is going through tremendous change right now,” Feinstein says. “Through their association with the RAA, they can continue to be part of that change.”

**RAA Benefits**

If you are a graduate of Rensselaer, you’re already a member of the Rensselaer Alumni Association. The RAA offers a variety of programs and services. Here’s just a sample:

**Rensselaer Alumni News Network (RANN).** More than 600 Rensselaer alumni have already taken advantage of this inexpensive Internet connection, and are electronically communicating with campus and the world. RANN offers services like telnet, ftp, gopher, the World Wide Web, Usenet newsgroups and e-mail; it can even be an aid in your career search.

As a special welcome to our newest members of the RAA, the standard 1 Meg account (regularly $40) is free to 1995 grads.

Contact Ellen Johnston, RANN system administrator, at (518) 276-6068 or ar-consult@rpi.edu for complete information.

**Regional Networking Conferences.** Regional clubs all over the country sponsor networking events. Generally, programs feature time for interaction between attendees and a keynote address or panel discussion by local and campus experts and executives.

**Alumni Volunteer Activities.** Regional and affiliate clubs plan events both social and educational in nature. They often offer a variety of ways for you to stay connected with Rensselaer.

If you’d like to encourage local high school students to enroll at Rensselaer, take part in one of the club-sponsored alumni admissions programs.

Class reunions are another way to get involved. Many volunteers help shape the monumental event as part of their Reunion planning committee.

Development efforts are essential to the future of the Institute, and alumni are an integral part of those efforts. You can volunteer for phonathons, Reunion class gift committees, and other special projects.

If you’d like to find out about local activity in your area, call Susan Dinon, associate director of alumni relations, at (518) 276-6910. Or you can e-mail her at dinons@rpi.edu.

Above all, the Rensselaer Alumni Association is here to serve you. If there is something you are interested in, give Peg Aldrich, director of alumni relations, a call at (518) 276-6205. Or you can e-mail her at aldrin@rpi.edu.

Your input is welcome on the Rensselaer volunteer team!
"I didn't give Rensselaer a dime. Instead, I gave appreciated stock."

Paul Severino '69, Chairman of Bay Networks Inc., used appreciated stock to make his gift to Rensselaer's School of Management. Paul knows that a cash gift (though always welcome!) isn't the only way he can help support Rensselaer. Gifts of appreciated stock, personal property, or real estate are also excellent ways to contribute to the Institute. And there are additional benefits to Paul: He can take a charitable deduction for the full fair market value of the stock on his income tax. He pays no capital gains tax for any appreciation earned by the stock. And, Rensselaer's School of Management gets the full benefit of his gift. Paul also knows that gifts of appreciated stock can be given to the Institute for plans that will pay income to him and his wife, while still allowing him to take an income tax deduction and avoid capital gains.

If you're interested in learning about the different ways you can support Rensselaer, contact Ruth Killoran, director of gift planning, at (518) 276-8509 or killoran@rpi.ris.net.
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(518) 276-6216

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