THE Rock

Fall/Winter 2026 | Slippery **Rock** University Magazine



Because *this is* THE ROCK.

Coming together for a campaign to invest in students and carry SRU's legacy of excellence into the future.

INSIDE

5
Caring Forward
Nursing Student Prepared for Empathic Leadership

12-13
Inspired Research
Professors Explore Topics as Parents

14-15
Books in the Barn
Community Outreach for Children Reading to Horses

In this issue

2 **University News:**
Enrollment Updates, Partnerships, Awards and Rankings

4 **Student Spotlight:**
Alex Momyer Excelling as Safety Major, ROTC Cadet and Trustee

5 **Student Spotlight:**
Future Nurse Mylah O'Hanlon Developing as Empathic Leader

6 **Cover Story:**
Introducing SRU's First Comprehensive Campaign in 30 Years

12 **Faculty Focus:**
Becky Thomas Explores Language of Conservation in Thailand

13 **Faculty Focus:**
Jon Anning's Research Inspired by Son's Response to Exercise

14 **Public Eye:**
SRU Group Leads Equine-Assisted Program for Young Readers

16 **Public Eye:**
Women's Flag Football Unfurled as Varsity Sport

18 **Parent Reflection:**
Family of Nursing Major Grateful for Scholarship Support

19 **Athletics News:**
High Grades, New Wrestling Coach and Club Rugby Champs

20 **Alumni Network:**
Finney and Sheetz Family Gifts Fuel Student Success

22 **Alumni Network:**
Josh Cress '09 Champions Safety Excellence at Deep Well

24 **Class Notes:**
Celebrating SRU's Alumni with Achievements, Promotions and Weddings

26 **Alumni Network:**
Two Alumna Share Bond From Backpacks to Briefcases

27 **From the Archives:**
A Look Back at North Hall's Rebuilding in 1938

28 **Big Picture:**
The "White Out" Crowd Roars for Rock Football



The Rock is on The Rise

There is a lot to celebrate at Slippery Rock University.

In this issue of The ROCK, you'll meet students, faculty and alumni whose stories reflect the strength of The Rock — and discover how that strength is helping shape an even brighter future through our new comprehensive campaign.

That future comes into focus every fall, when a new class of students arrives on campus with hopes, ambitions and dreams of what comes next. This year, that moment felt especially meaningful. **A record 1,627 first-year students chose SRU — the largest first-year class in our history.**

It's more than a number. It's a sign of what happens when students see a place where they can belong, grow and find their path — and when families place their trust in The Rock.

"Welcoming the largest first-year class in Slippery Rock University's history is a powerful sign that more students and families are choosing The Rock as their first-choice destination," said Michael May, SRU's vice president for enrollment management. "This growth, as well as our record number of graduate students, reflects the trust families place in SRU and the commitment of our faculty and staff to invest in every student who joins our campus community. From the classroom to advising, mentoring and the many experiences that help students find their path, we are creating an environment where students can thrive at every stage of their academic journey. We're proud of the progress we're making together and even prouder that students are choosing The Rock."



ON THE COVER

From left, Logan Heffington, Caylen Makola, Carter Elbin and Mia Renard represent the largest incoming first-year class at SRU on record, as a record 1,627 students gathered at New Student Convocation at the Morrow Field House in August. Students wore different T-shirt colors according to their residence halls or status as commuters.

CREDITS

Executive Editor: Ken Bach, executive director, University Marketing and Communication. **Managing Editor:** Justin Zackal, director of communications, University Marketing and Communication. **Designer:** Megan Cassioli, '14, director of graphic communication, University Marketing and Communication. **Contributors/Editorial Assistance:** Claudia Fischer, administrative assistant, University Marketing and Communication; Lisa Luntz, clerical assistant, Alumni Engagement; Chloe Kemp, '26; Maxwell Hildebrand, '27; Aidan Treu, '26; Ava Baird, '30. **Photography:** Mike Schnelle, visual communication director, University Marketing and Communication; Lauren Jaroch, '27; Alumni Engagement; University Archives. **Executive and Editorial Advisory Committee:** Kelly Bailey; Erin Bryer; Jason Hilton; Troy Miller; Roberta Page, '88; Michael Zieg.

The ROCK is published two times annually by the Office of University Marketing and Communication for friends and alumni of the University.
Send story ideas or feedback to news@sru.edu. Send Class Notes or updates to contact information to alumni@sru.edu or by using the online form at rockalumni.com.

Address changes can also be submitted to:
Slippery Rock University • University Advancement Office
1 Morrow Way • Slippery Rock, PA 16057

Message from the President



Greetings,

Slippery Rock University is at an inflection point. It's not because we are changing direction, but because we have built a strong foundation and are ready to take our next important step forward.

The progress we are experiencing today is the result of years of work, vision and investment. Our strategic plan has given us a clear sense of where we are going. Our students are achieving at record levels. New academic programs are expanding opportunities. Our faculty and staff continue to find new ways to help students thrive. And our alumni and friends are showing, in remarkable ways, their belief in what SRU can become.

Progress in higher education and society at large works this way: **one generation building upon the work of the generation before it.**

From Vision to Opportunity

In this issue of The ROCK magazine you'll learn about our comprehensive campaign, with the theme "Because *this is* **The Rock.**" It is a natural progression of what we are doing together at SRU. The strategic plan established our vision and priorities. The campaign gives our community an opportunity to turn these priorities into lasting benefits for our students and the University for generations to come.

That distinction matters.

Universities are built over generations. Leaders make decisions today whose greatest impact may not be visible for years. Programs launched decades ago become the foundation for new areas of excellence. Investments made by alumni and friends long ago continue to shape the experiences of students who walk our campus today.

A strong foundation is not one that never moves—it is one that endures. Resilience is not measured by avoiding adversity but by how we respond to it. It is found in our willingness to adapt, to innovate, and to embrace change with confidence rather than fear. Every challenge carries within it the possibility of growth. Every obstacle presents an opportunity to discover new strengths within ourselves and within our community.

We have willingly inherited that responsibility and relish the opportunity.

The Next Chapter

Now, we are writing the next chapter together.
The campaign includes case statements that we can accomplish immediately, and it is about creating the foundation for what comes after us. It gives our community an opportunity to create lasting possibilities for future students—possibilities we can envision today, even if we are currently unaware of all of the applications.

That is why this moment matters.

SRU has always moved forward because people believed it could be better tomorrow than it was yesterday. Today, we have an opportunity to build on that legacy with the same confidence, ambition, and care that have propelled this University forward for generations.

We know where we are going. We have built the foundation.
Now, together, we can take the next step.

Sincerely,

Karen Riley
President, Slippery **Rock** University

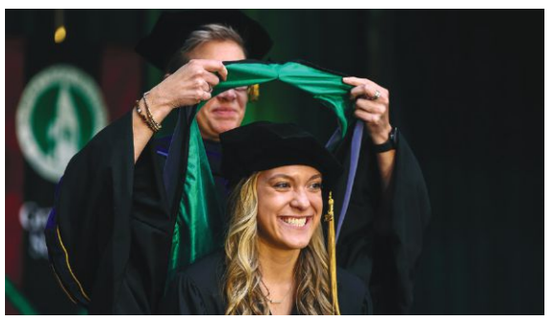
Historic Enrollment Growth

The Rock is on the rise with students and their families continuing to choose Slippery Rock University. SRU has welcomed its largest first-year class and the most graduate students on record for Fall 2026.



1,627

first-year, full-time students, the largest class on record and a 5% increase compared to last fall.



1,577

graduate students, the most in school history and a 2.6% increase from 2025.



8,654

total enrollment, which is up 0.3% compared to last year.



Cpl. Nicole Ludwig with SRU professor David Champion

Pathway to Policing

A new partnership between SRU and the Pennsylvania State Police creates a direct pathway for criminology and criminal justice students to careers with the PSP. Through the agreement, students accepted into the PSP Academy can apply 15 credits of academy training toward their SRU bachelor's degree during the second semester of their senior year. Students also gain early access to PSP recruiters and mentorship from troopers, along with on-campus workshops and academic guidance to help prepare for the academy and application process. The partnership connects classroom learning with hands-on preparation for a career in law enforcement.

Constructing Futures Together

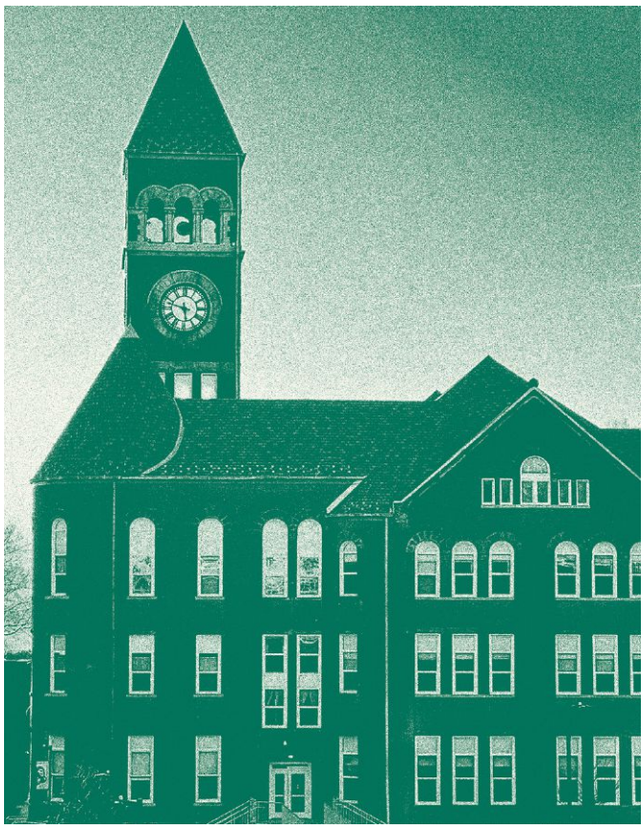
SRU has partnered with the Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters union in western Pennsylvania to empower carpenters to earn college credentials while fully employed.

Union members can earn their Bachelor of Applied Science in construction management at SRU as part of a pathway that honors apprenticeship learning, builds leadership capacity and strengthens the local construction workforce.

They can also earn one of three industry-recognized certificates at SRU to enhance their BAS degree.

SRU began offering a Bachelor of Science in construction management in Fall 2025 and the new BAS model will create a career-advancing pathway for professionals seeking an online degree program that honors both apprenticeship learning and opportunities to earn industry-recognized certificates to enhance their BAS degree.





Rock-Solid Recognition

SRU continues to earn national recognition for delivering an exceptional education at an outstanding value. Three respected college guides have recognized SRU among the nation's best for 2026, highlighting the University's academic quality, affordability and student outcomes.

Best National University, Top Public School — U.S. News & World Report

First time in school history after previously ranked as a Regional University.

- **Best Mid-Atlantic — Princeton Review**
- **Best Colleges in America — Money.com**
- **Best Colleges for your Tuition (and Tax) Dollars — Washington Monthly**

Together, these recognitions reinforce SRU's reputation as a first-choice destination for students seeking a high-quality, affordable education.

Fulbright Ahead

Joveline Pettus, an SRU instructor of business, received the prestigious Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program award for the 2026-27 academic year from the U.S. Department of State and the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board.

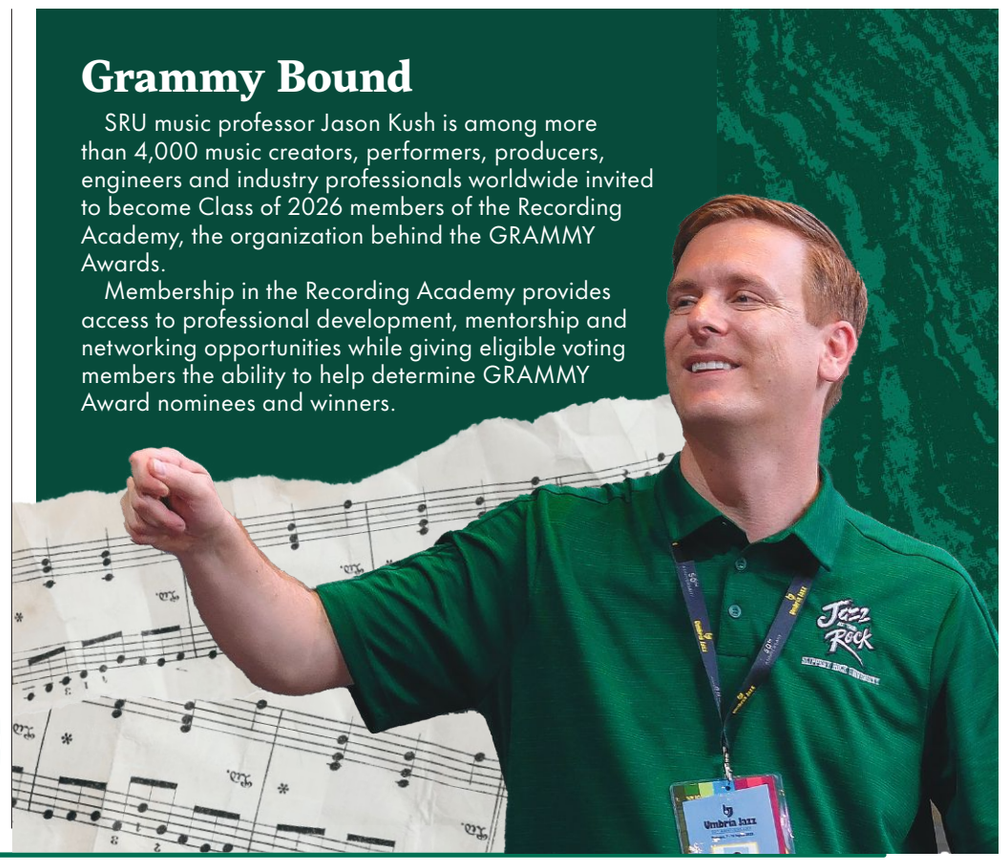
As part of the Fulbright international academic exchange program, Pettus will design and teach graduate-level coursework in digital ethics, leadership and strategic communication at Makerere University in Uganda.



Grammy Bound

SRU music professor Jason Kush is among more than 4,000 music creators, performers, producers, engineers and industry professionals worldwide invited to become Class of 2026 members of the Recording Academy, the organization behind the GRAMMY Awards.

Membership in the Recording Academy provides access to professional development, mentorship and networking opportunities while giving eligible voting members the ability to help determine GRAMMY Award nominees and winners.





Alex Momyer is a safety management major who is a cadet in Army ROTC, president of the Green & White Society, and the student representative on the council of trustees.

Door to Opportunity

Alex Momyer embraces campus roles to grow into a leader

By Maxwell Hildebrand '27

Personal and professional development go hand in hand for Slippery Rock University students. Alex Momyer perfectly exemplifies this balance. A senior safety management major from Punxsutawney, Momyer is taking full advantage of everything SRU has to offer while growing into a dedicated student leader.

"At SRU, I always say that there's never a closed door," Momyer said. "And if you ever came to one that was closed, it was just because there was someone standing right beside it, waiting to open it for you."

Momyer actively seeks ways to immerse himself in campus life. From earning Cadet of the Month honors in SRU's U.S. Army ROTC program to serving as president of the Green and White Society student organization, he embodies the true spirit of The Rock.

Where students are empowered to make things happen

He's also making strides toward a career in safety management, gaining hands-on industry experience through internships and serving as the community service chairman for the American Society of Safety Professionals student chapter at SRU. As if that wasn't enough, he's also the student representative on SRU's council of trustees, the University's governing body.

Momyer credits much of his growth to a simple willingness to step up and say "yes."

"Freshman year, I dove into everything I could, I was kind of like the 'yes man,'" Momyer said. "I went headfirst into ROTC and then Green and White Society, picking up a lot of experience in interpersonal leadership and communication. Working with people elevated my communication skills. I feel like I can walk into any room and talk to anybody. It's one of those fun talents you can pick up."

"I've watched all the yesses that I said as a freshman blossom. It has been an amazing experience."

He's using that experience to benefit others and provide a voice for other students as a trustee. Momyer attends all the trustee meetings and has the same voting privileges as the 11 other trustees, making decisions that affect University policy and approving budgets, new academic programs and other duties.

Taking on the role of student trustee was a culmination of everything I've done at SRU," Momyer said. "I've had experience in almost every facet of campus life, and I felt like I had a great base of knowledge that I could bring to it."

Through these diverse leadership roles, Momyer has not only built a strong foundation for his future career in safety management, but he has also experienced firsthand the collaborative culture that defines the University.

"The amount of support from the students, faculty, and alumni has been something like a trifecta," Momyer said. "If you want to do anything at SRU, there's always something happening."



Mylah O'Hanlon is well on her way to becoming a nurse thanks to SRU's accelerated BSN program and the Louise and Art Williams Scholarship. Students will be able to complete their entire BSN on campus with a new program that launched in Fall 2026.

Cultivating Compassion

Nursing students like Mylah O'Hanlon are trained as empathetic health care leaders

By Chloe Kemp '26

Mylah O'Hanlon is a perfect example of a student who benefited from the expansion of Slippery Rock University's nursing program and support through donor-funded scholarships.

O'Hanlon gained the hands-on, technical skills and interpersonal intelligence medical professionals need to excel as providers and leaders.

A junior nursing major from Derry, O'Hanlon entered SRU's new accelerated 1+2+1 program and became the first student to receive the Louise and Art Williams Scholarship, established by Art Williams, '64, in memory of his late wife, Louise, to support the next generation of nursing professionals.

Developing nurses who change lives

SRU launched the accelerated program in Fall 2025, in which students earn their RN at a partner institution for the second and third years before completing their BSN with SRU online by the end of their fourth year. In Fall 2026, SRU began offering a four-year BSN program that will be completed entirely on campus.

Students participate in lecture-based learning and lab-simulated skills trainings like intravenous therapy practice and patient care techniques.

"It's exciting to be one of the first people to go through the program," O'Hanlon said. "I'm learning how to care for patients directly, and other hands-on skills that will set me apart. My favorite part is being able to talk to my patients and their family members and see what I can do to make them feel better."

The nursing program also includes clinical practice, placing students like O'Hanlon at Heritage Valley Hospital in Beaver and other hospitals in the area. In the hospital, O'Hanlon can apply what she is learning about administering informed and empathetic nursing care for real patients.

"I really like working at the hospital because I get to actually work with people and make a difference in their lives," O'Hanlon said. "I get to help them get through a hard time and vulnerable moments in their lives with what I'm doing."

SRU's nursing students will be educated through service in medical surgical nursing as well as rotations through operating rooms, outpatient care, maternity and pediatric settings. These requirements led O'Hanlon to discover where her passions lie: toward becoming a nurse practitioner.

"I want to go into maternity—I've been looking forward to that forever," O'Hanlon said. "Even though we work in the hospital now, I'm excited to work with more than one patient at a time as a future nurse."

Read what Mylah's parents have to say about their experience in our Parent Reflection section on Page 18.



Because *this is* THE ROCK.

*The Campaign for Slippery **Rock** University*

SRU embarks on $35 million comprehensive campaign to solidify a legacy of excellence

For more than 30 years, Slippery Rock University has grown, adapted and shaped generations of graduates. We have succeeded without a comprehensive campaign to invest in our future at scale. That is changing now.

With the public phase launching of a new $35 million campaign earlier this fall, every investment moves SRU closer to the future its next generation of students deserves.

Why are we launching a campaign to support our students?

Because *this is* THE ROCK.



Regina '92 and
Tony '93 Robinson

We have an extraordinary opportunity to invest in the future of The Rock

Slippery Rock University has long been a place where lives are transformed through education, opportunity and community. Today, we are proud to help lead a historic effort that will strengthen those traditions for generations to come. As SRU launches its first comprehensive campaign in more than 30 years, we have an extraordinary opportunity to invest in the future of The Rock and empower students to achieve their dreams.

Rooted in the University's strategic plan, this campaign reflects a bold vision for student success, academic excellence and community impact. The campaign theme, "Because This Is The Rock," captures what makes SRU special. It speaks to the resilience, determination and sense of belonging that unite generations of Rock alumni and supporters. This campaign is not simply about raising money – it is about creating opportunities, removing barriers and ensuring that future students have the resources they need to thrive.

We are honored to serve as campaign co-chairs. Our connection to SRU began when we were students and has remained strong throughout our lives. Tony earned a bachelor's degree in political science with a minor in accounting in 1993 and was an All-American on The Rock football team. After SRU, he attended law school and built his career with Arthur Andersen and later Ernst & Young. Regina earned her bachelor's degree in social work in 1992 and obtained her clinical licensure. She has devoted her career to serving others in a range of clinical and social work roles. Although we now call Naperville, Illinois, home, our Rock Pride remains as strong as ever.

Our decision to serve in this leadership role comes from a deep appreciation for the impact SRU has had on our lives. We believe in the power of education to change trajectories and open doors. By supporting scholarships at SRU, we have sought to help students who may lack access to mentors, resources or encouragement. We know firsthand that talent and determination can flourish when students are given the opportunity to succeed.

The campaign's goal is to raise $35 million by the end of 2028. We are already encouraged by the tremendous momentum created during the quiet phase, which generated nearly $20 million in support during its first two years. With the public phase officially launching on Oct. 23, we invite every member of The Rock community to be part of this journey.

Every contribution matters—whether through philanthropy, volunteer leadership, advocacy, mentorship, internships or career opportunities for students. Together, we can help SRU continue preparing students for meaningful lives and successful careers.

The future of SRU is bright, and with your support, its best chapters are still to come: Because *this is* **THE ROCK.**

Sincerely,

Tony '93 and Regina '92 Robinson

Campaign Case Statements

The comprehensive campaign has four case statements that tell the story of why a campaign is needed, what it will make possible and how alumni, friends and other philanthropic investors can help make that future a reality. The following are the four case statements:

Campaign Goal: $35 million

Academic Excellence and Innovation $15 million	**Athletics** $5 million
Presidential Priority Fund $3 million	**Scholarships** $12 million

Scan this QR code to learn more about the campaign and to learn how you can donate today.

Academic Excellence and Innovation

Fueling discovery, empowering progress and inspiring possibility.

Access to resources and opportunities is integral for student success at SRU. Students like Tadiwanashe Musanhu are conducting hands-on research that fuels discovery, empowers progress and inspires possibility.

A senior biology major from Zimbabwe, Musanhu has worked closely under SRU faculty mentor Paul Falso as they analyzed how crayfish respond to bacteria exposures by simulating a natural environment in the lab. Learning about the immune systems of crayfish has emboldened Musanhu with confidence and opened him to more possibilities as he plans to pursue a career in medicine or clinical research.

"There are challenges of working with something that is alive; it is very interesting and rewarding," Musanhu said. "I didn't even know you could do this type of research here. But now, I feel like this has definitely improved my learning in class. I've seen my class performance go up since starting the research, and it has also helped connect me to people. I'm finding myself talking and relating to a lot more people in the professional setting now."

Why Give to SRU?

Your support helps students like Musanhu reach new heights. Whether through spaces, tools or mentorship, students are equipped to achieve successful outcomes when they have the resources to learn and grow through classroom interactions, experiential learning, internships and community involvement opportunities. Investments in academic excellence and innovation ensure students can dream boldly, create fearlessly and lead confidently.

Join a tradition of building brighter futures and ensure that The Rock continues to stand firm, cultivating knowledge, leadership and a spirit of community that endures well beyond graduation.

Investment Opportunities

- Named Facilities, Colleges, Programs or Faculty Positions.
- Faculty and Student Research.
- Faculty and Student Awards.
- Health Care Simulation Center.
- Women in Business Program.
- Engineering Labs.



Biology major Tadiwanashe Musanhu analyzes crayfish in a lab at SRU to study how their bodies would respond to physiological stress.

Athletics

Empowering students to grow in the classroom, on the field and on the court.



Lily Ventresca is an All-American on the nationally ranked women's lacrosse team who aspires to work in college athletics.

Investment Opportunities

- Facility/building naming opportunities.
- Named scholarships.
- Interactions with students and mentorship.
- Coaching position/support.
- Travel for programs.

Opportunities to develop and achieve on SRU's 19 men's and women's varsity sports teams help shape students into leaders: in the classroom, in competitions and in life. Student-athletes at The Rock perform at the highest standards of excellence, and many like Lily Ventresca lead at the national level. In addition to earning All-America honors on the nationally ranked Rock women's lacrosse team, Ventresca serves on the executive leadership team for the Division II National Student-Athlete Advisory Committee. She is among a select group of student-athletes who advises the NCAA on proposed legislation and represents the interests of their peers at the national level.

Ventresca is a standout goalie for the SRU women's lacrosse team that achieved tremendous success in 2026 with a perfect 17-0 regular season, a 20-game winning streak, its first-ever conference championship and the second-best overall record among all schools in the country at 20-1.

A native of Rochester, New York, Ventresca said she was not certain who she would become prior to coming to SRU, but she developed into a leader thanks to the community she found.

"I definitely benefited in a lot of different ways since becoming an athlete at Slippery Rock," Ventresca said. "Not only through my coaches and teammates, but the whole support system helped me find myself, and since then I've just been able to give back in so many different ways. There's nowhere else really like Slippery Rock. It's opened up so many doors that I'm just so grateful for."

Ventresca earned her bachelor's degree in sport management a year earlier and is now pursuing her MBA during her final year on the team. After graduating she plans to continue her involvement by entering a career in college athletics.

Her story is like many of the 445 SRU student-athletes who succeed on and off the field, helping SRU achieve its conference's highest grade-point average and ranking second in the nation for Division II Athletic Directors Association Academic Achievement Awards.

Why Give to SRU?

Your support helps students like Ventresca excel in the classroom and in competitions, become leaders and further raise the standard of excellence and high profile in athletes at The Rock. Gifts enable SRU to recruit top-notch athletes by offering scholarships and first-in-class facilities.

Empower student-athletes to compete and succeed while ensuring the Rock Solid tradition at SRU continues for the next generation of sports teams.

Presidential Priority Fund

Ensuring a dynamic and sustainable future for our university community.

The first two case statements focus on known opportunities. But as SRU President Karen Riley asked faculty and staff during an introduction of the comprehensive campaign: "What are your dreams?"

Whether it's from faculty, staff, students, alumni, a campus partner or anyone invested in the future of SRU, the next best idea – the idea that will transform how SRU fulfills its mission into the future – is awaiting.

"The Presidential Priority Fund will allow us to explore ideas and provide the flexibility for us to do anything new," Riley said. "This fund is an investment into the dreams of the people who are coming forward, allowing us to be nimble, pivot quickly and innovate intentionally without constraints of what we are already doing today."

One new thing SRU is doing is adding academic programs that respond to workforce demands. An example is the construction management program, providing opportunities for students like Katya Miller.

"I had no clue that there was even a school near me that offered something so specific because a lot of schools don't offer that," said Miller, who is the daughter of a vice president for a construction company in Pittsburgh.

Miller is seeking to follow in her father's footsteps in an industry that is a nontraditional route for women. She's already conducted job-shadowing at her father's company, but she plans to find her own path to success, and she has an internship lined up at a different company in Pittsburgh in summer 2027.

"Ever since I was a little girl, I've always wanted to be kind of the one that stood out in a positive way," Miller said. "Coming to SRU will help me fulfill my dream of being a woman in a male-dominated field."

Why Give to SRU?

Giving to SRU means investing in people and their potential to grow, thrive and contribute at every stage of life. Your support helps SRU evolve to meet the broader needs of SRU students and communities and fulfill the University's charge to advance human development. It ensures a dynamic and sustainable future for SRU and the people it serves.

Join a tradition of building brighter futures and ensure The Rock continues to stand firm.

Investment Opportunities

- Facility/building naming opportunities.
- Named scholarships.
- Interactions with students and mentors.
- New academic programs.
- Student travel.



Katya Miller is first-year construction management major who is building a career in an industry that is in high demand.

Scholarships

Helping students get here, stay here, and grow here.



As president of the Slippery Rock Student Government Association, Connor Pavlicko aims to serve students — sometimes literally with a T-shirt cannon at Rock football games (see result on page 28).

Investment Opportunities

- Endowed scholarships.
- Annual scholarships.
- Merit and need-based scholarships.
- Honors College support.
- Internships and experiential learning.

Supporting students through scholarships is essential to their success. Having enough financial assistance is one of the strongest factors for how students get to SRU, stay here and grow here.

Your support brings students one step closer to success.

"For students, affordability is everything," said Connor Pavlicko, a senior political science major, who is president of the Slippery Rock Student Government Association. "Students are always thinking about how to stretch a dollar and how they're going to pay for tuition, books or housing. They come to Slippery Rock to have the best quality education at a price they can afford. Affordability is why they come, but it's not just a one-time decision. It's also why people stay."

In addition to representing the student voice as SGA president, Pavlicko is engaged with campus life. He is the Debate Club president, Honors College vice president and Alpha Sigma Phi vice president of philanthropy, just to name of few of his roles. He's also a community assistant in his residence hall, which helps him pay for college in addition to being a Merit Scholarship recipient and the recipient of the Peter J. Oesterling Family Scholarship available to political science majors.

Understanding the importance of scholarships, Pavlicko and his fellow SGA board members established a $10,000, merit-based scholarship for recipients who contribute to campus engagement and leadership. The SGA's new scholarship is in addition to an existing needs-based scholarship supported by the organization, underscoring the importance students place on affordability.

Approximately 85% of SRU students receive financial aid. In 2024-25, SRU distributed more than $10.1 million in scholarships supporting our students. 53.9% of those scholarships were based on student need and helped to close the "scholarship gap," which is the difference between what a student can afford and the amount of aid they are receiving. SRU's average scholarship gap is $2,400.

Why Give to SRU?

Your investment in scholarships helps make up the difference in the scholarship gap, ensuring students have access to an education that makes them the first choice for employers and securing their success beyond our campus community. The annual cost of attendance for in-state students is $21,254 and $29,220 for out-of-state students.

Language of Learning

Immersed in Thailand for a semester, Becky Thomas advances culturally responsive conservation education



At Slippery Rock University, growth happens when people step beyond what they know, learn from others and bring new perspectives back to their communities. It's about understanding, and for Becky Thomas, that word took on deeper meaning, especially when translated from the Thai phrase **ความเข้าใจ.**

Thomas, an SRU professor of parks, conservation and resource management, spent a semester abroad in Chiang Mai, Thailand, studying Thai language, culture and culturally responsive conservation education.

"The Thai phrase for understanding resonated with me throughout the semester," Thomas said. "It's really something I sought to gain throughout my time in Thailand –– understanding of language, culture, environmental issues, conservation and, ultimately, myself."

Thomas gained a firsthand understanding of many aspects of sustainability within Thai villages, from approaches to ethical elephant tourism to agricultural practices. This included her time visiting Baan Huay Hee, a Pga K'nyau (Karen) community in Mae Hong Son Province, where generations of local ecological knowledge shape how people manage the surrounding forest.

"There's often a false assumption that to protect forests and other ecosystems you must separate people from them," Thomas said. "The Thai communities that I observed effectively balanced conservation with the human use of resource."

Thomas is developing case study examples that will be disseminated to students enrolled in her SRU courses delivered through the lens of her field experiences. Her project will also open opportunities for cross-cultural exchange for both SRU and Thai students.

"This experience will continue to shape both my teaching and research, particularly how I approach questions about whose knowledge counts in conservation and how environmental education can better recognize the relationships among culture, livelihoods and ecological knowledge," Thomas said.

Thomas' project, completed during her sabbatical in Spring 2026, was supported by a grant from Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education. She also worked in partnership with the International Sustainable Development Studies Institute and the Environmental Education Centre of Thailand to enhance her skills and knowledge directly from the people of Thailand.

The EEC provides family-friendly environmental education programming, and having Thomas' 8-year-old son, Tee, join her during their six-month stay provided additional context as a participant and learner embedded in the communities.

"Instead of me coming in as an expert from the outside," Thomas said, "I was there to learn from the local people who are interacting with the environment in that place."

Thomas received more than 70 language-learning sessions with a private instructor from ISDSI as she was able to speak Thai at an intermediate level, which, according to international standards, means she is able to handle everyday situations and express opinions.

"Without speaking the language, I would not have gained the understanding," Thomas said. "Culture is embedded in language and that is a crucial part of the work that we do in conservation education."

Deeper understanding from direct engagement

Becky Thomas experienced several aspects of conservation during her six months abroad in Thailand, ranging from feeding a capybara at the Kheow Open Zoo in a veterinary zoology program (top) to making friends at Patara Elephant Conservation in Chiang Mai (bottom).



Father's Purpose

Inspired by son, exercise science faculty member Jon Anning offers forward-thinking approach to muscular dystrophy care

By Nina Sgro '26M



From left, Matthew Anning operates an arm ergometer while exercising with his father, Jon Anning, an SRU associate professor of exercise science.

Driven by personal purpose, SRU faculty conduct research that changes lives.

What began as a father's determination to help his young son navigate Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy has evolved into groundbreaking research that could change how the condition is treated. Jon Anning, Ph.D., a Slippery Rock University associate professor of exercise science, has developed a comprehensive framework for understanding the historically controversial role of exercise in the treatment of DMD, a genetic disorder that causes progressive muscle weakness and degeneration, leading to loss of mobility over time.

The genesis of this research stretches back to the early childhood of Anning's now 17-year-old son, Matthew, a junior at Slippery Rock Area High School.

"When Matthew was diagnosed at 4 years old, we heard about all of these clinical trials and things that he could get involved with," Anning said. "I wanted to help him, so I asked for the data on those trials."

Anning was told that he couldn't have that data as it was all part of a research study. This led Anning to begin his own treatment proposal centering exercise as a treatment strategy for DMD. Anning's curiosity led him to collaborate with researchers at the University of Pittsburgh to find ways to implement exercise without causing damage.

One of the complications of DMD is that, once damaged, muscle doesn't regenerate, making the type and intensity of specific exercises crucial to help a patient rather than cause quicker loss of physical capacity.

"We started looking at all of the medicines that patients with DMD are given and all of the side effects, and we found that exercise can counteract those effects," Anning said.

Since 2022, Anning has authored articles published in peer-reviewed research journals, the most recent with co-authors in the Journal of Rehabilitation Practices and Research about which exercises would be appropriate for all five stages of DMD.

"We wanted it to be readable for practitioners and caregivers so that everyone could get some new perspectives on how to approach exercise and DMD," Anning said. "We've gone to physical therapists with Matthew who haven't been aware of what they can and can't do, so it's just as important to practitioners as it is to caregivers."

Anning has also served on a DMD advisory committee at the UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh.

With his deep understanding of DMD from both a parent and a researcher's perspective, Anning is helping to push the conversation around the treatment of DMD as well as the treatment of young people living with this condition.



SRU student Jayna McPherson helps a child from Slippery Rock Area School District develop reading skills with a horse as her audience at the Storm Harbor Equestrian Center.

Books in the Barn

Children paired with horses for faculty-led community literacy program

By Maxwell Hildebrand '27

A pioneering new program at Slippery Rock University is taking story time from the classroom to the barn by pairing elementary school students with four-legged study buddies. SRU's College of Education and the Storm Harbor Equestrian Center have launched a program titled Books in the Barn designed to support early literacy development by having children read aloud to an unlikely audience: horses.



Sara Tours is among the SRU faculty leading an innovative, equine-assisted program helping young readers.

"Horses are very intuitive animals," said Sara Tours, SRU associate professor of curriculum, instruction, educational leadership. "This can be a great way for children to enhance their skills. The horses have been highly motivating for the kids."

Designed for children in kindergarten through second grade, the program provides opportunities for younger learners to read to horses through structured sessions, fostering a low-pressure, supportive environment that promotes confidence, motivation and greater reading stamina.

After hosting a session with 10 students from Slippery Rock Area School District in April 2026, the Books in the Barn program has since incorporated reading-to-horses activities into various Storm Harbor field trips as it continues the program for the 2026-27 academic year. The SRU faculty's initial research will examine students' motivation and engagement with reading, with the goal of expanding the initiative into a larger research-based program later in the academic year and potentially to other school districts.

The idea for Books in the Barn stemmed from Whitney Angelini, an SRU instructor who teaches an equine-assisted services course that is part of the animal-assisted interventions minor. Angelini, who has worked with equine-assisted services for nearly 20 years, is committed to expanding non-mounted, therapeutic offerings at Storm Harbor.

"The more time I have spent with horses, the more I have begun to develop a deep appreciation for the value of simply being with them," Angelini said. "Horses are highly social herd animals, nonjudgmental and accepting. They don't correct, interrupt or criticize. They provide a calm, accepting presence and powerful source of motivation, especially for children who may lack confidence."

After earning credentials as a Horse Powered Reading Facilitator, Angelini sought out interdisciplinary partners across campus to turn the concept into reality.



Horses are ideal animals for children to read to because they are social and calming.

"I knew that developing a meaningful literacy program required collaboration with experts in reading, literacy and education," Angelini said. "What better way to bring those areas together than by reaching out to our own experts within SRU's College of Education? I was thrilled when several faculty members expressed interest and offered their expertise, creativity and support.

"We hope the program will continue to grow while preserving the welcoming, personal connections among children, horses, families and the University that make it so special."

SRU faculty, alumni and students have contributed to making Books in the Barn a reality. In addition to Tours and Angelini, the team includes graduate students Christina Myers and Kai Fulkerson-Bell; Ally Gilmore, a former SRU student and community partner; and faculty members Rocco Cremonese, from Bailey Library, and Luqing Zang and Diana Papa, from the Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Leadership Department.

"The Books in the Barn initiative has allowed me to combine my three passions: horses, literacy, and working with students from kindergarten to second grade," Myers said. "Books in the Barn provided me with the opportunity to use the therapeutic nature of horses to cultivate an environment for students to build confidence in reading."

Watching students respond to the horses has been a highlight for most of the team. Even at such an early stage in the project, the children show visible signs of progression among students, in both reading comprehension and interactions. The horses show signs as well.

"The horses enjoy being read to," said Myers. "You will observe them nuzzling the students or displaying positive body language like ears being in a forward position. I witnessed a student struggling to read a word in a sentence and began to show signs of frustration. The horse touched the student's knee with their nose as if they were saying, 'it is OK.'"

"Horses are a little intimidating because of their size," said Tours. "But the ones chosen for this are really kind and sweet, so even though there might be some apprehension, it was beautiful to see how the horses and the kids started to bond.

As data collection continues, the team remains focused on expanding the program's reach across the region.

"We believe Books in the Barn highlights the innovative, community-engaged work happening between the College of Education and Storm Harbor," said Tours.

"The horse touched the student's knee with their nose as if they were saying, 'it is OK.'"

Ally Gilmore, a former SRU student and community partner, introduces a group of younger readers to a book that they will read to a horse. Organizers of Books in the Barn will collect data to inform future equine-assisted literacy programs.







Planting a New Flag

Led by coach Lisa Horton '04M, SRU launches flag football amidst sport's rapidly growing popularity

By Aidan Treu '26

Flag football has skyrocketed in the American sports landscape in recent years. With increased presence in western Pennsylvania high school athletics and its introduction as an Olympic sport, Slippery Rock University is joining the movement.

Leading the way is Lisa Horton '04M, an SRU graduate who has coached both men's and women's football and played tackle football professionally. Now, she's taking the new varsity sport of flag football and running with it ahead of SRU's first season of competition in 2027-28.



Scan this QR code to learn how you can donate to women's flag football at SRU



Horton played (2003-18) and coached (since 2018) for the Pittsburgh Passion professional women's tackle football team for the last 23 years.

"The sport is growing exponentially," said Horton, who was hired as head coach in May 2026, a few months after SRU announced it would add women's flag football as a varsity sport. "The life lessons flag football, and any sport, teaches are huge. We're getting in at a time when it's building. It shows the leadership of our president, Dr. (Karen) Riley, and our athletic director, Dr. (Roberta) Page, supporting it, and seeing the vision of it. It's visionary because the number of lives this will impact."

As the second school in the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference to launch a flag football program, SRU parlays its already national recognition in men's tackle football into an early entrance to the women's collegiate football scene.

"Slippery Rock is already on the map, but this is going to continue to bring more exposure to the University and the community through not only the program, but the events and the community engagement that will come from this," Horton said.

Coach Taking the Lead

Horton, who spent three seasons working in various roles on the SRU men's football team's coaching staff, brings a wealth of football experience to her new position. SRU's flag football program benefits from Horton's 15 years of playing tackle and flag football. She was a standout for the Pittsburgh Passion women's professional tackle football team and she was a coach with the Passion as well as the NFL's Dallas Cowboys and Cleveland Browns.

"With the Browns and the Cowboys, I learned a lot more of the process of team meetings, the systems that were used, the approach. I learned a lot of coaching



New coach Lisa Horton hosts summer clinics at SRU to help high school girls build their flag football skills as The Rock prepares for its first varsity season in 2027-28.

"This grassroots level is really powerful."

styles just by the experience," Horton said.

In addition to her long football career, she played NCAA softball and volleyball.

"I was a student athlete," Horton said. "I've been in their shoes as a female athlete, the challenges, the ups and downs. I can relate to them, so I think some of my experience will definitely help us through some of their tough times."

Building From the Grassroots

Diane Galbraith, SRU professor of business, also worked on bringing flag football to The Rock.

Galbraith's projects on flag football started when she took a sabbatical in Europe. The first portion of her sabbatical focused on the future of business trends, while the latter involved developing and launching the Women's Flag Football Club at SRU.

Her experience with the club, which preceded the varsity program, involved working on the club's constitution, bylaws and serving as the adviser for the club.

Part of the desire to bring club flag football to SRU was Galbraith's love of athletics and the sport. The other was the ideal timing.

"To me, we had this window of opportunity that you either capitalize on it or you're going to be pretty far behind," Galbraith said. "I think we hit the window in such a way that we're not going to be left behind."

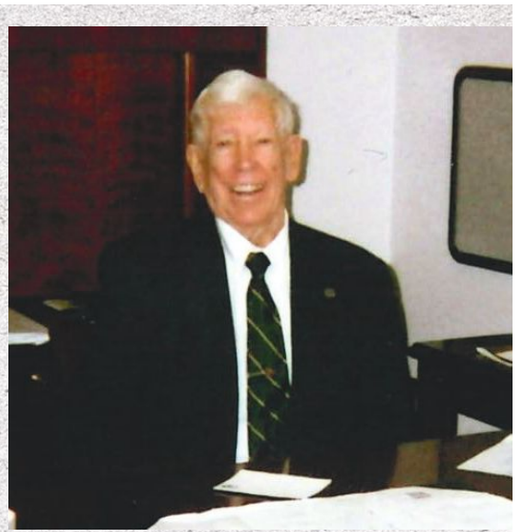
The emergence of flag football has undoubtedly been propelled by the NFL and NCAA. The NFL has supported youth flag football by investing in leagues, coaching, equipment and programs that make the sport accessible to children nationwide. Galbraith referred to flag football as a quickly growing sport in America, as evidenced by the NCAA introducing it as an Emerging Sports for Women program and potentially a fully sponsored varsity sport in 2027. Women's flag football will also make its Olympic debut at the 2028 Los Angeles Games.

"It's a buzz that is sustainable," Galbraith said. "Particularly as an Olympic sport. Once you get that type of showcase, you're golden."

Galbraith researched the strides flag football has made in local high schools, particularly in the Western Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic League. With more than 50 high schools sponsoring girls flag football teams, the growing interest points to another benefit of SRU adding its own varsity program.

"It's important, not only from that lens, to compete, but also just establish the foundation for years to come, and to do it at this grassroots level is really powerful," Horton added.





Early Influence

Earl Birdy '51, a member of the SRU Athletics Hall of Fame, was credited in the 1995 and 1996 editions of the National Intramural Recreational Sports Association's Flag & Touch Football Rules Book & Officials' Manual for his "significant contributions" to the sport's development. A former SRU track athlete, Birdy officiated college football from 1955-85, including the 1974 Orange Bowl and 1981 Hall of Fame Bowl.

Supported to Succeed

O'Hanlon family affirmed by choosing SRU thanks to scholarship that enabled daughter's growth

By Aidan Treu '26

(Editor's note: This Parent Reflection is a continuation of our Student Spotlight article from Page 5.)

Matt and Bobbi Jo O'Hanlon have seen firsthand how Slippery Rock University's nursing program and access to an affordable education can spur intellectual and interpersonal growth for their daughter, Mylah, a junior nursing major from Derry.

"As parents, you want to know that your child is in a place where people care about them, not just their grades," Bobby Jo said. "We have seen Mylah become more confident and more sure of herself since she started at SRU, and that has been wonderful to see."

Mylah was the first recipient of the Louise C. and Arthur G. Williams Scholarship, which is awarded to a third-year, pre-licensure BSN student with at least a 3.0 GPA.

"We have been very happy with Mylah's decision to attend SRU," Bobbi Jo said. "Her experiences with her nursing professors and advisers have really stood out to us. It is comforting to know that she has people at SRU who know her, encourage her, and want her to do well. She talks about how helpful and supportive they have been and, as a parent, that means a lot."



From left, Matt, Mylah and Bobbi Jo O'Hanlon celebrate Mylah's high school graduation before she began pursuing a nursing career at SRU.

Nursing is a rapidly developing field of study, and it takes the right combination of education, support and experiences to produce forward-thinking and proficient professionals.

After starting on the pre-physician assistant student track, Mylah began studying in SRU's accelerated 1+2+1 Bachelor of Science in Nursing program. The new program is more tailored to her interests and allows her to develop the social intelligence needed to work directly with patients in the medical field.

The scholarship Mylah earned has helped ease her transition into the new program, assisting in making her ideal career goals possible.

"The Williams Scholarship meant a lot to our family," Bobbi Jo said. "College is expensive, and as parents, you always worry about how you are going to make everything work. The scholarship took away some of that financial stress and helped make it possible for Mylah to attend SRU and pursue nursing."

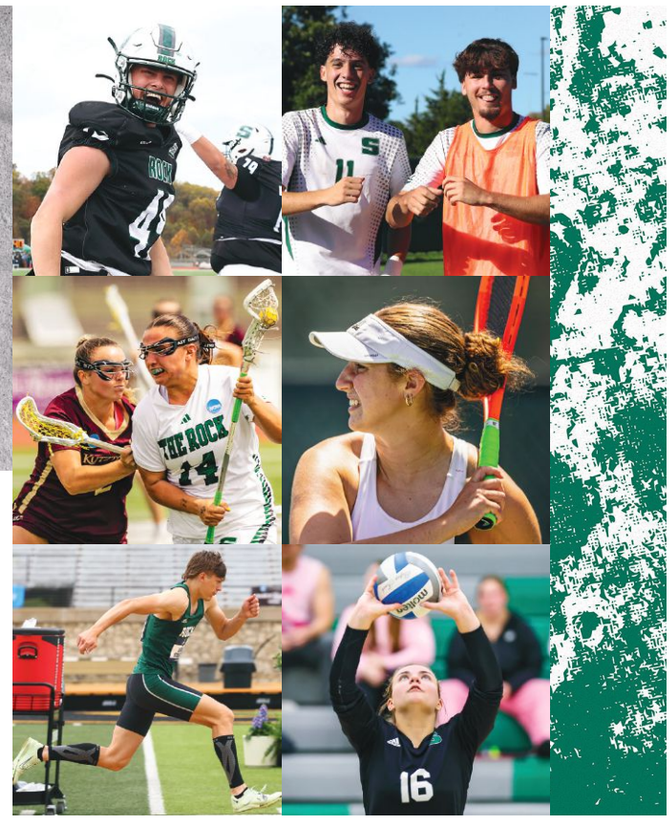
The O'Hanlons had the chance to meet with Art Williams. They discussed the Williams' story behind creating the scholarship.

> **"We have seen her become more confident and independent. She talks about how helpful and supportive [her professors] have been, and as a parent, that means a lot."**

"It was meaningful to hear what led him to want to help students and to see how much he genuinely cares about making a difference," Bobbi Jo said.

"It has been really special to watch Mylah grow since starting at Slippery Rock. We have seen her become more confident and independent, and she has really grown into her own. Nursing school is not easy, and we have watched her work hard and overcome challenges along the way. We are very proud of how she has handled it."





Academic Excellence

SRU student-athletes are raising the bar on and off the field. The Rock led the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference with seven Team GPA Awards, while its student-athletes posted the conference's highest overall grade-point average for the second consecutive year, a record 3.528. Football, men's soccer, women's lacrosse, women's tennis, men's and women's track & field, and volleyball earned top honors in their respective sports. Women's lacrosse and men's track and field extended their remarkable streaks to five consecutive PSAC Team GPA Awards.



National Champs!

Athletic success is not limited to varsity sports at SRU – club teams are thriving at The Rock as well. The men's rugby club team at SRU captured the Division III National 7s Collegiate Rugby Championship last spring, capping a season of strong performances by more than 30 student-athletes. Coached by Matt Heasley, the club also finished second in the nation at the 15s National Championship last fall. With enough players to field both A and B sides, SRU's club rugby program stands among the few collegiate clubs able to compete with two full teams.

New Wrestling Coach



As shared in the Spring/Summer edition of The ROCK magazine, wrestling is back at SRU after a more than two-decade hiatus. SRU now has identified the coach who will lead the team when it makes its return to the mat for the 2027-28 season. Jeff Breese joined the SRU athletics staff in June and he has already begun rebuilding the program. Breese previously served as director of wrestling development at Army West Point. A western Pennsylvania native and state champion at McGuffey High School, Breese wrestled collegiately at North Carolina State University.



Gail and Charlie Sheetz '74 are helping SRU invest in nursing labs and a mentorship program for business students.

Opportunity Made to Order

Sheetz family's gift fuels mentorship and nursing education at SRU

Slippery Rock University alumnus Charlie Sheetz '74 and his wife, Gail, are investing in the next generation of SRU students with support for two initiatives designed to strengthen career readiness and hands-on learning: the **Charlie Sheetz '74 Mentorship Program and the Charlie '74 and Gail Sheetz Nursing Skills Lab.**

Sheetz, whose family-owned company operates more than 830 convenience stores across seven states, credits his SRU education with shaping his work ethic and leadership style.

"My education at Slippery Rock University helped shape my work ethic, my leadership style and my belief in the power of opportunity," said Charlie Sheetz, who earned his degree in elementary education. "Gail and I believe strongly in investing in people, and SRU is a place that consistently develops talented, driven graduates. We're proud to support programs that will empower students to succeed and make a difference."

These new investments are in addition to the Charles Sheetz Scholarship created in 1998 to support incoming Rock students from Blair County with financial need.

Mentorship Builds Career Confidence

Launched in the fall 2026, the Charlie Sheetz Mentorship Program will connect junior and senior SRU business students with alumni mentors who can guide them based on shared interests and career goals.

During its pilot year, as many as 100 students will be paired with 30-40 alumni mentors. Networking events, workshops and other career-focused programming will complement the mentoring relationships. The Sheetz' investment will fund the program for five years.

"The Charlie Sheetz Mentorship Program brings together the best of what we aim to provide our students, meaningful relationships and real-world preparation," said Prasad Vemala, dean of the Haverlack College of Business. "We are grateful for the support behind this initiative, which allows our students to gain confidence, strengthen communication skills, and develop the professional judgment needed to successfully transition into their careers and beyond."

Nursing Training Mirrors Real-World Care

The Charlie '74 and Gail Sheetz Nursing Skills Lab will give nursing students an immersive environment for developing clinical skills before they enter real patient-care settings.

The lab will feature 10 stations equipped with hospital-grade equipment, patient beds, functional headwalls, medication carts and vital sign monitors.

The investment comes as SRU launches a new four-year, pre-licensure Bachelor of Science in Nursing program in fall 2026. Renovations are underway to create the lab space for when the program's first cohort begins on-campus nursing-specific skills training.

Students will use mannequins, task trainers and simulation to practice vital signs, wound care, medication administration and sterile procedures.

The lab will strengthen SRU's preparation of practice-ready nurses for communities throughout the region and beyond.

A Lasting Investment

The Sheetz family's gift advances SRU's focus on student success, academic innovation and workforce readiness.

"We are deeply grateful to Charlie and Gail Sheetz for their extraordinary generosity and their belief in Slippery Rock University," said Karen Riley, SRU president. "Their support creates lasting opportunities for our students and strengthens programs that address critical workforce needs."

Career-Ready Finance

SRU receives $500,000 gift to launch Finney Finance Lab

Slippery Rock University students will soon gain hands-on experience with the financial systems used by professionals around the world, thanks to a $500,000 gift from alumni Joe and Pam Finney to establish the Finney Finance Lab.

The lab will feature Bloomberg Terminal workstations, the industry standard for real-time financial data, analytics and trading. The addition will give SRU students direct access to the tools used by investment banks, asset managers and corporate finance teams worldwide.

"Slippery Rock gave me everything, my career, my direction and my wife of 39 years," said Joe Finney '86, whose wife, Pam '86, is also an SRU alumnus. "This lab is our way of giving back and making sure the next generation of students walks into their first job interview ready to compete with anyone, from anywhere."

Access to Bloomberg Terminals is typically limited to top business programs, positioning SRU among a select group of regional universities offering this level of professional exposure. The lab will support coursework in finance, economics, accounting and business analytics. Students also will be able to earn Bloomberg Market Concepts certification and participate in global trading competitions.

The investment strengthens the Haverlack College of Business as a destination for students seeking career-ready, experiential learning. The college holds AACSB accreditation, placing it among fewer than 6% of business schools worldwide.

"We are deeply grateful to Joe and Pam Finney for this extraordinary investment in our students," said Prasad Vemala, dean of SRU's Haverlack College of Business. "The Finney Finance Lab will provide hands-on access to industry-standard tools, strengthen our commitment to career-ready education and help our students build the confidence, skills and experience needed to succeed."

"This gift is a powerful investment in our students and a clear signal of where SRU is headed," said SRU President Karen Riley. "The Finneys' generosity will create new opportunities for hands-on learning, strengthen our ability to recruit top students and further connect our graduates to careers in the global economy."

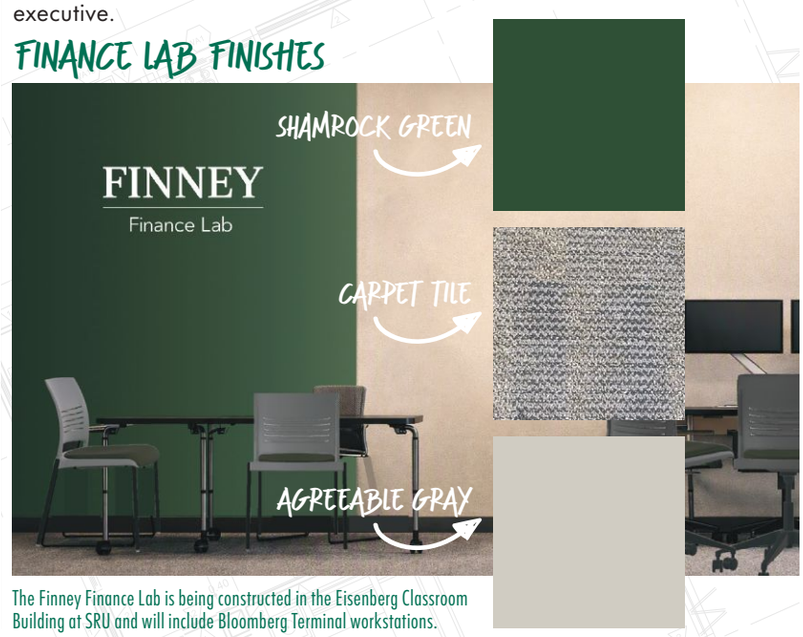


1986 SRU alumni Joe and Pam Finney support their alma mater by funding scholarships, attending campus alumni engagements and their lasted investment to create the Finney Finance Lab.

Wall Street tools for students to build confidence

Beyond classroom use, the lab will serve as a hub for student-led investment activities, faculty research and career development programming. Located in the Eisenberg Classroom Building, the Finney Finance Lab is expected to open in late 2026.

A native of Crawford County, Pennsylvania, and resident of Tampa, Florida, Joe Finney is CEO of T3 Services Group. He has led companies in services, retail and distribution during a 40-year career as a business executive.



The Finney Finance Lab is being constructed in the Eisenberg Classroom Building at SRU and will include Bloomberg Terminal workstations.



SRU alumnus Josh Cress is the director of competency and training at Deep Well Services, an oilfield services company based in Butler County.

Deep Commitment

Josh Cress '09 continues SRU's tradition of safety management excellence at Deep Well Services

By Maxwell Hildebrand, '27

After graduating from Slippery Rock University, Josh Cress '09 has kept his professional career in the safety industry focused firmly on one objective: building safer, more supportive work environments in high-risk industries.

"I started my career in safety and that's really what I'm passionate about — helping others succeed and grow," said Cress, who earned a bachelor's degree from SRU in safety management.

Today, Cress serves as the director of competency and training at Deep Well Services, an oilfield services company based in Zelienople that specializes in high-pressure and long-lateral completion and intervention work. In his role, Cress personally oversees and develops a globally accredited training program, giving DWS employees access to world-class equipment and instruction designed to handle complex, high-stakes well operations.

Cress first joined Deep Well Services in 2014 as a regional safety manager before transitioning into education and workforce development. That shift, he explained, was a natural evolution of his safety-first philosophy, one which built directly off the principles taught at SRU.

"Competency training was the next logical step for me," Cress said. "As a safety manager, I learned that you can't separate safety from the people who are doing the work. If you want people to perform at a high level in any company, you've got to give them the knowledge, the tools and the expectations to do something the right way. That philosophy, which was ingrained in me at SRU, led me into training."

Safety Starts with People

At the core of DWS's technical operations are specialized hydraulic completion units, which are massive, complex hydraulic machines engineered to allow crews to safely service oil and gas wells. These units provide the power, precision and control needed to manage heavy pipe and intricate tooling underground. Yet, despite the advanced engineering behind these units, Cress insists that technology is only as effective as the professionals behind the controls.

"The machine is important, but the real value is the trained people operating it," Cress said. "What really separates DWS, in my opinion, is our focus on people. Our 'One Team, One Family' culture includes our competency-based training, and our commitment to developing people and leaders."

Rock-Solid Foundation

That people-first leadership style took root long before Cress stepped onto the job site.

SRU's safety management program has long been recognized as a premier training ground for industry leaders, renowned for pairing advanced technical coursework with real-world application. During his time at SRU, Cress absorbed a strong set of core values built around clear communication, personal accountability and professional ethics.

For Cress, the bond with SRU is not just an academic line on a resume or a steppingstone to a successful career; it is deeply interwoven with his personal history, his family roots and a profound sense of regional pride.

Cress graduated from Slippery Rock Area High School, his mother, Rebecca, worked at SRU, and his grandparents lived on Slippery Rock Road.

"Slippery Rock has always been a part of my life," Cress said. "SRU and the community gave me a foundation and taught me how to think."

Leading Through Relationships

He built a career on that foundation by applying skills and developing relationships.

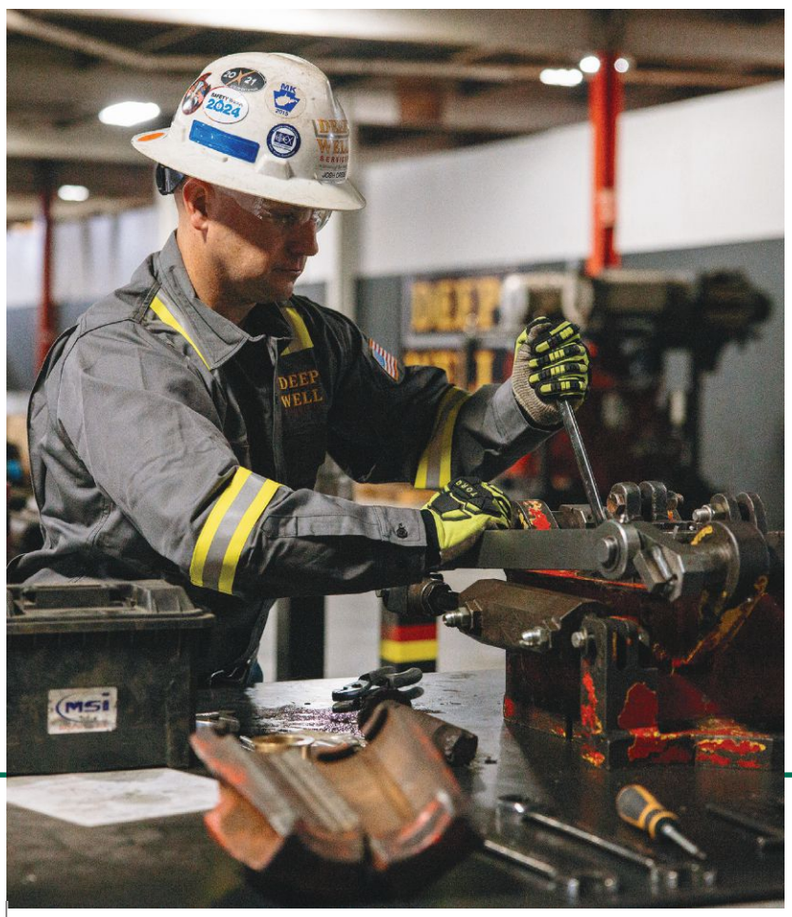
"I understood the hazards, risks and regulations," Cress said. "But as I've learned throughout my career, knowing just the technical sides isn't really enough. You've got to be able to communicate and build relationships, and to be able to get people to believe in doing things the right way. Those morals and values started at Slippery Rock."

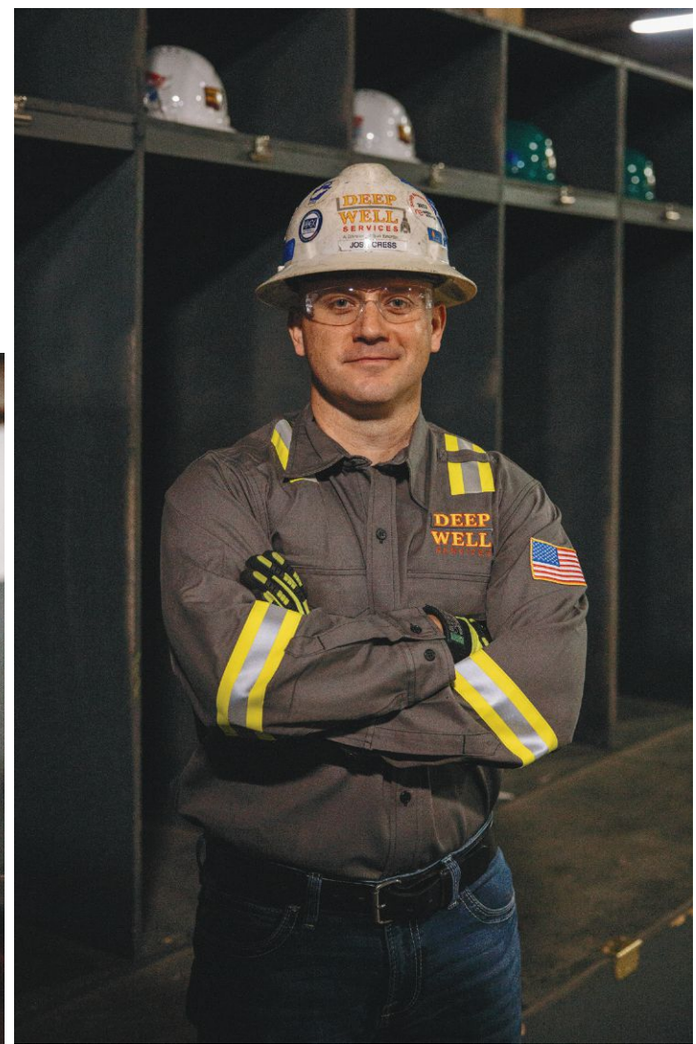
The collaborative environment within SRU's safety management program left a lasting mark on Cress, shaping the way he now approaches leadership and team building at DWS. Driven by dedicated faculty, supportive staff, and ambitious peers, the program instills a unique culture of mutual success, one that alumni frequently carry into corporate boardrooms and field operations alike.

"You had a team of individuals at SRU that cared about one another and the success around them," Cress said. "They cared about others more than themselves, and that was something that always resonated with me. The culture the safety program has directly connects to the type of culture and beliefs I'm instilling with the people at Deep Well."

"Getting people to believe in doing things the right way. Those morals and values started at Slippery Rock."

Cress operates equipment at Deep Well's training center in Zelienople where he trains employees, as well as interns through a partnership with the CNX Foundation (right), providing hands-on learning and industry experience.





1960s

David Monsour '68, '71M recently retired from his 22-year federal labor arbitrator practice following a 36-year career as a teacher and school administrator. He retired in 2004 as superintendent of the Brookville Area School District in Pennsylvania. While completing his doctoral degree, Monsour also served as a visiting instructor at Bucknell University. He earned his doctorate from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 1987.

Ed Codi '69 authored "The Brothers Saul: A Football Legacy," which chronicles the football careers of three brothers who combined for 33 years in the NFL. Bill Saul played middle linebacker for the Pittsburgh Steelers. Rich Saul was a center for the Los Angeles Rams and played against the Steelers in Super Bowl XIV in 1980. Ron Saul played for the Washington Redskins and earned a Super Bowl ring. The book also highlights famous SRU alumnus **Paul Uram '49** who earned four Super Bowl rings as a coach with the Pittsburgh Steelers. Codi also remains active in sports media. He hosts "The Coaches Round Table" on Armstrong TV, now in its 21st year, and co-hosts a sports podcast with former Major League pitcher Matt Clement on Spotify, now in its first year.

1970s



Ligato

John Ligato '71, '74M was honored at the opening of the Carolina Museum of the Marines in Jacksonville, North Carolina, on June 8. The 35,000-square-foot facility is anticipated to become a major attraction for the millions of annual tourists visiting the coastline. The museum's mission is to ensure that the contributions of our Marines and sailors are remembered for future generations. Ligato, who earned three Purple Hearts after being wounded in combat during the Vietnam War, was featured in a gallery recognizing Marines who have distinguished themselves in both war and peace. Ligato was featured in the Fall 2023 issue of The ROCK magazine.

John Seitz '72 published his second book, "Everyday People, Ordinary Places," featuring more than 50 nonfiction accounts that celebrate the often hidden but significant stories found in everyday life. Some of the stories are drawn from observations and events at or near The Rock.

Harold (Hal) Stockdill '76 and Leayn (Lea) Elesie Stockdill '78, of Laporte, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on June 5, 2026. Both are retired teachers from Sullivan County High School in Laporte. They have three children: John and wife, Donella, of San Diego, California; Mark of Williamsport; and Katie and husband, Keith Hyatt, of Dushore; and two grandchildren, Grayson and Myla Hyatt.

William Price Jr. '77 and Mary Reed celebrated the 50th anniversary of their first date, which occurred in January 1976 when they saw a movie at the SRU student union. After graduation, Bill was accepted to Duquesne University School of Law, while Mary transferred to the University of Pittsburgh, where she completed her degree. They married in 1978. Bill became a lawyer in 1980 and opened his own law firm near Pittsburgh in 1984. Bill and Mary have worked together in his law practice for more than 40 years. The couple has three children and four grandchildren.

Mike Hardy '79 published an autobiographical leadership book titled "The Outsider Leader: Growing Up Black in Rural America and Learning to Lead Across Difference." The book reflects on his experiences growing up Black in rural America, navigating corporate leadership while often feeling like an outsider, and the lessons those experiences taught him about leadership, belonging, resilience and building connections across differences. Hardy retired from ZOLL Medical in June 2024.

1980s

Jeff Smith '80 completed his 40th year as a lacrosse official for USA Lacrosse, the national governing body for the sport of lacrosse in the USA. Smith has dedicated his life's work to officiating lacrosse on the college, high school and youth levels in western Pennsylvania, Maryland and Ohio. Following a three-year career as a midfielder for SRU in 1980, Smith coached for five high schools in western Pennsylvania, including Upper St. Clair, Baldwin, Peters Township, Fox Chapel, and Bethel Park.


Ovenshine

Gordon and Kristianne Ovenshine '88 welcomed their third granddaughter, Olive Vivian Ovenshine, of Boston. Olive Vivian is the daughter of Sam Ovenshine and Melissa Mak.



Potter

Michele (Stefanka) Potter '88 qualified for the World Triathlon 70.3 Championships in Marbella, Spain, in 2025, and in June 2026, qualified to represent the USA in Nice, France, on Sept. 12, 2026. Potter has completed 18 Ironman Triathlons, as well as more than 50 marathons and many ultramarathons (50-milers). Potter was a member of the U.S. Duathlon Team from 2001-07.

1990s

Kimberley (Hudak) Jones '96 has turned a personal challenge into statewide advocacy. After experiencing a stroke, Jones chose to use her experience with aphasia to advocate for others living with communication disabilities. She was invited by Pennsylvania State Rep. Marla Brown to Harrisburg to be present as Brown introduced legislation recognizing June as Aphasia Awareness Month in Pennsylvania. Jones received a standing ovation from House members. Jones' advocacy also draws on her professional background in technology as she developed code to compile and organize information on legislators throughout the Commonwealth, allowing her to identify legislators and conduct statewide outreach to raise awareness about aphasia.

Erin Jackson-Daruszka '97 is host and creator of the podcast Menopause Chats. The podcast can be found on YouTube and major podcast platforms. The podcast is edutainment about the peri/menopause experience.



Kudrick

Mara Kudrick '98 took a piece of The Rock with her while visiting Italy on the Amalfi Coast.

Raylene Dufresne '99, vice president of information technology at Miller & Long LLC, was named a 2026 ORBIE Award Finalist in the Large Corporate category. With more than 200 nominations, the award recognizes CIOs in the Washington, D.C., metro area.

2000s

Brian Aikens '03 wrote "Chill Skills: Let's Make a P.L.A.N.," an interactive, pick-your-path graphic novel that lets readers navigate real-life emotional

challenges alongside the main character. Through relatable, everyday situations, like handling frustration, conflict and stress, the story unfolds based on the choices readers make, teaching them how their decisions shape outcomes. The book introduces the P.L.A.N. framework, a simple and repeatable strategy that helps young people build self-awareness, resilience and confidence in how they respond to life's moments.

Brittany (Miller) Ludwig '08, '11M was awarded the 2026 Mission Integration Award from the Association of Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities. Ludwig's program submission was "Saint Louis University Belize Business Immersion: Justice, Reflection, and Cura Personalis in Action." Ludwig is director of academic advising at Saint Louis University in Missouri.

2010s

Christopher Boggs '15 was awarded the Pennsylvania Institute of CPA's 2026 Young Leader Award which recognizes members who demonstrate a commitment to the accounting profession through active PICPA or community volunteer activities.

Rocco Martini '18 was named Beaver County Times Best of the Valley: Person of the Year. Each year, the Best of the Valley Community's Choice Awards recognizes more than 400 businesses and organizations voted on by the public. Martini is the founder of BOF Services, a professional health and safety consulting firm.

Taylor Schultz '18 joined River Wealth Advisors as its marketing associate. Schultz brings experience in family-owned businesses, retail field marketing and agency operations. In this role, Schultz will be responsible for implementing all marketing, communications and branding strategies for the firm.

Send Class Notes or updates to contact information to alumni@sru.edu or by using the online form at rockalumni.com.

2020s

Alexander Riccardi '21 recently earned his Certified Pennsylvania Evaluator certification and serves with the Lawrence County Assessment Office. In his role, Riccardi combines mapping and geographic data expertise with property assessment responsibilities, helping ensure accurate valuation of real estate for local taxation purposes. He was recently invited to join the Civic Boundary Working Group of the Pennsylvania Geospatial Coordinating Board, contributing to statewide efforts to develop and maintain accurate municipal boundary data across Pennsylvania.

Weddings



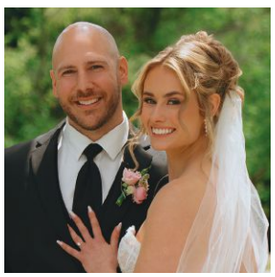
Scott Boyer '11, '16 and Erin Faust, were married June 13, 2025, in Meadville at The Harper Event Venue.



Joe Coudriet '24 and Kathleen Coudriet were married June 13, 2026, at Family Life Church in Vestal, New York, where Joe serves as pastor. The couple enjoyed a two-week honeymoon in California and Maui. Joe is a member of the SRU Alumni Association Inc. board of directors and a past Slippery Rock Student Government Association president, 1979-80.

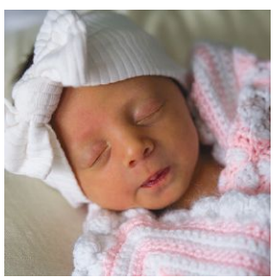


Aaron Marrie '21 and Hannah Shumsky '21 were married April 25, 2026, in Clark. The couple met their sophomore year and had their engagement photos taken at SRU.



Taylor Schultz '18 and Trevor Collier were married May 8, 2026, at Historic Shady Lane in Manchester. The couple resides in Mechanicsburg.

Births



Sara (Hershberger) Lewis '16 and Jacob Lewis '16 welcomed their second child, Elara Kay, Feb. 5, 2026.

In Memory

John G. Cunningham '54
Sally A. Dilts (Remaley) '55
Conrad J. Palumbo '57
John W. Bookheimer '58
Jacqueline J. Lippert (Drennen) '58
Joyce A. Weakland (Bradley) '58
Arley M. Duncan '59
Phoebe Reighard '61
Margaret R. Revell (McAndrew) '62
Nancy Rosensteel (Corsi) '63
Mary Ann Cunningham (McHenry) '64
Charine P. Hovanec (Petrarca) '64
Francis M. Claney '65
George J. Kovacs '65
Paul W. Leasure, Jr. '66
Thomas A. Neilson '66
Patricia C. Santomo (Kress) '66
Ralph L. D'Antonio '67
Margaret W. Foster (Winterhalter) '68
Kathleen A. Gardina (Schaffner) '69
Edwin J. Taylor '69
Janet I. Kohlhepp (Clark) '70
Richard Lohr '70
Richard O'Brien '70
John J. Patterson '70
Donald M. Thompson '70
Paul Girardi '71
Gloria J. Stevens (Dehaven) '71
James M. Baronetski '72
Anita J. DeMarco (Durgam) '72
Judith A. Hoffman (Burke) '72
Elsa L. Ohler '72
Albert B. Sloan '72
Barry L. Reynolds '73
Jeffrey R. Aversa '74
Richard E. Bereschik '74
Michael Dichov '75
Adelene C. Malatesta '75
Patricia A. Bulloch (Cowan) '79
Linda K. Mattocks (Graham) '79
Gregory P. McAtee '79
Rosalyn W. Lawton '80
Richard L. Druschel, Jr. '81
Michael M. Senge '81
James P. Hoehn '82
Sue A. Neubert (Wall) '82
Diane C. D'Uva '84
Richard Vinroe '86
David Ekey '88
Michael B. Bonetti '89
Kimberly Altmire '91
Mark A. McGrail '91
Kelly Hanlon (Burford) '95
Gregory C. Lipniskis '95
Daryl E. Hall '97
James E. Carson III '01
Sandra Marwick (Bradley) '02
Samuel M. Hess II '03
Carol A. Laskey (McCracken) '03
Bradley T. Nyce '04
Kelly K. Hilliard (Morrow) '07
Robert M. Crayne, Professor Emeritus
Robert E. Fidoten, Retired Faculty
Amanda E. Montgomery, Staff

Backpacks to Briefcases

Alumni mentoring event strengthens networks and propels students toward career success

By Maxwell Hildebrand, '27

A lasting connection can have just as much impact as listening to a classroom lecture or writing a term paper. An example are the relationships between Slippery Rock University alumni and students kindled at events like Backpacks to Briefcases.

Organized by SRU's Office of Alumni Engagement in coordination with the Office of Career Education and Development and the Green and White Society, Backpacks to Briefcases is a biannual event designed to help SRU students explore career options, interact with accomplished graduates and learn what to expect after college.

SRU alumni Hannah Glass '10 and Angela Conant '16, '19M have fostered successful careers built on mutual support and mentorship – a testament to the professional networking opportunities provided at SRU.



Angela Conant

"I was fortunate in my undergraduate studies to participate in Backpacks to Briefcases," said Conant, a physician assistant in transplant nephrology for Allegheny Health Network. "During that experience, I met an alumna who inspired me to pursue my career as a physician assistant."

Through this event, Conant met Glass, a physician assistant at UPMC St. Margaret Dermatology. Glass quickly became a key mentor in Conant's professional journey. For Glass, participating was a chance to give back to her SRU community in a way she hadn't experienced early in her career.

"I wanted to be a resource," Glass said. "As a professional, I didn't have anyone to mentor me. I didn't have a resource, and I struggled quite a bit. So I just thought, 'What the heck? I'm going to go and talk about my experience.' I wanted to be the person that I didn't have access to."

Their initial conversation sparked a lasting connection and mentorship between the two alumni that extends far beyond campus.

"In meeting Hannah at that event, I got to learn more about the career path of a physician assistant," said Conant. "It was what sparked my interest in the career, and after that, I started engaging in opportunities to shadow physician assistance roles in the community. Having the opportunity to meet with Hannah got me where I am today."



Hannah Glass

After Conant graduated from SRU, she and Glass kept in touch, further cementing a strong professional and personal relationship that has endured through years of career development.

"I'm so proud of her," said Glass. "We keep in touch and even share patients now. We're able to refer back and forth to one another, and I didn't really know the impact that just showing up can have on someone else's life. It's been really reinforcing for me to continue to show up, share and be vulnerable and real. People gather a lot from that."

"Backpacks to Briefcases brings the opportunity to learn more about careers or subspecialties in your field of interest and helps you find a career that best fits your goals," said Glass. "Ultimately, that is what this event did for me. A five-minute conversation with Hannah changed the whole trajectory of my life."

A five-minute conversation between Hannah Glass and Angela Conant turned into a lasting connection.



Angela Conant and Hannah Glass first met at SRU's Backpacks to Briefcases event in 2019 when Conant was a student and Glass was a recent alumnus. They continue to keep in touch as fellow physician assistants.



From the Archives:
North Hall Renewal

As the University embarks on its first comprehensive campaign in three decades, titled "Because *this is* **The Rock**," let's go back even further for a look at one of the most iconic structures on campus, North Hall. This was The Rock nine decades ago.

Just as The Rock rebuilt North Hall nearly 90 years ago, today's supporters are helping SRU build on its legacy and create an even stronger future through the "Because *this is* **The Rock**" campaign.



These two photos taken on Sept. 26, 1938, are from the construction of North Hall (top exterior, bottom inside a student's room), which occurred less than a year after the original North Hall burned down. This photo is from the Kurt Pitluga Collection of the Slippery Rock University Archives and Special Collections.

Fit for Launch

SRU students wore white to the first home football game of the season, but that didn't stop them from reaching for more SRU threads shot from a T-shirt cannon. A crowd of nearly 8,000 packed Mihalik-Thompson Stadium to watch The Rock defeat nationally ranked Minnesota Duluth, 45-43, on Aug. 27.




SLIPPERY ROCK
UNIVERSITY
ROCK
FOOTBALL
SLIPPERY ROCK
WHITE OUT
GO ROCK

Slippery Rock University
1 Morrow Way
Slippery Rock, PA 16057
www.SRU.edu
A member of Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PITTSBURGH, PA
PERMIT #162









Make a gift online

Learn more

Because *this is* THE ROCK.

*The Campaign for Slippery **Rock** University*

Make an investment in the people, programs, and experiences that make Slippery Rock University extraordinary. Together we can give students the spaces, tools, and support necessary to excel.

Academic Excellence and Innovation

Fueling discovery, empowering progress, and inspiring possibility.

Athletic Excellence

Empowering students to grow in the classroom, on the field and on the court.

Presidential Priorities

Ensuring a dynamic and sustainable future for our university community.

Scholarship

Helping students get here, stay here, and grow here.

Because *this is* The Rock.

Your generosity becomes part of a legacy that endures for generations.