88 MILES TO FINE DINING
Rail Stop: a Must-Stop

MATT GAFFNEY
Local Crossword Guru

VETERANS
RETURN TO JMU
Four Brave Men Share Their Stories

NICARAGUAN ORPHANS SEND MESSAGES FROM MANAGUA

FUTBOL FOR CHANGE
Two Graduates’ Dream

30 YEARS IN PHOTOGRAPHY
BOB LEVERONE

A BROTHER REMEMBERED
JMU Student Gives Perspective on Twin Brother’s Tragic Murder
ABOUT CURIO
Curio is a regional general-interest feature magazine published each spring by students in the School of Media Arts and Design at James Madison University. Curio is a nonprofit organization supported by the College of Arts and Letters and the School of Media Arts and Design. Subscriptions are not available.

ON THE COVER
Nicaraguan orphan Martha Eva Aragon Larios is one of the many children helped by James Madison University students on their trip this past spring break. The 5-year-old is one of 37 children at the orphanage. (29)
photography by Ashley Beaudin

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS:

During a year so fraught with change, we, your faithful editors, tried to make our own changes and leave our mark within the pages of the 2009 edition of Curio. We ended up with a hodgepodge of topics, a colorful breadth of designs and one uniform vision.

We started with unmatched enthusiasm right from the get-go, pitching ideas left and right. What we didn’t realize at the time was that a theme started creeping out of the final stories we selected.

The people, groups and programs we profile in the magazine all stand out as truly compassionate.

From Futbol for Change, a nonprofit started by two JMU alumni to help Ghanian children play soccer, to four war veterans who returned home from Iraq and picked up with their education at JMU, these stories go straight to the heart.

And for us three magazine industry hopefuls, it has been a rewarding, challenging and incredibly fun experience to lead such a dynamic staff.

Without the help of our trusted advisers, David Wendelken and Ken Terrell, this would not have been possible. Also, a big thank you goes out to the editors, writers and photographers for all their hard work on this project.

And where would we be without our technological geniuses? Thank you so much to John Gruver and Dietrich Maune, without whom we would still be trying to put together this magazine.

Curio has seen a lot of changes from years past. With both controversy and heart included, we hope this compassionate edition of Curio moves you.
Welcome to Candid Comment, your chance to call and discuss issues that are in the news and on your mind this morning," Frank Wilt announces at the start of the show — a show in which the listener never knows what to expect.

Textured black soundproofing material covers the top half of the freshly painted beige studio walls in the radio station's new home, built in 2008. The sun filters softly through the two windows, brightening the room. But even brighter than the orange and blue of the radio hosts' dress shirts are their colorful personalities.

Wilt, 46, and Bill Phipps, 57, of WSVAs Candid Comment, immediately put their listeners at ease. Despite arriving to work at 5 a.m. for appearances on earlier shows, they are enthusiastic as they welcome calls from listeners across the Shenandoah Valley.

Every weekday at 9:10 a.m., people can tune in to Candid Comment by setting their dials to 550 AM. Wilt — who recently celebrated his 20th anniversary with the station — and Phipps come in loud and clear during their special 50-minute segment. They encourage local listeners of all backgrounds to call and discuss regional and national current events.

"There is no other local talk station where people can call in and voice their opinions," says Phipps, who joined the Candid Comment lineup in November 1993. "You can write a letter to the editor in the Daily News-Record, but it's not the same impact seeing it in print as it is hearing it come out of someone's mouth."

Candid Comment acts as a daily informative resource and discussion arena for residents. The talk show is popular in the Valley, due in large part to the humorous and playful banter between the longtime co-hosts. Without batting an eye, Wilt asks Phipps on air how many decades he's been using Botox.

"Seven or eight," Phipps replies. "That's why I look so marvelous for a 111-year-old."

This ongoing repartee comes naturally after almost 16 years spent developing a close relationship.
"We can talk about absolutely nothing – even egg cartons – and turn it into a soliloquy on life."

BILL PHIPPS, radio host

"Without trying to sound maudlin, we've both been together for so long, I don't think you could have the kind of chemistry we have if we all didn't truly like each other," Phipps says.

Their show proves to be as likeable as their personalities. WSVA ranks second only to local country-music station WKCY 104.3 FM overall.

Candid Comment started in the early '60s, when local residents called in to share recipes and make public announcements. The topics on the show have changed somewhat, but the objectives remain the same: to encourage dialogue and to allow local residents to express their opinions on air.

Many callers discuss politics and other current events. Some call in response to previous comments, some make public announcements and others offer tips. One caller even suggested that men should urinate in the sink rather than the toilet, to conserve water.

Despite the varying topics, all of the callers have something significant in common: a passion for current issues. As long as that enthusiasm shines through and has the potential to keep listeners interested, callers to Candid Comment don't have to worry about getting the ax at the beginning of their discussion.

"We used to have a two-minute rule, but now we pretty much let a caller talk, within reason, as long as they're interesting," Phipps says. "We generally try not to let them go past three or three-and-a-half minutes, as long as it makes for good radio."

Wilt and Phipps typically play devil's advocate when it comes to callers' opinions to provide more opportunity for lively discussion. "We try to generate more opinion from different things by questioning callers," Wilt says. "When you question people, they immediately think that you don't agree with them, even if you do."

But the hosts try to refrain from stating their personal opinions on air. "If I come out and say exactly what I'm thinking, there may be a bunch of other people out there that agree with me," Wilt continues. "As a result, they feel there's no need for them to call and repeat what we said."

As it is, "for every caller we get I bet there are 25 more who listen but don't call," Phipps adds.

Sensitive local issues, particularly those involving schools, are generally the topics that persuade callers to participate in the mornings, according to Wilt and Phipps. They both have heard outrageous things throughout their many years hosting the show, and Candid Comment receives its fair share of conspiracy-theorist callers.

"We had one woman call in a long time ago and ask if we'd heard anything about Elvis still being alive— that's still one of my favorites," Wilt says. "We've also had callers who say that the Holocaust didn't exist, that the moon landing never took place and that 9/11 was planned by our government."
"One man called in and threatened to start a revolution in the Valley with a militia," Phipps says. "According to him, there is a militia no one knows about."

Wilt and Phipps are prepared in case a caller gives them a little more "good radio" than they bargained for. Candid Comment employs a seven-second delay so that any inappropriate observations and remarks can be edited out of the programming. The delay helped to protect at least one caller from potential legal repercussions, as he threatened to "kill all the tax people," according to Phipps.

The show brings out people's opinions and forces them to entertain alternative points of view they might not have considered before, according to Wilt. Some listeners are more open than others and, by hearing other opinions, they might change the way they think about stereotypes.

But Candid Comment is as much a venue for entertainment as it is for education. Listeners can tune in to WSVA for a bit of humor or perspective when they're having a bad day.

"Something really serious or really tragic can happen in [our listeners'] lives and they turn us on and we're the first thing that changes their outlook on their whole lives, so to speak," Wilt says. "I mean, those are the stories that just make you want to keep doing it."

"We can talk about absolutely nothing — even egg cartons — and turn it into a soliloquy on life," Phipps agrees.

For Wilt, the best part of the job is entertaining and talking to people. Both men say they are doing something they have always wanted to do, and that the best part is meeting new people.

"I get to listen to so many divergent opinions every day," Phipps continues, his tone more serious now. "It's such a cross-section. I get to touch the Valley every day. It's a great way to keep up with the Valley's pulse. There's seldom a day that I don't look forward to coming in here."

"And when you get up at 4 o'clock or 4:30 in the morning, you need something to help yourself," Wilt added with a grin. 

AVERY ELIADIES is a senior SMAD print journalism major from Prince George, Va. She worked for several years as a weekly columnist at the Progress-Index in Petersburg, Va. After graduation, she hopes to move to Charleston, S.C., and work for a magazine in either print or online form.

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“People were coming in and asking for assistance and [Tabitha] was helping them... I was just blown away by her commitment and compassion and vision.”

JENNIFER COFFMAN,
JMU professor
Cultural Curiosity:

Maasai visitors at the opening of Coffman's exhibit at the Madison Art Collection study the replica of a Kenyan classroom. The exhibit displayed the different educational systems of Kenya and Virginia, and also showed off the artwork of students in Kenya. The Maasai shared their handmade jewelry as well as a traditional dance at the opening.
“She didn’t complain,” Coffman says. “She was just wanting to do this and I thought, ‘OK, whatever I can do to help make her realize her vision of a bigger and better clinic.’”

With the help of Coffman and CFK, the current three-story clinic was constructed using local labor and design and named in honor of Festo. Tabitha Clinic now has the capacity to serve more than 40,000 people annually.

Outbreaks of violence following the results of the December 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections put CFK to the test. An immediate peace campaign was launched in conjunction with an emergency supplemental feeding program. CFK dispatched medical staff to take care of wounded people in the community.

Coffman, it was a tense time, with many worried phone calls back and forth between the United States to Kenya, to make sure people were safe.

“Her vision of a bigger and better clinic.”

Teresa Harris saw the conditions in Kibera when she participated in the Fulbright-Hays program Coffman led in 2006, during which a group of teachers from the Shenandoah Valley learned what it meant to live and teach in Kenya.

“In the parts that we were traveling in, it’s open sewage, the water isn’t safe to drink, the roads are all dirt, the houses are very close together, there’s limited access to electricity,” Harris says. “If you’ve never seen anything like that before, the first time it’s genuinely distressing to know that people are living there and are raising their children there.”

A native of Kajiado, Kenya, JMU student Jacob Looirmirrmad had been involved with the JMU Kenya programs since 2003. His role was to translate for the students and help with logistics, which included traveling to Kibera.

“The only time I’ve been there was with the JMU program,” Looirmirrmad says. “I don’t want to see people live in such a condition when there is nothing I can do to help them.” Looirmirrmad, who considers Coffman more of a friend than a professor, has spent time with her both in Kenya and at her home in Virginia.

With her help and the encouragement of those on the Fulbright-Hays grant, he applied to JMU and was accepted as an international student. This summer he will return to Kenya for the first time since December 2006 and will work once again with the JMU Kenya Summer program, which will include another visit to Kibera.

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The Plains' well-known restaurant is only 88 miles from the Valley

story by Caitlin Hardgrove | photography by Matt Voegel

With its worn, paint-chipped roof and modest oval sign hanging outside, people driving by might not even notice it. But those who have already discovered The Rail Stop know that gourmet dining doesn't always come in fancy and extravagant packages.

The eclectic American-cuisine restaurant is located in The Plains, a simple city tucked away in Virginia's horse-and-wine country. The Rail Stop plays into the town's charming simplicity with its petite, softly lit porch and homemade window decorations.

A local train station that used to be next to the restaurant was its namesake. Wealthy, upstate New Yorkers brought their horses down on the train to go foxhunting, and people coming off the train stopped there.

The real station no longer exists, but a toy train encircles the walls of the small beige room of The Rail Stop. The restaurant, with its wooden chairs and flowered tablecloths, seats about 60 inside and 20 outside on the patio.

"For the whole Washington area, Rail Stop is ranked eighth overall and No. 5 for best food," says Tom Kee, the head chef and owner of The Rail Stop.

Tall, mellow, salt-and-pepper-haired Kee is referring to the rankings posted on openTable.com, an online reservation network for restaurants worldwide. Based on cuisine and price range, users can search for restaurants, make reservations and rank their experiences. Reviewers commonly describe The Rail Stop as "neighborhood gem."

"It's pretty good for PR... all of our ratings have been between four and five stars," Kee says.

The Rail Stop has also been featured on "The Oprah Winfrey Show," "The Late Show With David Letterman" and the Food Network.

So, how does a hole-in-the-wall restaurant get this exposure?

Rising popularity

Robert Duvall made Kee an offer he couldn't refuse. The actor, also known as Tom Hagen from "The Godfather," co-owned the restaurant with Kee from fall 1998 to fall 2001. Once word got out that Duvall, a resident from The Plains, was trying on his restaurant-owning hat, Oprah sent her camera crew and the Food Network showed a Rail Stop pasta dish on a "Best Of..." feature.
Owner Tom Kee and his sous chef help finish off an order in the kitchen of The Rail Stop, which Kee has run since 2001.

In his opinion, it usually takes three to four years to become a good chef, and until he started coming up with his own recipes, Kee considered himself "just a cook." After his experiences baking with his grandmother and mom when he was little and waiting tables in college, Kee became a student at L'Academie de Cuisine, a French-based culinary school formerly located in Bethesda, Md. He says it gave him the basics he needed. "You get your technique down and your taste down, and then from there you can pretty much do anything."

Food for thought

Lunch includes items like the roasted eggplant open-face sandwich, the Rail Stop burger and the three-cheese quesadilla. Dinner features more gourmet items like pan-seared prosciutto-wrapped scallops, grilled veal chop with a mushroom ragout and saffron risotto and braised lamb shank.

Kee's favorite entree of the moment is the slow-roasted pork. Rubbed with rosemary garlic and cooked at 125 degrees for 12 hours overnight, "it just falls apart and smells so good," Kee says. The pork is placed on jasmine rice and served with Cuban black beans and fried plantains.

"I do all of the menu myself.... These are my ideas, my recipes," says Kee, who worked at three of the top restaurants in Washington, D.C., before buying The Rail Stop in 1995. Billy Joel, Christie Brinkley, Geena Davis and members of The Rolling Stones are just a few of the celebrities his former restaurants have served.

Kee's experience working in Italian, American and French restaurants explains his eclectic style and culturally diverse dishes, but he says they like to keep a small menu at The Rail Stop. "We'd rather do 10 things really good than 20 things so-so."

They also make all of the desserts, pasta and bread right in the restaurant. A favorite dessert at The Rail Stop is the crème brûlée. "People have come in here and say that we have the best crème brûlée they've ever had," Kee says. "Pastry chefs come in here and ask for the recipe. Sometimes I make them ask a couple times."
Kee bought the business from actor Robert Duvall and has created a new menu every few months to keep dishes interesting for returning customers.

Love from the locals
Some locals visit the restaurant at least once a week.
"We've had people coming in here for years," Kee says, adding that many could just say "the usual" and he'd know exactly what to make.
A couple sitting in the back corner of the restaurant talk about their first Rail Stop memory.
"We came here on our first date 10 years ago and sat at the table right there," Stephanie Reed says. "If we have a bad day, we say, 'Let's go to Rail Stop!' It turns your mood around. The food is good, but it's about the people."

On a typical weekend night the staff consists of four kitchen employees, two to three servers and up to four chefs — many of whom have had a long history with the restaurant. "One kind of unique thing about this place is that most of the wait staff has been here for over 10 years," Chancellor says. Kee mentioned a dishwasher who recently retired — he had worked there for 15 years.

Not decorating on a dime
The flowered tablecloths are European wax-coated, double-lined and custom-made for the restaurant, and the pots used in the kitchen are from Belgium.

Nol Putnam, a blacksmith and artist who has created three wrought-iron gates for the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., also has made some stunning additions to the restaurant. In the gold-textured extra dining room of The Rail Stop, on either side of a huge rectangular mirror, hang two striking wrought-iron candleholder sconces by Putnam.

Various original paintings are also hung around the restaurant, compliments of the Byrne Gallery in Middleburg, Va. The art is brought over after being displayed in Byrne's exhibits. "They've been doing that for years," Mills says.

Kee knows The Rail Stop doesn't fall short of being the "neighborhood gem," and he doesn't plan on going anywhere anytime soon. "I've been out here a while..." he says. "What better job than to do something you love?"

Chancellor's love for The Rail Stop is also apparent. "Over the years, the business has consistently gotten better, money-wise and volume-wise. It's good. Especially because a lot of places are struggling right now. We're lucky."

The Rail Stop is closed Monday, but diners can enjoy Kee's creations any other night of the week, lunch on Friday and Saturday and brunch on Sunday. Regardless of the unique business hours, longtime fans like Tim Reed know, "It's hard to find a little restaurant like this one." After all, it takes only one meal to become a Rail Stop regular.
welcome to the JUNGLE

From dogs to bunnies to piranhas, pet shop employee Rachel Harper is an animal aficionado

story by Rachel Chemerynski & Kristin Dyer | photography by Natalie Wall

When Rachel Harper comes home from work at the end of the day, it’s not a time for relaxing and enjoying a peaceful meal at the dinner table. Rather, she is greeted by a rowdy herd... of animals.

Rachel, a 24-year-old Harrisonburg resident, owns more than 20 pets, including a Crested Gecko, an African Grey Parrot and a 4-foot, dragon-like Savannah Monitor, in addition to her 14 tanks filled with fish, including two piranhas.

“I love animals, obviously,” Rachel says, recalling her passion for animals even as a child. She grew up in a household full of animals, purchasing her first pet — Sally the hamster — at the age of 5.

Now, Rachel applies her extreme devotion to animals by working at Sylvia’s Pets in Harrisonburg, where she has been for three years.

Rachel says that one of the perks of working at a pet store, where she devotes 30 hours a week, is that on long days she can take her dogs to work with her. Her favorite pet, an American Bulldog named Allie, comes to work with Rachel quite often.

“She’s kind of a baby and follows me around hand and foot,” Rachel says, attempting to bring the shy, white-and-brown spotted dog out from the employee room at Sylvia’s. “I think I held her too much as a puppy and now she’s really clingy, which I don’t mind.”

Rachel purchased Allie during her senior year of high school after she was offered the dog for $450.

“It was kind of fate,” Rachel says, since Allie was originally $1200. “She means the world to me and I’d do anything for her.”

Rachel’s sympathetic nature toward animals and experience in the business have made customers at Sylvia’s grow to trust her for advice. On one busy afternoon in the store, a woman approached Rachel concerned about her snake’s sudden lack of appetite. Rachel suggested leaving the snake in a dark area, for it might be laying eggs.

Her boss, Joni Guinn, says people come to Rachel because of her knowledge of the animal industry.

“Rachel is highly intelligent,” Guinn says. “She is very in tune with the animals’ needs.”

Because of Rachel’s expertise, especially with aquatics, she is planning on giving public lessons at the store, including advice on how to set up saltwater tanks.

Rachel’s sincere compassion for animals is the main reason she has acquired so many of them throughout the years.

“The only animals I own that I have actually purchased are my fish, one snake and a dog,” Rachel says. The rest, she has rescued or taken from owners who couldn’t provide care.

Currently, Rachel and her boyfriend, Mike Butler, are nursing an underweight ferret that was shipped to the pet store. Butler and Rachel met while working at PETCO, and now work together at Sylvia’s.

“The common person probably wouldn’t know what to do with it,” Butler says. “It may have died, so we’re trying to fix [the ferret] up and make it better.”

Rachel also has rescued one of her ball pythons from an abusive owner and had to go to court twice in order to become the lawful owner. According to Rachel, the snake had suffered extreme burns, evident through the long scars spread across its body.

Rachel has bottle-fed 35 cats as well, but says that she would never do it again. “It is when you start keeping them all that you get problems.”

Rachel stresses that not just anyone can take on this task.

“You must be very patient and very dedicated. A lot of people take their dogs to the pound and you just can’t do that; it’s so hard on the animal,” Rachel says, her tone becoming lower.

While it’s true that Rachel does love most animals, her sister Rebekah, 18, revealed Rachel’s one fear: sharks.

“One time she was in the ocean and her surfboard hit a shark and she fell off,” Rebekah says. “Now she won’t even go in the ocean in water deep enough for there to be a shark.”

Rachel says that while she loves all her pets, caring for more than 20 animals definitely comes with a price. She spends hundreds of dollars on caring for her fish alone. Each saltwater fish costs about $15, and lights for the tanks are more than $100. Her other pets also have added to the bill. One time, Rachel came home from a long day...
to find that her bulldog, Allie, had destroyed her $300 Coach bag. Allie also has chewed through screen doors, couches and shoes.

“One time she ate one of my friend’s sandals that he was absolutely obsessed with,” Rachel says. “I had to drive all the way to the Outer Banks to buy him a new pair!”

Her African Grey Parrot has eaten every key off her laptop computer and numerous wallets have gone missing. Some of Butler’s items have been ruined as well.

“I’m big on video games and Dixon’s eaten some of those,” Butler says, referring to Rachel’s feisty black-and-white Boston Terrier. “One day he ate about $200 worth of stuff!”

“There’s always something interesting going on,” Rachel adds, mentioning that her birds enjoy bathing in the dogs’ water bowls. “A lot of the time they’re just all running around at once,” she says laughing.

With the financial strains and long hours spent caring for her pets, Rachel is now trying to downsize, sticking mainly to fish.

“Rachel’s problem is she likes all animals, so if anything comes in with a cute face it’s coming home,” Butler says. “I’ll just stick with saltwater fish. They don’t poop on the floor,” he says with a smirk.

Rachel also is downsizing because of the great amount of space her animals require, although she is able to live — crammed yet content — in the bottom level of her grandparents’ house.

Rachel says that she is limited as to where she can live because no one will rent to someone with that many animals.

“I am very lucky that my grandparents let me stay here,” she says. “Otherwise, I would have to buy my own house.” Rachel says she is grateful to have the support of her parents and boyfriend as well, who help take off some of the pressure.

“I am lucky because my parents are available to me, so I am still able to go on vacations and lead somewhat of a normal life,” Rachel says.

While her pets can be difficult to manage at times, Rachel says that her animals are like children to her. Rather than family portraits hanging on the walls of her apartment, Rachel showcases professional photographs of her pets in holiday themes.

“They are worse than kids, but I still love all of them.”

RACHEL CHEMERYNSKI is a senior SMAD print journalism major and communication minor from Marlborough, Conn. She works for The Breeze as a staff writer and interns at Girls’ Life online magazine. After graduation, she hopes to write for a women’s magazine in New York City.

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NATALIE WALL is a junior SMAD print journalism major. She is the photo director for The Bluestone. She plans to move to New York City, attend Upright Citizens Brigade and pursue a career in comedic acting.
Saving nearly extinct languages is just a day on the job for former JMU professor Marion Bittinger
Marion Bittinger hunched in her hooded down coat, staring through the glass. The howling winds outside threatened to rip the drying animal skins off the boxy roof seen from her hotel room. After hearing of two men found dead in the blizzard outside, she lifted her camera to snap pictures from inside her room, documenting her third trip to the Arctic Circle.

Bittinger is in Kotzebue, Alaska, home to the Inupiat Eskimos. But she isn’t on a frosty vacation — she’s at work.

As a part of the Endangered Languages program with Rosetta Stone, an educational language software company that started in Harrisonburg, Va., Bittinger travels to remote locations to develop software for communities that want to preserve native languages.

The mission of the Endangered Languages program is to revitalize the language within the community where it was born. The program started in 2004 after a few groups joined with Rosetta Stone to create software for their personal use.

“We don’t sell or distribute it to others,” Bittinger explains. So far, six different Native American or Alaskan Native tribes have contracted with Rosetta Stone for custom software.

As the program manager, Bittinger meets regularly with members of the tribes, either remotely or on site, to discuss a plan of action. The program has finished three languages so far and has five more in progress. She made her most recent trip to Alaska to record audio clips of the language for the software.

Now back in her warm, buzzing Rosetta Stone office, Bittinger jokes about her lack of physical activity in Alaska, saying, “In that kind of weather, you can’t spend that much time recreating anyway.”

Bittinger asserts that the international success of the software is because it is immersion-based. “You only see the language you’re learning,” she explains. For example, a native English speaker wanting to learn Spanish would never hear the English translation of a word or phrase. “You learn by associating the language with visual and audio, in small pieces — phrases and sentences,” she says.

The team begins with a basic template for the program and customizes with specific linguistic and cultural features. The staff works remotely and then goes on location for photos and to record audio with native speakers. Once the project is complete, the Endangered Languages program staff travels again to the location to train the native speakers to use the software in their schools and communities.

“Time can vary a great deal — it could take up to four years to complete a project, depending on a team’s availability,” she says. And time is of the essence when languages are quickly disappearing.
Of the 6,800 languages in the world, Bittinger says about half could be extinct by the end of this century, "extinct" meaning all active speakers are deceased. "A few hundred of these [languages] will be in North America alone," she says.

So where are all of these North American languages? These communities are scattered around the United States in urban areas and others are accessible only by air or, in warmer summer months, by sea. Bittinger’s most recent trip to Alaska was to record audio clips of the language for the software.

Bittinger attributes the death of several languages in North America to the boarding-school structure in the American educational system. In this system, many children were forced to leave their communities for schooling and learn the English language.

"Students were often physically punished for speaking their native language," Bittinger says. She gazes at the ceiling and states flatly, "You kill the Indian, save the man," quoting Captain Richard Pratt, founder of an experiment that involved teaching Native Americans to read and write English and dressing them as American soldiers.

Howard Michael Gelfand, a history professor at James Madison University, notes that other movements have contributed to the weakening of the Native Americans’ culture. The Dawes Act of 1887 began the individual distribution of land to Native Americans, starting in Oklahoma. Unfortunately, the allotments were white castoffs and not substantial enough for economic viability. The forced assimilation mandated by the act led to confusion and immense anger on the part of the Native Americans. "As a result, their languages went on a steep decline," Gelfand says.

Today, traditional groups of Native Americans remain, striving to reclaim their language and culture, but succeeding primarily with their most tangible asset: land. Gelfand, an Arizona native, testifies that Phoenix is a perfect example of the divisions today. "Flying into Phoenix, you can literally see the reservations with the suburbs surrounding them," he says.

After traveling to several of the program locations, including Alaska and Canada, the Endangered Languages team became attached to the people they helped. "All the projects I’ve been really connected to emotionally," Bittinger says. After working most thoroughly with the Navajo Indians in the Four Corners area of the western United States, the Navajo project is where her heart is.

She finds that most groups take a while to warm up to the team because of their weariness with white culture. "We’re white corporate America and everything that represents when we go up there," she says. "I have to be a good listener."

As she was recording audio tracks for the Inuit Labrador community in Nain, Newfoundland and Labrador, she was approached by an Inuit man who had been rather unfriendly.

"He said, ‘You know, I always used to hate white people,’" Bittinger recalls. "This opened the door for him to communicate his history. If they can see you have a personal interest, they will respect that."

When she isn’t jetting off to far-flung civilizations, Bittinger maintains her connection with her clients by reading Native American publications online. "I like to keep up on local issues with the tribe," she says. "Those issues have a direct impact on the people I work with.

After studying language in college and living in Spain for three years, Bittinger spent 20 years teaching Spanish in Harrisonburg and at JMU. She decided to give up teaching language to work with Rosetta Stone.

Bittinger’s enthusiasm for languages pervades her life. Her husband, Antonio Martinez, 54, shares her love for culture and new languages. "I go with her only when she’ll take me," he jokes. "I’m actually extremely jealous." He has tagged along twice to the Navajo reservation and once to the Mohawk community in Canada.

"It’s a world within a world," Martinez says. "They don’t want to be like us. There are people living in sod-roof hogans within a morning’s drive of Phoenix."

Bittinger considers herself lucky because of the people who surround her. "All of us who work within the program are trained in languages and have a passion for what we do. This job allows me to really see people and a language firsthand, in a way that very few people do."

Her mouth breaks into a crinkly smile as she says, "I always knew I wanted to study languages."

One thing is clear: at 51, Bittinger has finally found her dream job.
From Rucksack to Backpack

Four student veterans tell their stories of transitioning from soldier life to student life

story by Matt Voegel & Nicole Brigaglinio
photography by Megan Mori, Jessica Rice, Matt Voegel & Ashley Beaudin

“Hey Mom, I gotta go. We’re getting rocketed,” says Timothy Norville, a member of the National Guard deployed to Afghanistan.

For young Americans overseas, this way of life can become routine until the day they are sent back into regular civilian life — or in this case, student life.

According to numbers published by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics in October 2008, a total of 523,258 veterans were using the educational benefits promised to them by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Trudy Ham, the veterans program coordinator within JMU’s Office of the Registrar, recognizes the difficulty of making this transition, and also makes sure that her veteran students are fully aware of the services that JMU provides for them.

Mike Stanley, John Dalton, Timothy Norville and Michael Shydlinski are four of these JMU student veterans who graciously shared their experiences within the military and talked about how the transition from military to university life affected them. Each of them has his own story and has faced different obstacles along the way.

O

On the night of March 25, 2006, the streets within the Iraqi city of Ramadi were hauntingly quiet and dark. Mike Stanley of the 101st Airborne division of the Army had to put on his night vision goggles to keep a good lookout while he and his fellow scout platoon members made a routine patrol throughout the industrial section of the city.

Tall buildings surrounded the group as they ventured deeper into the unknown. Unfortunately, the large AT-4 rocket launcher that Pfc. Stanley was carrying on his back would not be getting any lighter, but he was not the type to complain. Why should he? Today was his birthday. He was now 20 years old, and earlier that day, he was greeted by the well wishes of his buddies within the platoon.

Suddenly, without warning, everything went white and Stanley could not hear anything except the deafening ringing sensation that was pulsating inside his head. Stanley was not on his feet, but rather lying on his back, wondering what was going on and why he could not feel his legs. Even though the effects of shock were closely encroaching on the infantryman’s senses, basic training had drilled into his brain the proper response for this sort of situation. He screamed, “MEDIC!”

Stepping on an improvised explosive device (IED) was not what he expected to do on his birthday.

Three years later, Mike Stanley, now 23 and a sophomore at James Madison University, is sitting outside of a quaint coffee shop on a relaxed and calm spring afternoon. “Pretty much, [the medics] go over your whole body to figure out what it is going on,” Stanley says. “They are not supposed to tell you the extent of your injuries because they are afraid that you’ll go into a deeper state of shock.”

Stanley remarked that even though the medics would not answer him, he still persisted on asking them; that is, until he saw it for himself.

“I pick up my leg to look and I realize that it’s gone,” Stanley says, “completely just blown right off.”

For Stanley, seeing his leg missing for the first time was a major blow; not just physically, but also mentally and emotionally.

“When I saw my leg, I thought my life was over,” Stanley recalls.

After getting out of the line of fire and to their local base in Ramadi, Stanley was taken
to a Combat Medical Facility in the Iraqi city of Balad. A day later, he was flown out to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, where doctors and specialists treated him for three days. Due to the intensity of the blast, Stanley's right leg was amputated below his knee. He also lost a thumb of his right arm, his pinky finger and part of his ring finger. The infantryman also sustained several burns and lacerations from the explosion.

"Supposedly it was a pressure plate [IED] that was meant for a vehicle. Like 20 or so guys had already walked over it before me, it just finally went off when I stepped on it," Stanley says.

Once he arrived back in the United States, Stanley began treatment at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. There, he underwent several surgeries to reduce the swelling of his leg wound, which was then followed by a long and daunting process of physical therapy. Even though his situation seemed dismal, Stanley became motivated by the determination and inner strength of fellow wounded servicemen who were also forced to wear prosthetics.

"When you go down to the physical therapy room [in Walter Reed] there's a bunch of people in there and you see the people with prosthetic legs that are running on the treadmill or riding on the bicycle, stuff like that," Stanley says. "You start seeing that there is more to it and that you are not just going to be in a wheelchair for the rest of your life. You slowly start into that process. They make you a new leg, you take your first steps and then it all goes from there.

Stanley was officially discharged on February 27, 2006, almost a year after he was wounded. Before leaving Walter Reed, the young veteran decided to inquire about educational benefits.

"I had to take some standardized tests and everything to determine what I could do, and that's where I learned about the 'Voc Rehab' program," Stanley says.

With Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment benefits to assist with funding his education, Stanley was offered the opportunity to go to college. He knew he wanted to study computer science and he knew where he wanted to go: JMU.

The idea of going to JMU was introduced to him more than once and had sparked his interest in the institution. Even though he researched other schools, it did not take long for him to make up his mind. "I decided to come here before I saw the campus," he says. "I don't know... it just felt right."

By August 2007, Stanley was considered a full-time student at JMU studying for a bachelor's degree in computer information systems.

"I was the 21-year-old freshman in the dorms," Stanley says. "I had to question which of the people were actually my friends and which of the people were just trying to get to me to get them alcohol. That really became a problem for me."

Even though he made some friends, Stanley still felt somewhat isolated from most of his peers. Unable to relate or even fully trust many of his new companions, he considered dropping out of JMU or transferring.

"I definitely contemplated leaving at one point," Stanley says. "I was making friends but... I don't know. It was just a feeling... like I didn't know if I was in the right place."

Thankfully, the veteran was able to find a friend who could relate to him and help him through this new transition: a faculty member, Thaddeus Herron, his GCOM teacher.

Herron had never had a war veteran as a student before.

"When I first saw Mike, I saw his prosthetic; [it was August and] he was wearing shorts," Herron recalls. "I was thinking, 'There's a story there.'"

At first glance, Herron had thought Stanley was 18 or 19 and that a car accident was the reason his new student had lost a limb. It was not until after each student in the class gave individual presentations about themselves that Herron realized he was wrong.

"He was open, honest and forthcoming to everyone about what happened to him," Herron says. "I remember just sitting there thinking, 'Wow... these kids have no idea, and I have no idea, what this guy's really been through.' He added so much value to that class, just in experience."

With encouragement and a constant open door policy, Herron was able to be what Stanley had been looking for: someone he could talk to.

"With his class, [Herron] would always ask me to tell my stories and put my opinion on everything because he wanted to see my view [considering] I had different experiences from everyone else that was in there," Stanley says. "We became friends. When I had problems, I really didn't know who else to go talk to, so I went and talked to him and he helped me."

With a breath of fresh air, Stanley was able to gain more of a foothold in his new surroundings and become more focused on his studies. Because of the strong sense of self-discipline drilled into him throughout his service, getting school assignments done on time was never a problem. In fact, after his first year at college, Stanley was on the dean's list with a 3.7 GPA.

"In the [Army], it was built into me that when you are told to do something, you do it; I did everything," Stanley says. "Now I am kind of getting away from that because I haven't been in the military for a long time, but at first, [my mindset was] when someone told you to do something... you do it. Don't ask questions, just get it done."

As the spring semester of 2009 comes to a close, Stanley now has a second year of college under his belt. A lot has changed for him since he first came to JMU, and things seem to be working out quite well for the former soldier. He's still on the dean's list, he has made many close friends since his arrival and he has been dating his girlfriend, Andrea, for seven months. One could say that the reason for his success at JMU has a lot to do with the discipline he probably attained while serving his country in the Army. After having a conversation with the former infantryman, however, it's fairly obvious that it also has to do with his determination and positive attitude.

"His positivity, his perseverance," says Herron of his former student. "This sounds cheesy, sounds cliché, but I think that in that semester he was more of an inspiration to me than I ever believed I was [for him]."
If I heard a bang, I would drop to the ground and look to see what was happening around me.

SGT. JOHN DALTON, commenting on his transition to JMU

Stationed in Fallujah, Iraq, John Dalton was paranoid all the time. As a sergeant for the convoy security team, you always had to be on your toes, Dalton explains. “You can’t trust anyone outside the military,” Dalton says. “The [Iraqi] people could be your friends one minute and shooting at you the next.”

Dalton, a senior international affairs major, enlisted in the U.S. Marines Corps Reserve in August 2003, a year after high school. Dalton had witnessed the change that his best friend went through after enlisting and he too wanted more discipline in his life. In March 2006, he was sent to Iraq for seven months.

With the Iraqi army building in size, Dalton and his team assisted them in training to properly conduct a convoy and how to react in different situations. His platoon also did detainee pickups and releases and was part of the Quick Response Force (QRF), adding to Dalton’s tendency to always be on guard.

With heavy fighting occurring, QRF teams could be counted on to help out at any moment, Dalton explains. He remembers an incident vividly. “We didn’t have enough Marines so we were taken in by heavy fire from many buildings,” he says. “We had to wait for an infantry ground team to clear the building and for air support.”

Upon returning from Iraq, Dalton attended Piedmont Community College in Charlottesville, Va., for a year and transferred to JMU in January 2008. It was a stressful time going from the combat realm to being back to civilian life, Dalton says. “It was just difficult because no one in class had experienced what you had, or could relate,” he says.

Most of the Marines who came back from Dalton’s unit suffered from what is known as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This made transitioning back into civilian life especially difficult. “If I heard a bang, I would drop to the ground and look to see what was happening around me or if I saw a trash bag on the side of the road I thought it was an IED,” Dalton says.

To deal with his PTSD, he received counseling at the Veteran Affairs hospital in Richmond for almost a year. When Dalton came to JMU, he also spoke to a counselor at the Varner House.

“It was nice to have a neutral party and somewhere to cope,” he says. “I didn’t know anyone so I didn’t have that immediate support.”

When he was part of the military, Dalton had the closeness and camaraderie of the other Marines at his side, but at the university, it was harder to relate to his fellow classmates. Now adjusted, Dalton plans on graduating this May.
WHILE CLIMBING OUT HIS SCANTILY ARMORED HUMVEE, infantryman Timothy Norville of the 116th Infantry Division couldn't help but notice the towering cliffs that surrounded his convoy on three sides. The group, consisting of nine infantrymen, an interpreter and two Afghan police officers (who looked like they were 16 according to Norville), was on a mission to detain a Taliban fighter, who was supposedly hiding out inside the village that lay in front of them.

"We are 400 meters out from being inside the village and the only thing we see is this donkey tied up to this tree about 200 meters away from us," Norville says. "That's it. There's nothing going on in this valley...", says the junior political science major, as he recalls a day during his 17-month deployment in Afghanistan. "We had started establishing a perimeter and then suddenly one of the machine gunners on the other side yells 'RPG!' [rocket-propelled grenade] and began opening fire with his machine gun."

According to Norville, the empty village did a 180-degree turn and suddenly became a chaotic downpour of enemy small-arms fire that seemed to be coming from every direction. After finding cover, Norville and the other infantrymen relied on what they all learned in boot camp.

"In training, you are supposed to be very communicative to let everyone know where certain areas of contact are [and] your status so the command is always up-to-date with what is going on," Norville says. "It was all by-the-book."

Norville and his group engaged the enemy in such an organized manner that they received no casualties, and air support was coming in 20 minutes to help them out. Their morale was good, even though they were still taking fire.

"Everyone's smiling, it's happy," Norville says. "Guys are pulling out cigarettes and lighting them up [while they were] shooting. It was surreal."

Then the radio called back again with bad news: the air support would arrive in 50 minutes instead of 20.

Thankfully, time flew by for the group of infantrymen until air support came to relieve them. The A-10 Warthog, which can be described as "a bath tub with wings," flew 100 feet over the groups' heads and supplied enough firepower to stop the enemy small-arms fire. After going into the village and scanning the area, the group was not able to find its target. But they didn't sustain any casualties, a plus for them considering they were actually vastly outnumbered.

"We found out later that we were looking at a force of approximately 80 or so against our nine," Norville says.

"One good thing about the National Guard is that people know each other; it's a hometown group," Norville says. As a specialist in the infantry, Norville was assigned to patrol villages and to conduct counterinsurgent operations.

"That was a completely different turn-around," Norville says. "I came back 21 years old and my focus was a lot more on school... [I] made dean's list the first semester [back]."

After completing three semesters at JMU, Norville was sent on his second deployment to Iraq for 10 months. There, he did convoy security and operations consisting of the logistical operations movement of troops and equipment from one place to another.

In late May 2008, after 11 months, Norville returned to JMU from his second deployment. Changed by his experiences after his first deployment, Norville developed an interest in the Middle East. With his general education classes out of the way, he had begun focusing intently on his political science major. He had also developed a love for the country of Afghanistan.

"I did anything and everything to be able to take classes in that field," Norville says. "I think it also changes as you progress in school, getting your general education classes out of the way, being able to focus on things more that you enjoy, things for your major... [it] definitely helps with willingness and adaptability."

In April 2009, it had been a year since Norville returned from Iraq. With his formal discharge date in October, Norville hopes to finish with his schooling entirely in spring 2010.

"JMU was very helpful in [my] transition, at least administratively, back here," Norville says. "As the conflict was still new, not too many people were returning veterans. We have a good number of veterans now, but I don't think we had nearly that number originally."
It’s the worst possible way to get woken up ever, ever, ever!” Michael Shydlinski says.

Shydlinski, a senior history major, was being woken up to the sounds of a chemical alarm and voice alarm echoing throughout the ship.

Abroad the USS CARR, 250 officers and crew members rushed to their stations. Shydlinski threw on his full-body suit, boots and gas mask and ran to his station 300 feet behind him on the ship.

With the hazy sky of the north Persian Gulf as the backdrop, Shydlinski did not know what to expect.

“I was scared out of my mind at first,” he says. “We know Hussein used chemicals against his own people, so he would have no problem using them on us.”

Chemical sensors located on both sides of the ship could detect chemical, biological and nuclear substances. When one side of the sensors went off, officers used basic maneuvers to combat the problem for two hours. All thinking was under control, the ship was met once again with the chemical alarm, this time from the sensors on the opposite side.

Six hours later, the problem was under control, but the officers and crew were unsure what the cause for the chemical alarms was.

When it was all over, Shydlinski and the others aboard the USS CARR watched the first offensive mission against Iraq. It was what he described as a “firework show” as the first bombs and first planes were sent to Iraq.

Only mere miles off the coast of Iraq, chemical attacks, explosions and sandstorms were always possible threats that the U.S Navy could encounter.

“They’d love to sink an American vessel,” Shydlinski says, who patrolled the area from January 2003 to May 2003.

Shydlinski enlisted in the U.S. Navy in August 2000. As an E-5 sonar technician and petty officer, his primary role was anti-submarine warfare.

A member of the visit board search and seizures (VBSS) team, Shydlinski and other members boarded ships that were suspected of smuggling illegal goods, people and cargo. They were in charge of making sure United Nations mandates were being met.

To Shydlinski, his military experience had the greatest impact on the continent of Africa. He and his crew broke a lot of ground, helping to build relations and doing community service programs, Shydlinski explains.

“We gave back in a big way,” Shydlinski says. “It changed who I was, as far as understanding the world.”

MICHAEL SHYDLINSKI, Petty Officer 2nd Class, U.S. Navy

“It kind of felt too mature. I was around full-grown men and now [I was around] 19-year-old kids. I didn’t embrace the college atmosphere.”

Shydlinski has been back for three years now and is fully acclimated into his life as a JMU student. Fellow students and the classroom experience have really helped with his transition, Shydlinski explains.

“I was overjoyed,” Shydlinski says. “It meant a lot to me to come back and finish.”

Shydlinski and his crew brought medical supplies to villages, met with locals and had the opportunity to provide security to the first female president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

“We tried to establish more relationships with a part of the world [that was] neglected for far too long,” Shydlinski says.

With the Iraq War, most of the Navy is strategically wanted in places that have the most potential, Shydlinski explains.
top, right: 2008 Naismith Award winner and University of North Carolina senior forward Tyler Hansbrough.

above: Bob Leverone poses with his wife, Barbara, at Super Bowl XLII in Phoenix, Az. Leverone has been working for Sporting News magazine since 1998.

right: Leverone spends much of his time covering games, but has developed his skill with portrait shots while at Sporting News.
This Madison graduate and Sporting News photographer is driven to capture the moment of ultimate intensity.

Bob Leverone is trained to capture peak action — "from lepers in Vietnam to the NFL Super Bowl," according to his resume.

The 1979 James Madison University graduate is now a staff photographer for Sporting News magazine, reporting on major sporting events across the country. While Leverone spent most of his career as a photographer for various newspapers, he remembers getting his first taste of magazine production with Curio.

"That was a really, really cool experience, because I had never really thought about magazines," Leverone says. "It was just kind of cool to see how to do a magazine. It was just a different way of publishing something."

Leverone also worked on JMU's yearbook, The Bluestone, as an undergraduate, and cites flexibility as the largest benefit of working on both publications.

"The neat thing about The Bluestone is you could shoot a basketball game, and if you didn't really like anything you could go to the next basketball game," Leverone says. "It was the same sort of with Curio; you had a chance to go back and do better if you had to."

One of his original mentors, JMU photojournalism professor Tommy Thompson, said that the late 1970s brought many strong, motivated photographers to Madison.
well-rounded:
Leverone has been to a plethora of sporting events, including the Olympics, NASCAR races and NFL Super Bowls.

“They would hit the street [and] do it their way, which is kind of neat,” Thompson says. “They were very innovative. Every one of those photographers from that period [was] coming out to best the other photographer.”

As JMU made its academic requirements more stringent, Thompson saw a change in his students. Many of them were more concerned with grades and less interested in taking their photography to the next level.

It seems as if Leverone came up in the “golden age” of JMU student photojournalism. Still, he had to start out as a jack-of-all-trades when he graduated.

Leverone initially spent about a year as a staff photographer for the Page News and Courier in Luray, Va. But his job duties stretched much wider than his title.

“I did a lot of writing and layout and everything,” Leverone says. “With such a small staff, you did a little bit of everything. That one year I probably learned as much if not more than I did in college, cause you were forced to learn how to do everything. I mean, we even delivered the paper — you had to.”

After a year at the Page News and Courier, Leverone spent five years collectively at two daily newspapers in Maryland, before working for 11 years at the Charlotte Observer. But in 1998, he decided that he had seen too many of the same assignments working for newspapers, and quit. Leverone wanted to freelance and had developed enough contacts at that point to branch out.

As it turned out, a career hiatus was not even necessary. Leverone got a phone call from Sporting News about a few weeks after he quit, and the magazine told him he could stay at home.

“They let me stay in Charlotte, which was actually advantageous for them, and I worked out of my home in Charlotte for
STEPS to capture peak action:
(according to Bob Leverone)

1. Dress comfortably no matter the situation. Have correct weather gear for rain, snow or extreme heat.

2. Stay in shape. I ride a stationary bike between three and five times a week because this job is very physical.

3. Read, read, read. Always check the local newspaper the day of the game for injuries, insights and tips. I want to know what each team’s strengths and weaknesses are, what each team might do in certain situations and who might be the go-to guy. I also pick the brains of any writer who has an interest in what I’m shooting.

4. Know your gear. It amazes me how often even seasoned professionals don’t know how to use the camera gear hanging around their neck. Cameras are simply computers with lenses on them and those computers are only as good as the person using them.

5. Being lucky is better than being good. Good luck has described much of my life both professionally and personally.

**slam dunk:**

Here, Leverone catches a personal encounter between Shaquille O’Neal (dunking) and Dikembe Mutombo in the 2001 NBA Finals matchup between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Philadelphia 76ers.

Sporting News until they moved [to Charlotte, N.C.] last July," Leverone says. "A company in Charlotte bought the magazine and moved the whole operation."


"He went out of his way to help everyone that was moving into Charlotte," says Paul Nisely, senior photo editor at Sporting News. "He took my wife and I on driving tours around the area, to show us, 'Hey, this is a really neat place,' and 'Look at the houses in here,' and told us about his realtor, told us about all these other people. And everything that he did for us, he did for other people at the company."

Nisely and his coworkers also became impressed with Leverone’s ability to capture peak action, which led to the crafting of a phrase.

"Somebody would have a good game, but Bob always had the best game," Nisely says. "He had the action, the photo, the photo of the game that told the story, and it was always sharp. The joke was, the other guys got 'Bobbed.' Yeah, well, 'We got Bobbed today.'"

Leverone refers to it as a "friendly competition." Before every game he covers, he wonders how he can out-do the dozens of photographers he’s up against.

"Basketball or football or whatever, I really enjoy watching people compete," Leverone says. "And I’m sort of a step away from that because I compete against the people who are my friends and colleagues. So it’s sort of a friendly competition, and they beat me a ton and I go, 'Wow, I wish I had that frame.' But every now and then you grab one and they’ll come up to you and go, 'Wow, I wish I had that frame.'"

As he gained experience with Sporting...
One shot for good measure

When Bob Leverone went into his interview with Sporting News magazine, this shot from the 1996 NFC championship game at Lambeau Field impressed his future employers. It shows the Green Bay Packers’ Dorsey Levens catching a touchdown over the Carolina Panthers’ cornerback Eric Davis. Leverone battled brutally cold temperatures to catch the moment.

News, Leverone refined his touch with portraits, working with many of the world’s premier athletes. Shaquille O’Neal, Kobe Bryant and Alex Rodriguez have each shared time with Leverone.

His job, however, is not always celebrities and glamour shots. Long road trips are often part of the equation, while rain and snow sometimes challenge him when he covers games. “Sometimes it’s not great weather — you know, you freeze your butt off or you get soaking wet or whatever,” Leverone says. “But that’s part of the competition. How do you weather that, how do you weather the storm, and do you produce really good stuff under those conditions.”

That insight is what keeps Leverone sharp. Whenever he shows up to a sporting event, whatever the conditions, he shifts his eyes over competing photographers, mapping out the challenges ahead of him.

He’s trying to figure out how he can get action at its absolute peak.

MATTHEW McGOVERN is a senior SMAD corporate communication major with a minor in Spanish. He is sports editor at The Breeze as a senior, was assistant sports editor as a junior and will pursue journalism as a sports writer for the North Fork Journal as well as the Shenandoah Journal upon graduation.
FACES of the FORGOTTEN

JMU students visit Nicaragua to connect with orphans in need

story by Anna Young | photography by Ashley Beaudin

CHRISTA SAMAHRA'S HEART belongs in a trash dump — in downtown Managua, Nicaragua.
The blue-eyed, blond Samaha, who speaks Spanish fluently, lived in Nicaragua for five weeks last summer, serving a severely impoverished community in La Chureca, a dump where 700 families live and another 700 people work, collecting plastics and other valuables from the huge heaps for a couple of dollars a day.

“I was able to go to the dump two to three times a week and help with the child sponsorship program and just meet families and get to know people there,” the James Madison University senior says. “I didn’t know how different my life could be from someone who lives in a trash dump.”

Though the Williamsburg native’s upbringing in Virginia is worlds away from the trash dump in Central America, Samaha serves as the president of JMU’s Nicaraguan Orphan Fund, an organization that serves impoverished Nicaraguan youth and families as well as orphans. For the past two spring break trips, she has served as the trip leader for as many as 30 JMU students.

During the university’s most recent spring break, students spent a rewarding week with families in La Chureca and with young children who live in El Canon, an orphanage appropriately named for being nestled in a canyon on the outskirts of Managua.

“People can ask you, ‘How was your spring break?’ but you can never fully give that person the experience you had unless they were there,” Samaha says. “I didn’t know how different my life could be from someone who lives in a trash dump.”

While in La Chureca, Good met Olivia, an 8-year-old who lives in the trash dump with her family. “She came up to me and asked if she could get on my shoulders and we started running around and she took me to meet her family,” Good says. “Olivia loves to dance, she would dance on my shoulders and I would dance with her to music. She had so much energy and passion and she had the biggest smile I’ve ever seen.”

Good spent almost the entire day with Olivia and says she never let go of his hand. “Her smile was contagious,” Good says. “I found with a lot of orphans, they start smiling and then everyone’s smiling and laughing... the joy and hope is really contagious and it makes you appreciate life even more.”
The group members also worked with the orphans of El Cañón every day for at least part of the day, dividing their time between two service projects. They were painting the orphanage’s weathered outdoor kitchen and the large fence that surrounds the orphanage. They also played soccer, made crafts, went to the beach and to a lake, and had birthday parties for the orphans with upcoming birthdays.

On one particular night, the students had a pizza party for the orphans while the orphanage’s employees took a night for themselves. “It was nice to give the workers at the orphanage a night off,” Good says. “We were there for the orphans, but we were also there to help those already working to provide them with support and give them a break because it is such a demanding life.”

Samaha says that as soon as the college students stepped off the bus onto the yard of the orphanage, the children’s faces lit up. Samaha assured that each student who goes to Nicaragua builds special relationships with one or two children, most of them between 8 and 12 years old.

One such bond was between Good and a 15-year-old boy named Jordan. As the oldest child in the orphanage, “he had this outward appearance of a tougher kid, rougher around the edges,” Good says. “He spoke a little bit of English and after talking with him I realized he’s just a kid... and he has such a big heart.”

Good spent much of the week playing soccer with the orphanage’s teenagers and getting to know Jordan, discovering that he was to be adopted soon. “I really miss him and I’m just so excited he has a chance to be adopted,” Good says.

At the end of the week, all the students struggled to pull themselves away from El Cañón for the trip back to the United States. “The JMU students were a wreck; no one wanted to go home,” Samaha says. “But I think that’s what makes it so powerful — that you are so broken at the end of the week that you want to go back [to Nicaragua].”

Even so, the bonds built during that week have not been broken. Many students write letters and send pictures to the orphans in their absence. Samaha knows how much the stability of seeing the same faces again means to the children in El Cañón. “The fact that people are returning down there for the trip is so key because it’s showing these kids that they’re loved, that people care for them,” she says.

Where the passion began

During her sophomore year in college Samaha attended a mission conference where she learned about many countries. “Going to that mission conference essentially opened my eyes to what was going on in the world and I was like ‘OK, I want to do something. I want to help.’ ”

When she returned from the conference, she found that a friend who attends Virginia Tech was going to Nicaragua with a large group from the university for the upcoming spring break to do mission-type work, and Samaha felt drawn to Nicaragua.

Through networking, she was able to contact students who were leading trips from Virginia Tech and University of Virginia. She discovered that several JMU students were planning on piggybacking on a trip planned by an Orphan Fund chapter at U.Va.

Samaha signed herself up for the one-week spring break trip to Nicaragua.
While there she made a pledge to herself to return the following summer. Summer 2007, she decided she wanted to start a program at JMU to serve Nicaragua, like U.Va. had done several years previously, and envisioned starting her own chapter of the NOP.

"JMU is going to love this, they love service projects as it is, it has so much potential," she thought to herself. "So why not have this be a big trip?" Samaha’s desire for other JMU students to experience what Nicaragua has to offer lies with those she served on that first trip she took to Central America. "I think the people there are what draw me back," she says. "It’s so ironic but it’s... like the secret of the poor... they have something that we don’t."

**Sparking the passion**

For spring break 2008, Samaha organized the first official JMU trip to Nicaragua for 31 JMU students, an endeavor she started in October 2007 because she didn’t know if the program would attract any interest.

Samaha spoke to the director of ORPHANetwork, a Christian-based umbrella organization based in Virginia Beach that orchestrates trips to Nicaragua through groups like the Orphan Fund, and Manna Project International, which serves Nicaraguans living in La Chureca where Samaha served last summer. The ORPHANetwork’s college spring break trip is its largest organized trip every year.

“We have connections to other groups down there, we’re all serving in Nicaragua together,” Samaha says, clarifying that the Orphan Fund is not affiliated with JMU’s Alternative Break Program (ABP).

“We knew we didn’t want to go through the JMU ABP program,” she says, adding that they allowed fewer participants. “We knew we wanted to be a big thing, so we knew being a club would be the best thing for us.”

In fall 2008, JMU’s chapter of the Orphan Fund spent several months jumping through hoops for it to become an official club. Samaha brainstormed with Chez Hughes, the president of Virginia Tech’s chapter.

“ Christie and I had already met and we had mutual friends and connections throughout Nicaragua," says Hughes, a senior at Virginia Tech. “We began talking about the process we went through at Virginia Tech, becoming an official club, looking for sponsors, fundraiser ideas, everything from how to structure leadership, to how to recruit for the trip, to how to generate funds.”

For spring break 2009, JMU students spent their week in Nicaragua with students from Virginia Tech. While Virginia Tech students spent their week working at Nueva Vida, a feeding center that provides 300 children with one meal a day, Tech and JMU students lived together in a hotel and reflected on their day almost every night of the week.

“We process what we’ve been exposed to for the day and how we fit in to a lot of the poverty and the issues and the problems that we are working with and we share those times," Hughes says.

**Planning the passion**

Last fall, the leaders from U.Va. and Virginia Tech, along with Samaha, met with Tom Weiglein, ORPHANetwork’s Nicaragua national program director, to streamline efforts for Nicaragua. “We needed that...
You’re coming face-to-face with this poverty. How can that not be impactful?

CHRISTA SAMAH,
JMU senior

common direction,” Hughes says, “because being on a college campus, dealing with limited resources, I think it’s really good for us to pull together what we’ve been working on and maximize what we do have, which is people, energy and time.”

Samaha has adopted some aspects of both the U.Va. and Virginia Tech chapters, such as the leadership structure, fundraising events and circulating a newsletter to serving students’ parents. But she kept the JMU group smaller than the other chapters.

“We go on these trips and students from U.Va. or Virginia Tech that had 50 to 60 students and still by the end of the week in Nicaragua, they didn’t know each other,” she says. “When you’re serving other countries, you have to get comfortable with everyone and get close to everyone.”

For the most recent Nicaragua trip this past March, the JMU chapter collected donations and clothing, as well as medical and school supplies to take to Managua. “This trip we had 33 full suitcases of just donations to get down there,” Samaha says.

Most donations came from students, while some came from students’ families. In previous years, the group was scraping together donations to pile on the planes they took to Central America. This year, however, the group placed boxes around nearby apartment complexes and appealed to other organizations around JMU and Harrisonburg. Group members also asked friends and families to donate. Samaha attributes much of this year’s donation success to a JMU global nutrition class whose semester-long project was to sponsor the Orphan Fund.

While the JMU group may be smaller than the two comparative universities, its passion and potential has been growing, partly because of the impact that the trip has on students.

“We’ve only been around, you know, less than two years, and to already see how all of these people have come back from each trip and then spread the word to all their friends, I think that it’s just going to have more and more interest each year,” Samaha explains.

Although interest in the Orphan Fund has flourished, the Harrisonburg community-based service events have not been as successful as Samaha had planned, and she hopes to expand the local service efforts this year. “I think that’s key, that we’re not only serving down in Nicaragua but we’re trying to benefit our own community as well.”

Future community-based projects may include working at the downtown soup kitchen and Hispanic trailer park communities. In addition, they plan to teach adult English as a second language classes scattered around the Valley, and participate in Vida Joven, the Hispanic Young Life program.

Spreading the passion
Nicaragua has touched the lives of Good, Samaha and Hughes, just a handful of those who witnessed the intense poverty and the heartbreaking stories of the orphans and other families during their spring break.

“I’m definitely planning on going back, the trip was amazing,” Good says. “I fell in love with the country itself, I fell in love with the kids and the culture.” Good is looking forward to spending his last spring break as a senior next year in Managua, and plans to serve those in La Chureca or one of the orphanages for a couple of years after he graduates with a degree in public health education.
Samaha wants to keep close ties with JMU's Orphan Fund, and considers herself lucky to have another year in Harrisonburg to finish her three undergraduate degrees in psychology, Spanish and secondary education. The following year she hopes to still be at JMU to earn her master's in education.

"I changed by having the desire to go there, but in return, Nicaragua has totally shaped what I want to do with my future," the aspiring high school Spanish teacher says. "I don't know if I'll necessarily be able to go every single year for the rest of my life but I know that's something I'll definitely keep as a big part of my life."

Hughes, who will teach high school Spanish through Teach For America once she graduates this May, is preparing other Virginia schools like Radford University to take on their mission for Nicaragua.

"You can read statistics on paper, you can go online and research different things, but going on a trip like that is giving these statistics a face. You're coming face-to-face with this poverty," Samaha says. "How can that not be impactful?"

To learn more about the Nicaraguan Orphan Fund, check out the Web site at www.nofjmu.org.

ANNA YOUNG is a junior print journalism and sociology major. She currently works at The Breeze as managing editor and is an executive editor for Madison 101. She plans to pursue a career as a freelance magazine writer or a magazine editor.

ASHLEY BEAUDIN is a senior SMAD print journalism major with a minor in Spanish. She is currently a freelance photographer, graphics assistant with the Journal of ERW and Mine Action and has been working with other nonprofits throughout her JMU career. She has interned with United Way and hopes to pursue a career as a humanitarian photojournalist.
Tyler Jay Binsted, Jan. 16, 2007
Assignment #51: Describe what to do with your body when you die

“When I die, I want to be buried next to the creek behind my house where I grew up. I always buried my pets back there, and since they are the things in my life to which I was always closest I want to be in the ground with them. And I really get annoyed when I hear how expensive funerals are, so I don’t think I’ll need a coffin. After I am buried I want the people present to plant an entire garden on top of my remains, so this way, I can give back even when I’m dead (via bodily nutrients). And it will almost be like people are eating me, which is kind of exciting to think about because in a way I will be carried on even after I’m dead.”

For a brief moment, in the earliest instance of life, Tyler and I were one: a mono zygotic embodiment, whose unity persisted through mitosis, birth, childhood, adolescence and death. I think our relationship was enigmatic to those who witnessed our interaction, and in many ways it was misunderstood. When people see twins, they have a tendency to individualize them, to separate them according to their distinct features, thereby undermining the very uniqueness of their relationship. The individuality of twins is symmetrical — each embodies one half of a whole. A balanced whole with an oriented left and right. Physiologically, each of us mirrored the other. Tyler was left-handed, I was right-handed; his hair parted to the left and mine to the right. But there was more than an anatomical mirror between us. Face-to-face, we saw nothing but our equilibrated selves. Each twin is one half of a self. No — one half of a soul. A soul who understands itself behind that expressive facial curtain of skin and muscle, and above the cumbersome frivolity of words; it is something of an intuitive awareness each has of the other, fostered in the shared womb, where a harmonization occurs between two bodies from the same egg, both from the same history and the same home. Twins’ fetal development is an attunement between two minds, a ceremony commenced with the first synchronous beat of two hearts. It is a connection beyond the vicarious, a connection that exists after death: a union that transcends life itself.

Tyler and I never met each other. It would be more accurate to say we emerged together into the world. Because we experienced the world together — discovered the world together — language was an emphatic distraction from our mode of communication. In many ways, words were a perversion to our reticent interaction, to our experience, to our truth. In the absence of language, it was our artistic projects that captured and expressed our intuitions, and hence our understanding of one another. Tyler studied sculpture as an honors student at Virginia Commonwealth University, a concentration that led to his ambitions in architectural furniture design. Yet, as a musician and a painter, Tyler was not limited to three-dimensional mediums. He possessed an aesthetic sensibility that reflected a sensitive curiosity for experiencing the world, and through which he expressed a supremely meaningful understanding of it.

We shared a room together for 15 years, falling asleep and waking up together each day. It was a space shared between us, one that echoed the mutual familiarity of the womb. We eventually got our own rooms in high school, leaving the old one as storage space. Our new rooms were nonetheless close to each other, within a couple footsteps. Ironically, although we had spent almost all of our lives near each other, I was in Grenada, Spain when he was murdered: he was born at my side, but an ocean separated us at death. I returned home for the funeral, climbed upstairs and
opened the door to our old room; there sat all of his belongings —
boxed, taped, wrapped, labeled and stacked. A life consolidated.
A large painting of Tyler’s was situated away from his other pos-
sessions. It was a depiction reminiscent of the American flag, only
instead of the traditional red, white and blue, there were faint un-
dertones of pink, purple and green covered liberally and hastily
with a layer of white pigment. There was violence in the paint-
ing; a texture that concealed the vivacity and nobility beneath; an
image that portrayed the privation and perversion of American
values.

Tyler and I went hunting on our last Thanksgiving together. While for us it amounted to little more than a pleasurable walk
in the woods, we promised to take my Australian suitemate be-
fore his return home. It was not an unusual November after-
noon, comfortably cold. The three of us crossed the field, then
the creek and spent the day slinking through the forest leaves,
sitting on fallen trees and listening. As the light began to fade,
we took a photograph to commemorate the day and headed home
for Thanksgiving dinner. We were near the creek when I saw a
white animal running across the uppermost branch of a leafless
oak. It was an albino squirrel, whose peculiar whiteness radiated
from the dull forest. I raised my gun and placed a bead on it. I felt
excited and wondered about that feeling of vivaciousness before
killing. I pulled the trigger and watched the animal drop down,
landing on a bed of leaves. I walked over and touched my palm to
its soft, clean white fur. It was a fragile animal. It was warm and
still twitching, and I was taken back by the life leaving the crea-
ture in my hand. Its blood escaped from inside, first bluntly stain-
ing its white fur and dripping down to the skin of my palm. I felt
a welling guilt. Tyler read my disturbance and said that this shock
comes from our distance from death itself; death is a constant in
our everyday life, only it is concealed behind factory walls and
agreeable wrapping. We separate our food from this rite of death,
depriving ourselves of the significance of the life that must end so
that we can live. There was a tacit disdain in Tyler’s words for the
mechanical perversion of food, of the chicken and beef and pork
dismembered in plastic wrap, sitting on a display shelf behind
plastic garnish. This is the reason that death remains foreign.

More than a year has passed since Tyler’s murder. Around 2
a.m. on March 27, he and his girlfriend, Maggie, went for a walk in
a Richmond park to search for sculpture materials. Two strangers
approached them asking for directions, at which point one pulled
out a gun and ordered Tyler and Maggie against the chain-link
fence surrounding the tennis courts. The thieves were Zsabriela
Williams and Howard Scott III. The former wielded the gun. Af-
ter robbing them of $1 and a cell phone, they demanded their car
keys and Tyler and Maggie complied. Though the atmosphere was
relaxed at this point, it turned violent when Zsabriela commanded them to lead her to Maggie's car, pushing the nose of her pistol against Tyler's back. Upon reaching the car, Tyler and Maggie were ordered inside the trunk. Instead of acquiescing, Tyler defiantly slammed the trunk. Grabbing Maggie's hand, Tyler turned to walk away. He whispered to Maggie, "It's going to be OK." At that moment, Tyler was shot in the back. He fell to the ground. Maggie managed to escape, but only after one final glimpse at her fallen companion. Maggie's car was found torched the next day.

My father, a Vietnam veteran, once told us: "If you're going to kill a man, you had better be his best friend, because he's staying with you for the rest of your life." I first saw Tyler's killer in a brightly lit courtroom on the day of her trial. On the state's request, I agreed to testify to my family's psychological trauma. Taking the stand, I met eyes with Zsabriela. At least I think I did. She wore black tennis shoes and a metallic silver dress with scrunch-up material at the shoulders — a dress exaggeratedly juvenile in character, as if its wearer was tacitly suggesting "I'm young, be merciful." To me, her clothing accessorized an already-evident immaturity: her face conveyed a docile adolescence, and her eyes were empty of any understanding of remorse or of the world around her. Her mother also testified, revealing not only the mother's drug and alcohol addiction, but also, for the first time, that Zsabriela's alleged father was not her real father. There in that cold, indifferent courtroom sat an infant subject to the punishing power of the sovereign, a girl who understood nothing of her punishment nor the language with which it was dealt. Yet, what was confounding is that this monumen
tal punishment was born from a procedure so routinized and stale, and from a sovereign so evidently disinterested. She — this neglected human being, a leafless shoot malnourished and suffocated by weeds of ignorance — was an enemy of the state. In the end, Zsabriela was sentenced to life in prison. Thence, two mothers, two beings sanctified by Mother Earth to incubate, bear and embody care for life, were childless.

Tyler was slain at that moment desire exceeded the material, aiming to behold the fear and the obedience that kneels before the barrel of a gun. This steel bolt, breech and barrel forged as an instrument of instant and indifferent power, could only deliver the impotent destruction of its commander's vindictive scarred ego. But, the virtuous circumstances of his murder are an attestation not only to him, but also to our parents. The experiences from their lives, their knowledge and their guidance, all culminated in the events that night in Richmond. For Tyler, the boldness in his decision was in its principle and was in no way out of character. I can define him no better than this feature: he always replaced a soul, not the indispensable but the irreplaceable.

Of his grandmother's death, novelist Marcel Proust said, "I did not insist only upon suffering, but upon respecting the originality of my suffering." It is given that we will suffer more, those who have spent our lives with Tyler, but the originality of this suffer-

![Tyler (left) and Seth (right) take a photograph before heading home for Thanksgiving dinner in fall 2007.](image)

Isaac is a junior with a major in SMAD and a minor in Spanish and philosophy. He works at The Breeze as a photography editor and most likely will attend law school after graduation.
The cherry blossom tree (top) was planted in the Binsted's backyard in honor of Tyler. Tyler and Seth, age 5, peer out a window (left) in the farmhouse where they grew up in Mount Jackson, Va. (right).
Like most children, Matt Gaffney believed he could be anything when he grew up: a third baseman for the Baltimore Orioles, a professional chess player, a crossword puzzle writer. But the Staunton resident did not give up on his childhood dreams. He now makes a living writing crosswords.

"Not many people get to do what they love," Gaffney says. "I'm lucky."

For Gaffney, constructing crosswords is not just a way to receive a paycheck: it is a way of life. The only other job he has ever held was as a camp counselor the summer after college. His apartment, although minimalist in style, is a crossword puzzle in and of itself. Black, box-shaped 5-by-5-foot shelves line his white walls, and the only shape in his home is the square. Stacks of crossword books, both ones Gaffney has written and the hundreds he has collected since childhood, fill the otherwise empty living room.

"My mind is so cluttered," Gaffney says. "I want my apartment to be not cluttered."

Though "cluttered" may be one way to describe Gaffney's way of thinking, "intricate" and "problem-solving" would also apply. Gaffney has been creating crosswords since he was 13, when he was published for the first time in Dell Champion Crossword Puzzles, which no longer exists. It takes him three to five hours to create a normal-sized crossword and on average less than 10 minutes to solve one.

"It's just a wiring of the mind," Gaffney says. "I never learned to solve or write crosswords, it's just something that I immediately realized I could do."

It was his sister, Rebecca, who pushed him to pursue a career in crosswords, back when he still had his heart set on being a professional chess player. He dropped out of college after his first year at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.

"I went to my parents and said, 'Look, I hate school, I'm bad at it,' " Gaffney says. "But I really want to play chess. So how about you give me three grand and I'll go to Europe and play chess for half a year and then I'll never hit you up for another penny ever again.' They did about five seconds of math and said, 'Have fun.'"
Although his parents supported his decision to pursue chess, it did not take Gaffney long to realize that to play chess professionally, he would have to be one of the top 10 in the world — and he was not.

With chess player and third baseman crossed off his potential career list, Gaffney turned to crossword puzzles, the only other thing that had ever captured his attention.

Although he has been submitting puzzles to various publications since he was a teenager, he considers his professional career to have begun when he was 22 — he is now 36.


But Gaffney attributes his success as a crossword constructor to his exploitation of the Internet.

“‘You have to be entrepreneurial to make a living out of crossword puzzles,’” Gaffney says, “‘because there is a set order that favors the older guys who have been around forever. I got lucky because when I was coming up, the Internet was just coming into its own in the mid ’90s and late ’90s, so the older guys weren’t interested in the Internet.”

With the explosion of the Internet and the decline of print publications in the past few years, Gaffney’s choice to pursue Web-based crossword clients was the right move, he says. He contributes weekly music crosswords to Billboard.com, has a weekly online crossword contest, rotates with eight other crossword constructors for The Onion online and is currently working on a crossword program for iPhones.

Brendan Quigley, a friend of Gaffney’s for the past 10 years and a crossword constructor himself, says that being “forward-thinking” is what sets Gaffney apart from others in the profession with his use of new media. Gaffney’s use of unpredictable letter patterns also makes him a standout crossword writer.

“It’s not surprising that it was Gaffney who got Quigley interested in crosswords back in the late ’90s, and has always been someone Quigley looked up to: Gaffney fits every one of Quigley’s characteristics of a successful crossword writer.

“It takes grace and dignity to accept that it could be a life of poverty,” Quigley says. “You have to be prolific, have to have your own style, be unafraid to push yourself and write for different types of areas, and be unafraid to gamble with new technologies.”

Quigley, who lives in Boston, is one of the eight contributors to The Onion, along with Gaffney.
Not many people get to do what they love. I'm lucky.

MATT GAFFNEY, puzzle artist

Gaffney, however, does not just have an online presence; he also publishes and edits books. He currently has 25 published crossword books, and a few more in the works. He also syndicates crosswords to about 60 publications.

Although creating crosswords day-in and day-out may seem monotonous to some, Gaffney never gets tired of looking at squares and coming up with clues.

"One good thing about my job is that it's easy not to get bored because I can change the level of difficulty of what I'm doing," Gaffney says. "If I'm hungover, or I'm tired or I don't feel like writing a puzzle that day, I can ease it up. But if I really feel like doing something special, something interesting, I can put the extra time in to do that."

Gaffney completes the three-to-five-hour process of creating a puzzle in blocks, completing four or five a week on average. He describes the process as similar to building a house: "You put the long beams in first."

The first step is coming up with a theme for the puzzle, which will help the solver with the longer words. Gaffney then puts black boxes in random spots on the puzzle, while still following the rules of crossword puzzles: Every letter has to be part of an across and a down, so the solver has two chances to get it, no words shorter than three letters and the black boxes have to be symmetrical on the puzzle, like a mirror image. Gaffney also has to make sure not to box himself in, leaving him with an "unclueable" word.

"For example," Gaffney says, as he works on a puzzle, "[If] I can't think of a word that fits _T_G_A_. I'd be in trouble."

Next Gaffney writes the clues to go with the words he has filled in. Gaffney is constantly on the lookout for new names, TV shows, games and words that would make good crossword entries.

"All of us in crosswords were excited when Monica Seles, [the famous tennis player], became big," Gaffney says. "Seles,' having very common letters to build on."

One of Gaffney's favorite words is 'jukebox,' though, because of its use of the more unusual letters 'J,' 'K' and 'X.'

"You know at the end of 'Wheel of Fortune' everyone gets 'R,' 'S,' 'T,' 'L,' 'N' and 'E,'" Gaffney says. "So you don't want a crossword full of those letters. That would get boring. So you're trying to put in a lot of these J's and Q's, just to jazz things up."

While Gaffney considers himself a crossword constructor, he has dabbled in other puzzles, including Sudoku, Kaidoku (a crossword/cryptoquip hybrid), word finds and others.

Gaffney is also a self-described "chess groupie." Although he never made a career of it, he still likes to play and follow other players. On his Web site he lists "Magnus Carlsen," who is one of the current world chess champions, under his interests, which he admits with a sheepish grin.

"I guess it's too late now — they know I'm a complete geek," Gaffney says.

His world of chess and crosswords may be "geeky," as Gaffney describes it, but it's hard not to be envious of Gaffney for doing exactly what he loves.

"Everyone fantasizes about where they would like to be in the future," Gaffney says. "But I don't think I'll ever walk away from this."

MEGAN WILLIAMS is a junior print journalism and anthropology double major. She is the outgoing life editor at The Breeze, JMU's student newspaper, and is an executive editor for Afod/son 107, a publication for incoming freshman and their families. She has interned at The Free Lance-Star in Fredericksburg, Va., and will intern there again this summer. She hopes to pursue a career in journalism after graduating.

For an original Curio-inspired crossword puzzle designed by Gaffney, turn to the back cover.

answer key:

...
Two JMU graduates start a nonprofit academy to help children in Ghana play soccer

story by Alex Ledford | photography courtesy of Mike Raskys & Bobby Humphrey

Mike Raskys grabbed the napkin under his beer and started to sketch an outline of Africa. Inside the outline, he wrote, "Futbol For Change" in all capital letters.

"It was a terrible sketch," Bobby Humphrey said, teasing his friend for his humble attempt.

But despite Raskys' lack of artistic talent, the idea soon transformed into something beautiful.
In 2005, two James Madison University graduates and former varsity soccer players started a nonprofit organization in Ghana, called Futbol for Change, with the goal of getting African youths off the streets and onto a soccer field.

It was an ordinary night for Humphrey, now 26, and his childhood friend, Raskys, also 26. They met for dinner at Dave’s Downtown Taverna, only a few blocks from the JMU campus. The restaurant was filled with loud conversations, plates clattering, waiters taking orders, music blaring and the big screen TV humming in the background. But at Humphrey and Raskys’ table, talk drifted to a modern African studies class at JMU. The class, taught by David Owusu-Ansah, focused primarily on nonprofit organizations.

“You know, we always said we wanted to do something different,” Raskys said to Humphrey.

As students, the two always feared entering the mundane world of desk-jobs and cubicles.

It was a longtime goal of Raskys to start a nonprofit, and the class ignited his interest even more.

But Humphrey had a different dream.

“I always wanted to play pro soccer,” Humphrey says. “But I knew I wasn’t athletic enough.”

Humphrey and Raskys admired the inherent grace and athleticism that African soccer players possessed. That night, they argued over whether an African team, with their raw talent and speed, would ever win the World Cup. They agreed that professional African teams were at a disadvantage because of their lack of resources and facilities.

Growing up in Connecticut, Humphrey and Raskys were spoiled when it came to soccer, unlike the players in Africa. “We thought, ‘How good could these kids be if they got to play on the best fields with the best equipment too?’” Humphrey says.

The next morning, Raskys woke Humphrey with a proposition. While discussing the previous night’s events, Raskys tried to convince Humphrey that Futbol for Change was a good idea. After only a couple of hours, Humphrey was sold. They would go to Africa and start their nonprofit.

“We filled out the paperwork that day,” Humphrey says. “And then we crossed our fingers.”

They had no experience with nonprofits and no idea how to start one, but it was obvious what they needed: support and money. They quickly went to work selling Futbol for Change (FFC) T-shirts donning a version of Raskys’ logo from the napkin. A lot of the donations came from their friends and family, but it was their soccer coach at JMU, Tom Martin, who provided insight, unflinching support and a little extra money for the program.

“As soon as we came to him with the idea, he handed me a $100 bill,” Humphrey says. He was behind them from the beginning, and he made sure the soccer team bought enough T-shirts to get them started.

“I have four or five T-shirts myself,” Martin says. “When they came to me, I said, ‘This is all well and good, but money is gonna make it happen.’”

The inspiration for the idea, Owusa-Ansah, or “Dr. O-A,” as many students call him, was also eager to help. He wrote a letter of endorsement, explaining that he was providing guidance and support for FFC.

“It was a testimonial for us to have and put on our Web site,” Raskys says, “To give us some credibility since Dr. O-A was already involved with Ghana.”

He provided them with their first and only contact in Africa too, directing Humphrey and Raskys to the Ghana Center for Democratic Development, an institute that Dr. O-A used as a resource for his study abroad courses.

“We had no idea where we were going to start the program,” Humphrey says, “We needed to narrow down our objective and find one community to focus on.”

“"These kids had absolutely nothing but a broke-down ball and a patch of dirt, and now they have a whole new world."”

BOBBY HUMPHREY, co-founder
In Ghana

Six months later, they were on a plane to Ghana to do just that; focus their objective. The Ghana Center for Democratic Development provided the pair with an itinerary and tour guides to help them find a community to plant their program. On their first day, they were surprised at how quickly Ghana grew on them.

"It's as hot as Florida," Humphrey says. "But the people are much cooler and more interesting than any group of people I've ever met."

They quickly got to work meeting people and establishing contacts. Accompanied by Ghanaian tour guides, Humphrey and Raskys traveled to several towns on the first day. Expecting to be met with a level of skepticism, they were proved wrong by the welcoming communities.

"You rarely see someone without a smile on their face," Humphrey says.

During their search, they were invited to watch a youth soccer game in Medina, a small town on the coast of Ghana.

"We didn't know at first, but they had put on the game just for us," Humphrey says.

The kids played on the only field in town. Surrounded by a chain-link fence, it was hard dirt with scarce patches of grass; a slum compared to the palace-like fields Humphrey and Raskys played on.

"This was pretty much it," Humphrey says. "The whole community centered around this field, and they all came out to watch the games."

The two were sitting on the sideline with nearly 200 others, when a young boy tugged on Humphrey's jersey. He wanted one of the T-shirts they brought with them to give to the players.

"We had to say no," Raskys says. "We didn't have enough for everyone."

The child continued to nag the Americans about the T-shirts, when an older kid dragged him away from the crowd. Humphrey and Raskys turned around to watch and saw the older one pin the younger one against a fence.

"Stop fooling around!" he screamed. "Don't you want them to come back?"

"It was right there that I realized this community not only accepted us, but they needed us," Humphrey says.
That night, Humphrey and Raskys agreed to set up their program in Medina. The American duo started a soccer academy in the community and originally selected 60 of the most gifted players to participate.

Each week, FFC holds three soccer sessions led by Wahab Abdul Musah, the program director, and Adnan Marafa, the academy coach. Each player has a copy of a code of conduct, which he must obey during the sessions.

Drawing from the academy, FFC also fields a professional team in the Ghanaian Second Division that plays weekly matches against some of the country's most competitive teams.

In addition to athletic opportunities, program officers provide school counseling and leadership lectures for the students, emphasizing school as a requisite for taking part in the soccer sessions. They also help fund schooling where they can, even paying an examination fee for one gifted player. Samir Ibrahim, 13, and his parents were ecstatic, as the exam allowed him to pass junior high school. Without the help of FFC, Ibrahim would have been a dropout.

"This is a familiar story in the community," Musah says. "The thing that really got the kids' attention was the gear," Humphrey says. With the help of generous donations from Puma and the U.S. Soccer Federation Passback program, FFC distributed much-needed equipment to the players, including new cleats, shin guards and clothes.

"These kids had never seen a $200 pair of shoes," Martin says. "They were playing in sandals."

Humphrey and Raskys knew that in order to raise the level of play, African communities needed proper soccer equipment and facilities. They also found that even just a T-shirt or a pair of shoes...
can provide hope and inspiration in communities of extreme poverty.

“They were really shy at first,” Humphrey says. “The look on their face was, ‘Are you sure you want to give these to me?’ But they walked away and every kid gathered around in awe of the stuff. They became stars in the town.”

Where they are now

Despite starting with only two members, the FFC staff has grown significantly, now operating with a board of directors and employing former players at the University of Ghana as coaches at the academy. Members of the community also volunteer as referees and assistants.

“They were quick to help,” Raskys says. “The community was very appreciative and we were very appreciative of them. There are many people that are hopeful in the face of very difficult circumstances, very difficult realities.”

The academy also maintains a housing facility in Medina that offers lodging to several of the most at-risk players. They spent what money their budget allowed renovating a concrete shack into a livable house for several homeless players.

“It’s amazing that they’ve done so much with zilch,” Martin says. “You can’t measure the smile on those kids’ faces.”

Raskys remembers a moment of clarity during the organization’s beginning stage. While watching one FFC session, he asked Musah what the kids would be doing if they weren’t at practice.

“Nothing,” Musah replied. “They would be doing nothing.” Raskys learned there was no alternative for the children. There were no fun opportunities for young people in Medina. By providing something as modest as a game of soccer, FFC allowed them to appreciate being young.

“The business of kids is playing, and we sort of provide that,” Raskys says.

The economy, along with other complications, forced FFC to go on hiatus. Humphrey and Raskys returned to the U.S., leaving Musah and other program officers to run the academy. They still hold practices and play competitive games.

“We just ran out of money,” Humphrey says. But the two plan to make more trips to Medina in the future. For now, they look back on their venture, confident that the seed they planted will continue to grow.

“These kids had absolutely nothing but a broke-down ball and a patch of dirt, and now they have a whole new world,” Humphrey says.

For more information visit the Futbol for Change Web site at www.futbolforchange.org.

ALEX LEDFORD is a junior SMAD print journalism major and a technical and scientific communication minor. He has interned as the graphic designer for the Institute for the Stewardship of the Natural World at JMU. He is also an articles editor for Madison 101. He plans to pursue a career in advertising.
Local crossword puzzle artist, Matt Gaffney, designed a Curio- and Shenandoah Valley-inspired puzzle exclusively for Curio readers. Enjoy!

**ACROSS**
1. ___ Enterprise
5. Big street in 20-across
9. Magazine you're reading
14. Height, as of a mountain: abbr.
15. Not doing much of anything
16. To the left or to the right
17. Word in many beer names
18. Level, as of a wedding cake
19. Plane finder
20. Valley city
23. "This ___ joke, right?"
24. Part of a lowercase "i"
25. Field full of Frost?
29. Came out ahead *
30. Final
32. Brazilian city, casually
33. Silver or bronze
36. Walks back and forth
37. Put 2 and 2 together?
38. Big rds.
39. ___ Square (part of 20-across)
40. Border
41. ___ Blossoms
42. Seacoast
43. Pittsburgh is known for it
44. O.J. trial judge
45. "Pretty funny"
46. "Tic Dough"
47. Life's work
49. ___ Lanka
50. Window units in summer: abbr.
51. President whose name is seen all over 20-across
57. Plus
60. In style
61. Linwood H. ___ (local college president)
62. Jess' ___ (noted diner in 20-across)
63. Golf target
64. Money in the pot early
65. Animal furs
66. Needs to pay
67. Burn

**DOWN**
1. Indian city
2. Jennifer Garner show
4. At any time
5. Makes a pass at
6. Green Day's "American ___"
7. Singers ___
8. Mint or thyme
9. Chicken soup ingredient
10. Employment
11. Free (of)
12. Ore- ___ Tater Tots
13. The Who's "Love Reign ___ Me"
21. "American ___"
22. Unexpected win
26. Play the markets
27. Part of BRCC
28. Sing from the mountains
29. Used to be
30. Late designer ___ Ashley
31. Measure of land
33. Criss Angel's field
34. Andrew Lloyd Webber musical
35. Ronan Tynan, notably
36. A.A. Milne character
39. Slickness
40. And so on
42. Sword holders
43. "That's what I ___"
46. Remnants
48. Fighter plane button
49. Say "cheese"
50. In unity
51. ___ Rican
52. Derisive look
53. Pittsburgh is known for it
54. Haunting sound
55. "The Daily ___"
56. Money for the future
57. Swiss peak where you might hear someone 28-down
58. Take to court
59. Seth Meyers is a member of it, for short