The end of another academic year can be an ideal time for reflection. On May 22 and 23 we held our annual commencement celebrations. These ceremonies are very exciting for everyone at Niagara University, particularly for our graduates. They now move to a new chapter in their lives. Some will choose to begin their careers, while others will look to continue their education with graduate school.

Faculty, staff and administration can look at this time as a time to reaffirm our work, which is driven by our mission. As you may be aware, our mission states that we educate our students and enrich their lives through programs in the liberal arts and through career preparation, informed by the Catholic and Vincentian traditions.

Often when I personally speak about Niagara, I use three words from the mission: We are a university that is Catholic and Vincentian. I choose these words because they speak to the heart, soul and purpose of Niagara University. These are words that influence everything that is done here to fulfill our educational mission. And these words, this part of our mission, are very apparent in this edition of the Eagle.

Niagara is a Catholic university. It provides an education that recognizes the God-given dignity and worth of every individual. We provide a holistic education to help our students develop themselves in mind, body and spirit. Throughout this publication, you will see examples of Niagara’s work in accepting every individual. Whether it is one of our workshops on making education accessible to all, or an art exhibit by economically disadvantaged individuals, or one of the many multicultural events we have held recently, you will see Niagara’s commitment to every individual.

As a Vincentian university, we seek to inspire our students to serve others, especially those who are among the neediest and most marginalized. Recently, Jonathan Keppler worked on a medical mission in Jamaica as part of Niagara’s MBA program, and its concentration in health care administration. This type of educational experience will make a difference in Jonathan’s career, and as you will read in his story, clearly made a difference in the area he served.

As a university, we continually strive for excellence — excellence in teaching and learning, excellence in research and publishing, and excellence in the many ways in which we serve and care for our students. Dr. Seneca Vaught, an assistant professor of history, discusses his experience in a faculty exchange program with a university in Bogotá, Colombia. Through this partnership, Dr. Vaught travelled to Bogotá to lecture for a week. As part of the exchange, Niagara was honored to then welcome Luis Angel Madrid to our campus to speak and interact with our students. This type of study provides our students with a unique learning experience and cross-cultural education.

You will notice that there is a clear theme of diversity woven through the stories I mention. The cover story of the magazine, “Diversity Matters: Creating a Welcoming and Inclusive Niagara Campus,” takes a much closer look at the initiatives the university has been working on for a number of years. I am pleased to say that our programs relating to diversity focus on a number of areas, including curriculum development and campus activities, as well as recruitment for our entire campus. As our students prepare themselves for work in an ever increasing global market, the experience of learning in a diverse environment will take on greater importance.

Overall, through its curricular and extracurricular programs, Niagara University seeks to develop the whole person, mind, body, heart and soul, for the benefit of one’s personal and professional life.

As always, I look forward to hearing your input on the campaign, or your experience at Niagara University. I welcome your comments and suggestions at jll@niagara.edu.

God Bless,

Joseph L. Levesque, C.M.
MBA student Jonathan Keppler spent two weeks in Jamaica on a medical mission as part of his MBA in health care administration program.

Swapping Scholars
Niagara University and the Universidad Sergio Arboleda in Bogotá, Colombia, offer professors a distinctive cross-cultural experience.

A Taste of China
A unique course lets students experience China’s culture through its cuisine.

On the cover
Diversity Matters
Niagara has undertaken a number of initiatives to ensure the campus is a welcoming environment for all.

In every issue
From the President
Around the Ridge
Eagle’s Eye
Niagara Notables
Purple Eagle Pride
Advancing NU
In the Spotlight
Alumni Association Update
Alumni Notes
A NU View

View the Eagle online at http://eagleonline.niagara.edu/
Niagara University officially opened its new $3.1 million Elizabeth Ann Clune Center for Theatre and renovated William P. and Marie Leary Theatre with a blessing, dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony outside the new center at Clet Hall on May 1. Following the ceremony, a sold-out audience was treated to "Anything Goes," the 1930s Cole Porter classic.

The new center is named after the daughter of Niagara University alumnus Robert J. Clune, Esq., a member of the university’s board of trustees, and his wife, JoAnn G. Clune, both members of NU’s Class of 1958.


The renovated Leary Theatre seats 134 people and includes improved acoustics and lighting, an enhanced tech booth and backstage facilities such as a new green room, make-up room, and backstage storage.

In addition, more than a dozen individuals who have consistently aided the theatre in its mission were presented with inaugural Spirit of Niagara University Theatre awards at a special gathering on April 30 at Alumni Chapel.

More than a dozen individuals were honored with Spirit of Niagara University Theatre awards at the theatre opening. Front row, l-r: Gordon Weil, Robert T. Williams, Alan Trinca, Alicia Burning, Elizabeth Ann Clune, Mary Furlong, Dr. Nancy McGlen, Janice and Donald Laurie. Back row l-r: Robert Clune, JoAnn Clune, Honorable John LaFalce, Richard Cheshire, and Adair Saviola.
TEA PARTY — Atsuku Nishida-Mitchell demonstrates a Japanese tea ceremony for students in Niagara’s Japanese Popular Culture course. The ceremony involves the traditional preparation and presentation of a powdered green tea called matcha. Yoshiko Connolly, lecturer of Japanese, describes the ceremony as “a good hands-on entryway to the Japanese experience” because it incorporates many aspects of Japanese culture, including the importance of hospitality and rituals, Japanese craftsmanship (as seen in the utensils), and the deep relationship to nature and the seasons.

“The tea ceremony is the culmination of a union of artistic creativity, sensitivity to nature, Zen Buddhist religious thought, and social interchange,” she says.

Newsmen Bob Woodruff and Wolf Blitzer Were Featured Speakers at NU’s Commencement Ceremonies

Former ABC World News Tonight anchor Bob Woodruff and current CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer were the featured speakers at Niagara University’s commencement ceremonies May 22 and 23. Woodruff spoke at the graduate commencement, while Blitzer delivered the undergraduate address. Both men received an honorary doctor of humane letters degree from Niagara University.

Woodruff succeeded the late Peter Jennings as anchor of ABC World News Tonight in December 2005. Just weeks later while covering the war in Iraq, Woodruff was struck by shrapnel and suffered a life-threatening traumatic brain injury. Following a long and painful recovery period, he made an inspirational return to television in February 2007. Still contributing to the television news industry, Woodruff, along with his wife, Lee, published a bestselling book titled “In an Instant: A Family’s Journey of Love and Healing.” They also established the Bob Woodruff Family Foundation to assist veterans — particularly those suffering from brain injury or combat stress — and their families.

Blitzer, who was raised in North Buffalo and Kenmore, joined CNN in 1990 and is currently the cable news network’s lead political anchor. As anchor of CNN’s “Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer,” he has spearheaded the network’s coverage of every major political event from the presidential election of 2000 through the current debate on healthcare reform.

Also honored at the two ceremonies were Lee Woodruff, who accepted a doctor of humane letters degree with her husband; Phil Fontaine, retired national chief of the First Nations Assembly of Canada, and astronaut Julie Payette, who received doctor of laws degrees; Robert Daino, ’66, retired president of Continental Securities Group, who received a doctor of commercial science degree; and Marv Levy, retired coach and general manager of the Buffalo Bills, the Most Rev. Anthony F. Tonos, bishop of Hamilton, Ontario, and author Gordon Weil, Ph.D., who received doctor of humane letters degrees.

The Business of Charity Topic of Conference

Dr. Ellen Benjamin, professor of nonprofit management education at DePaul University’s School of New Learning, will be the featured speaker at “The Business of Charity,” a conference designed to bring professional resources to those who lead and manage nonprofit human service agencies. In a series of addresses and workshops, specialists in various aspects of business management will provide the latest methods and lessons for running nonprofits that serve the disadvantaged. Topics will include financial management skills, developments in relevant information technologies, grant seeking from government and corporate sectors, effective handling of volunteers, collaboration with educational and civic institutions, office management, working with auditors, and issues of legal compliance.

The event will take place on Oct. 15 from 9 a.m.—4 p.m. in St. Vincent’s Hall. The cost is $75 per person; group discounts are available. For more information or to register, contact Niagara’s Office of Continuing Education at 716-286-8181.

The conference is being held as part of Niagara University’s observance of the 350th anniversary of the deaths of Saints Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac.
Student Chemistry/Biochemistry Research Wins Awards

Niagara University chemistry/biochemistry students won four of eight awards at the WNY American Chemical Society’s 2010 Undergraduate Research Symposium March 6. The students received two first-place awards for oral presentations and first- and second-place awards for poster presentations.

“The judges were impressed with the quantity and intensity of the research being performed at Niagara University,” noted Dr. Ronny Priefer, associate professor of chemistry and vice chair of WNY ACS.

Approximately 50 students representing about 10 universities in New York state and Canada attended the event, which was held at Niagara and co-hosted by the department of chemistry and biochemistry and the university’s ACS student affiliates.

“This was a wonderful opportunity for Niagara’s department of chemistry to showcase the research going on not only at the university, but throughout Western New York as well,” said Priefer. “It also allowed the students to learn what opportunities are available to them after graduation, and how what they’re doing now has real applications down the road.”

Later in March, seven of Priefer’s students attended the 239th annual ACS national meeting in San Francisco to present their research alongside undergraduate, graduate and post-doctoral students and faculty from around the world. Kyle Biegasiewicz’s poster, “Utilization of a novel cubane-based ligand in asymmetric catalysis,” was one of only 40 selected as a top submission in the organic chemistry section. More than 1,000 posters were submitted in this section.

In addition, the Niagara University student chapter of the ACS was recognized for its research and community service and outreach work during the 2008-09 academic year.

Extreme Makeover: Dining Edition

Students returning to Monteagle Ridge after summer break will enjoy renovated Clet Hall dining facilities and expanded menu choices following the extensive makeover the facility will undergo this summer. The physical changes will include renovated food stations, new booths, additional lighting, an improved entranceway, and an improved customer service area. In addition, the dining program will offer a wider variety of menu items, a second deli, a carving station, expanded breakfast options, more healthy options, and expanded vegetarian choices. The international and classics food stations will also be improved and there will be a dedicated dessert area with an expanded dessert format.

“We have been surveying our students about both the atmosphere and the menu selections, and all of these changes come from the input they provided during our surveys,” said Chris Ferguson, director of contract service.

The Clet Dining Hall renovation is the second dining area upgrade to take place on the Niagara campus in the past two years. In 2008, the lower level of the Gallagher Center was refurbished and now features a variety of food items, including La Nova pizza and chicken wings and a deli counter.
Making Education Accessible to All

As increasing numbers of learners with disabilities and cultural differences, returning adult learners, and students whose primary language is not English enroll in colleges and universities nationwide, schools are challenged to provide services to assist the diverse needs of these individuals. Conscious of this, Niagara University has initiated opportunities to introduce and establish universal design principles throughout the campus to assist students’ transition, academic performance, and adaptation to college life.

“The concept of ‘universal design’ originated in the field of architecture and has recently been applied to the design and delivery of programs and services, as well as instruction, with the goal of improving access for a wide variety of diverse users,” notes Diane Stoelting, coordinator of disability services at Niagara University. “When applied to administrative departments on campus, the goal of universal design is to prepare programs and services to be usable by a wide variety of users, including individuals with disabilities, and to minimize the need for special accommodations.”

General universal design guidelines include ensuring that everyone can get to the department and maneuver within it, access materials and electronic resources, and participate in events and other activities. Staff should be trained to support people with disabilities, respond to specific requests for accommodations in a timely manner, and know who they can contact on campus if they have disability-related questions.

The concept of universal design is also applicable to academic instruction. Here, the goal is to provide all individuals with opportunities to learn. Developing flexible ways to present or access information, concepts and ideas; plan and execute learning tasks; and engage students in learning are key to making education accessible to all.

To support the university community in applying universal design concepts in their classrooms and offices, Niagara has offered a number of workshops and conferences over the last few years, bringing in speakers including Scott Lissner, ADA coordinator at Ohio State University; Dr. Jane Jarrow, president of Disability Access Information and Support and former executive director of the Association on Higher Education and Disability; and Dr. Kathleen Gradel, associate professor in the College of Education at SUNY Fredonia, who discussed creating a welcoming campus environment and strategies to provide access and support to diverse students. In addition, faculty mini-grants have been awarded to enable professors to research methods of integrating universal design into their instructional programs. Most recently, information on an array of disability-related topics has been made available on the university’s intranet for employees.

“The concept of universal design includes very concrete strategies that the university community, including faculty and administrators, can use to make practical improvements to improve access to instruction, programs, services, and facilities for diverse students and to appropriately support the needs of diverse students as they live, learn, and/or work at Niagara University,” Stoelting says.
New Scholarship Program Addresses Poverty and Social Injustice

A newly established initiative called the Vincentian Scholars Program will enable the university, its students, and community leaders to work together to alleviate poverty and social injustice. This program, an intensive service and learning experience developed by a team of university and community partners, is intended to meet the needs in the community by preparing undergraduate students to assist local, regional, and possibly even national organizations that work with the poor and oppressed. Students in this unique four-year curriculum will work with specific themes, goals, and learning outcomes each year, completing a full-year clinical internship during the fourth year.

“The Vincentian Scholars Program will be an incredible experience for our students, and for the communities they will serve throughout the program,” said Dr. Marilynn Fleckenstein, associate vice president for academic affairs at Niagara. “A Niagara education is designed to nurture all areas of a student’s growth, and this program will further our students’ ability to assume leadership roles in their careers and in their communities.”

Nursing Faculty Are Hosted by the United States Army Nurse Corps

Dr. Connie Jozwiak Shields, ’76, and Ann Marie MacIsaac, ’74, faculty in Niagara University’s nursing department, visited Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio this February as part of the United States Army Nurse Corps Nursing Educator Tour. At the installation, which is the home of the Army Medical Command headquarters, the nurse educators learned about opportunities the Army has to offer nurses and viewed the state-of-the-art facilities available at the military medical training facility and Brooks Army Medical Center. They also visited classrooms and clinical areas; met Army Corps faculty who prepare registered nurses and other health care professionals to care for active duty soldiers, their families, civilians, and even enemy forces; and interacted with nurses currently on active duty to gain a glimpse of the life of an Army nurse. “It was impressive to gain an appreciation of the kind of interdisciplinary expert team leadership that guides Army nursing practice,” said Shields of the experience.

“It was nostalgic for me to return to Fort Sam; it was even more exciting to see how Army nursing continues to prepare leaders who stretch the bounds of cure and care, and I was proud to know that the compassion of Army Nurse Corps members has remained steadfast throughout this evolutionary process,” said MacIsaac, a former Army nurse who was a member of Niagara’s Student Army Nurse Program.

Niagara University’s former College of Nursing had a long-standing relationship with the Army Nurse Corps and served as a significant pipeline for many nurse leaders. The newly established nursing department is eager to rekindle that partnership.

“Certainly, our mission is fully congruent with that of Army Nurse Corps,” said Dr. Frances Crosby, ’67, chairperson of the department. “We hope to again be recognized as a premier educational program from which the next generation of Army Nurse Corps leaders will be prepared and called forth to serve our country with the values, beliefs, and ethics that make us Niagara.”

DANCING THE NIGHT AWAY — A celebration of Latin American dance was held at the Castellani Art Museum on April 30, co-sponsored by the museum, the Latin American studies program, Bienvenidos student club, the College of Arts and Sciences, and Niagara’s modern and classical languages department. Here, Lionel Southwell and Jovene Viola, academic assistant in the department of modern and classical languages, lead attendees in one of the dances.
Diversity and Unity: Living in the Tension

“For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another.” (Romans 12:4-5)

Diversity is a very relevant topic today, be it in the world of business, politics, education, or religion. One hears of the need for workplace diversity; a college receives high marks if it is described as diverse; politicians speak glowingly of “diversity in their districts”; and diversity training is geared for nearly every age, ethnic group, and setting.

Even the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ Conference now has a department devoted to cultural diversity in the Church, owing to large numbers of members from growing Latino, African, and Asian populations. The above quote from St. Paul gets to the heart of the tension in building a bridge between diversity and unity. Paul’s analogous comparison of the human body to Christ’s mystical Body is ageless and true.

Whether it is Church, state, workplace, or body politic, the question must always be asked: What is the relationship between diversity in thought, belief, and practice, and the need to achieve unity of purpose in a common project? Does the former trump the latter? And is diversity more than affirming “otherness,” building coalitions and allies?

At NU, we’ve found ourselves in that conundrum both academically and socially. While we desire diversity, it also means learning new ways of looking at the world. Its zeitgeist can be difficult to translate into lasting actions beyond the world of ideas.

But we try, in both curriculum and campus activities. For a Niagara education to make a difference, it must prepare our students to live and work in a diverse world of people and ideas, ready to “go global” any time. Yet, it must also be rooted in the “things of God.”

One of my ongoing concerns as university chaplain is that, as we encourage diversity at NU, we also actively nourish our Catholic and Vincentian roots, which undergird our unity and cement common purpose. Both Saints Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac accepted the diverse people and problems of their day as being from the hand of God. Their principle of unity in diversity was twofold: maintaining the dignity of each person made in God’s image and welcoming each member as a part of the Body of Christ.

In this year of the 350th anniversary observance of the lives of Saints Vincent and Louise, the challenge for all Niagarans — students, faculty, staff, and alumni — is to respect and honor each person God puts in our path as one with innate dignity. The Catholic and Vincentian values which give glory to God and propel us to service of neighbor should be our unifying principle of life. For Saints Vincent and Louise, innovative service to the poor and master organizing skills were not ends in themselves; they led them to the person of Jesus, often manifested in the poor. Vincent’s oft-used phrase: “Jesus Christ is the first rule of the mission,” was uttered to remind us of the unity of purpose only Jesus provides.
Ask Babatunde “Tunde” Adepegba what his future holds and he’ll give you a well-thought-out plan that includes law school, a career as a military lawyer, and ultimately, a position in public office.

“I tell people that I’m running for president in 2036,” he says, smiling. “If you’re going to shoot for something, you might as well shoot high.”

After speaking with him for a few minutes, one gets the idea that Adepegba just might achieve that dream.

He’s accomplished much already. Recently nominated to be listed in the 2010 edition of Who’s Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges, the full-time contracted ROTC cadet with a major in political science and minors in international studies and military science has established himself on the Niagara University campus as a student leader. He is currently serving his second consecutive year as the vice president of the university’s prelaw association, and is a founding member and chief of staff of the Diversity Advocates, a student organization dedicated to fostering awareness of diversity issues. Students often seek his advice and support on a variety of issues, and Adepegba is always willing to assist.

“I make people feel comfortable,” he says. “I don’t judge people, I’m objective, and I’m a good listener.”

Part of the reason he is open-minded, he says, is that he has experienced two extremes in his life. His father is a Nigerian immigrant who works as a corporate insurance broker and owns a business in his native country; his mother serves lunches in a school cafeteria. The two are divorced and, while Adepegba lived with his father for a time, he and his brother Ray grew up living with their mother in public housing on Buffalo’s East Side. “We never had a car,” he says. “We never had a credit card.”

What Adepegba did have, however, were dreams. As a member of the junior ROTC program at Hutchinson-Central Technical High School, he appreciated the camaraderie and discipline he experienced in the program and knew he wanted to pursue a career in the military. He had always been interested in a legal career as well, and an internship he completed at a law firm while in high school solidified that desire. When he discovered that Niagara’s ROTC program was one of the top in the nation, he enrolled with the intent of pursuing both careers.

“I like to be unique,” he says. “Being a black male wanting to go to law school to be a lawyer in the military — there’s not too many of us.”

Adepegba also likes to explore the uniqueness in others. In his role with the Diversity Advocates, he is able to help start conversations that lead to greater understanding and acceptance on the Niagara University campus.

“Diversity is not an easy issue to talk about,” he acknowledges, but he is pleased with the success the organization has had in doing just that. From a forum discussing the Confederate flag, to the “Celebration of Unity and Hope” that took place during the presidential inauguration, to the recent workshops that encouraged students, employees and administrators to confront their own belief systems about themselves and others, activities hosted by the Diversity Advocates have facilitated constructive conversations among the Niagara community.

“I am proud of the group and what we are doing,” Adepegba says. “We feel powerful in the sense that we can create change.”

Being an agent of change is clearly a motivating factor for Adepegba, who says that he hopes to some day be able to speak for people who are not able to speak for themselves. “I feel that if someone can trust me to represent them, that’s a great honor,” he says. “I love helping people.”

For now, however, Adepegba is concentrating on the leadership development course that he’ll complete this summer, and on law school applications. Adepegba’s performance in the course, an advanced training exercise that the Army holds each summer, will determine what his next steps on his career path will be. If all goes as planned, he’ll go on to law school and then complete his service in the military. After that, anything is possible. Even an office in the White House.

— Lisa McMahon
Alex “Boo” Ellis, who played basketball at Niagara from 1955-58 before being selected 16th overall in the 1958 NBA draft by the Minneapolis Lakers, died May 6. He was 74.

Ellis became a rebounding and scoring force during his three years with the Niagara varsity. He left Monteaule Ridge first in career rebounds with 1,533 and second in scoring with 1,656 points. He remains the rebounding record holder.

A rebounding machine, Ellis set the Niagara single-season mark as a sophomore with 485, broke it as a junior with 522 and again as a senior when he led the nation with 526 rebounds. Ellis set the Niagara single-game record during his junior year when he grabbed 31 boards in a 99-76 win over Villanova in the Holiday Festival at Madison Square Garden. During his junior year, he set both the Niagara single-season scoring (631) and rebounding (522) records.

Cheerleaders Claim Championship in National Event

The Niagara University cheerleaders took first place at the Cheerleaders of America National Cheerleading Competition over the Easter holiday weekend in Orlando, Fla. The competition hosted more than 250 teams from across the country competing in the two-day event. The first-place finish gave Niagara a U.S. Final Qualifier bid.

Niagara’s squad of 24 girls has been working on routines since October. Captains Bethany Wood, Deanna Klemann, and Megan Abraham explained that this was a big win not only for the seniors, but for the recognition of cheerleading at Niagara.

This is the third competition the Niagara University cheerleaders have competed in since 2009. Last year, the Purple Eagles placed second in the same event and placed first in the Niagara Falls Championship.

The cheerleaders plan to travel to Daytona in 2011 to compete in the National Cheerleaders Association National Competition.

Kudos to NU’s Student-Athletes

A number of Niagara University student-athletes have been named to All-Academic teams during the spring semester.

Women’s basketball players Rachele Folino, Julie Gebhard, Jaclyn Konieczka, Jennifer McNamee, Jacy Schulz, and Meghan Waterman were named to the 2009-2010 MAAC All-Academic team. Niagara tied with Marist and Manhattan in placing the most players. The men’s team placed three: Demetrius Williamson, Paul Kowalski, and Luuk Kortekass, the second-most number of players placed.

The Niagara women’s hockey team landed two Purple Eagles to All-CHA teams. Junior goalie Jenni Bauer earned First-Team All-CHA honors and freshman forward Jenna Hendriks was named to the All-Rookie Team. Bauer was also among 10 players named to the CHA All-Academic Team along with Rachel Hauser, Christina Jablonski, Nathalie Larsen, Jennifer MacLean, Alison Malty, Frances McPhail, Jacqueline Spring, Autunn Stuntz, and Sarah Zacharias.

Senior goalkeeper John Fiutowski was named to the 2009 National Soccer Coaches Association of America University Scholar All-East Team. His 3.96 grade-point average was the highest of anyone named to the team.

Three Purple Eagles were named to the 2010 MAAC men’s and women’s tennis All-Academic teams. David Lemiux-Sarrasin had the highest grade-point average (4.15) of the 57 student-athletes on both the men’s and women’s teams. Emma Cunnington and Hilary Hansen were named to the women’s teams.

Women’s Basketball Wins Three MAAC Awards

March 4 was a banner night for the Niagara women’s basketball team as the Purple Eagles won three MAAC awards. Kendra Faustin was named the 2010 The Rock MAAC Women’s Basketball Coach of the Year, while Kayla Stroman was named MAAC Rookie of the Year and Ali Morris was selected as MAAC Sixth Player of the Year. This is the most awards Niagara has won since the 2002-03 seasons, when the team earned Coach of the Year, Defensive Player of the Year, and Sixth Player of the Year honors.

Alex Ellis, NU’s Leading Rebounder, Passes Away

Alex “Boo” Ellis, who played basketball at Niagara from 1955-58 before being selected 16th overall in the 1958 NBA draft by the Minneapolis Lakers, died May 6. He was 74.

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If you truly desire to understand someone, it is essential to listen with openness to the stories that he or she shares.

Frank J. Clark's stories are not of himself; they are about his relationships: to people, places, and experiences and how those relationships have shaped his life.

In individuals like Clark, who live their lives with great significance, there is almost always symmetry of give and take, of gifts given, enriched through personal life experience and service, and then returned with grace. This balance is evident in the way Clark characterizes the ways his life was enriched by his parents, his marriage, his faith, his profession, the United States Marine Corps, and certainly by Niagara University.

Frank Clark is gifted with a keen and precise mind. It is a mind honed in the disciplines of classical Latin and Greek declensions and the rigorous logic of law. Yet, he also possesses a particular sensitivity to the complexities of human affairs, a sensitivity that is tempered by his love for the poetry of Virgil and Homer and a tremendous sense of gratitude to so many others whom he says have contributed to the person he is. Clark's is a mind at peace with the roles he has played in his community and in his profession. It is also a mind in friendship with laughter, especially when relating the varied stories of his life.

Clark will share that he initially wanted to attend Holy Cross but circumstances intervened and he found an open welcome at Niagara University, where he discovered a deep and lasting affinity for classical languages and literature. He places great weight on what his studies and his life at Niagara played in those formative years and how those years at Niagara helped prepare him for the challenges he would face in service to his country and his community. He especially remembers, and with great affection, the mentorship provided him by Dr. Thomas D. Lynch, who was professor and chairman of Niagara's then department of classical languages.

“Dr. Lynch was a wonderful teacher and a wonderful man; a very good and holy man,” Clark mused while being interviewed for this profile. “He wanted me to teach the classics after I graduated. He told me that he would help me move forward into graduate school. But I wanted to take a different path. And, to paraphrase Robert Frost, that has made all the difference.”

The different path he sought led him to the study of law. After graduating from Niagara in 1964, Clark took the LSAT and entered law school at the University at Buffalo, eventually earning the degree of juris doctor in 1967.

After law school, he felt the call to serve his country and enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. Clark said, with a smile, that he seemed pretty familiar with the rigor of Marine Corps training due to his time at Niagara. He stated that, “When I got to Marine training and started its grueling works, I said to myself, ‘I’ve already been through this!’” He added that the education and experience at Niagara was, in many ways, “forging the character of all of us who went there. It gave you a discipline which you sorely needed. It wasn’t only an academic lesson, it was a life lesson that the Vincentians taught us. And it impacted our lives far more than we thought at the time.”

During his three-year service with the Marine Corps, he experienced the crucible of war as a combat officer in Vietnam.

About his time in the military he will only say, “I was very fortunate. Three years in the Marine Corps, with 13 months of that time in Vietnam, will teach you a lot about life. I was one of the ones who came out of that experience far richer than I was when I went in.”
Clark attributes many of the reasons why he was able to serve with distinction in both his military and professional careers to his experiences with the Vincentians at Niagara. In that, he states that his faith and its solace has provided him the spiritual bedrock from which he has built his extraordinary life. He remembers, with great approbation, the Vincentian priests and brothers who inspired him and his classmates to keep their faith at the core of their lives. He reminisces that, “They (the Vincentians) tried always to make our faith important to us. And they really led by their own example.”

He also maintains that his education and his life in the military and in law and law enforcement have been significantly seasoned by the help that he has received from so many others along the way. Clark’s firm sense of returning the gifts of a lifetime has inspired a very passionate desire to give back. He will tell you that, “Nobody achieves a great deal by themselves. Most of us owe our success to others.” He adds, “On our own we accomplish so little. But, with the help of others, it’s amazing what you can do.”

After his discharge from the Marines, Clark was admitted to practice law in state and federal courts. His résumé includes his service as chief of the Organized Criminal Drug Enforcement Task Force of the United States Attorney’s Office in the Western District of New York, chief of the Violent Felony Bureau in the Erie County District Attorney’s Office, and then, first deputy district attorney for Erie County. He was elected as Erie County district attorney in 1997 and held that position until his retirement in 2008.

Clark was awarded the Niagara University Founders Award in 2005, the Scouting Citizen of the Year in 2008 by the Greater Niagara Frontier Council of the Boy Scouts of America, and the Special Award of the New York State Humane Association in 2009. He has also received numerous citations from his professional peers in the field of law enforcement including the United States departments of Justice and Treasury, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Secret Service, and the Ontario Provincial Police in Canada.

Since his retirement he has kept an active pace with speaking and lecturing engagements. Clark and his wife, Catherine, a Buffalo school teacher, are taking advantage of his retirement to catch up on the travel and the other things they could not find the time to do in the midst of two very busy professional lives.

Now, as in his time as Erie County’s very public district attorney, his personage and distinguishable voice are immediately recognizable as local and national media seek and feature his commentaries, where appropriate, on cases and matters of criminal law and law enforcement when their complexities require studied but transparently crystal explanations.

Clark’s relationship with Niagara University endures with his contributions to the university’s Criminal Justice Advisory Board, his special lectures to Niagara classes, and most recently, as a means of giving back, establishing a named, endowed scholarship in criminal justice studies to the College of Arts and Sciences.

On what his Niagara experience has meant to his life, he says that, “I look back on my education at Niagara and also in the Marine Corps and I know it molded me. It would have been impossible for me to have accomplished any of the things I did if it hadn’t been for that experience and for the multitude of those who helped me. Over the years, I understood what Niagara gave me; from the discipline inherent in the study of the classics and, most critical to what I believe, that there probably isn’t anything as powerful as a prayer.”

— Patrick Hulsman
Mission Impossible

By Jonathan Keppler

Editor’s note: Last fall, Niagara University’s College of Business Administration, in partnership with Catholic Health, launched a health care administration concentration within its MBA program. A unique aspect of the program is the opportunity for students to join volunteers on medical missions to Jamaica each January under the auspices of Catholic Health’s parent organization, Catholic Health East’s Global Health Ministry. Jonathan Keppler was among the first Niagara students to participate in one of these missions. After an inauspicious start, which included changing flights due to a leak in an airplane’s defrosting system, a 14-hour day of travel, and two lost medical suitcases, Keppler spent two weeks in Kingston, serving as the assistant primary care team leader to John Davanzo, senior vice president of regional development for Catholic Health. Here, he shares his story.
Our medical team, which consisted of 15 individuals from all different parts of the United States, was greeted at the airport by John Davano, senior vice president of regional development for Catholic Health, and Sister Grace Yap, who is the director of the Immaculate Conception Convent in Kingston. Now Sister Grace is the primary example why the phrase, “Don’t judge a book by its cover,” was created. Standing no more than 5 feet tall and opting to keep her age a secret, this Chinese nun has dedicated her life’s work to serving others, and essentially acts as the “Godmother” of the entire Jamaican island. She spends her days overseeing various community development projects, negotiating peace agreements with local crime lords, and spending time with her family.

We stayed in the city of Kingston. The areas surrounding this city resembled pictures that you would see in a National Geographic magazine rather than on a postcard. Shanty towns filled with tin-roof houses and abandoned buildings lined the streets as natives went about their daily activities. Walls were covered with graffiti, memorials of fallen friends, and portraits of cultural heroes such as Bob Marley. The air was filled with the distinct aroma of ganja as young men passed the time in an attempt to escape from the demands of life. Communal water taps and pit toilets were common attractions. Children played barefoot with deflated soccer balls enjoying the precious moments of their youth. It was obvious that these people didn’t have much in the way of material things, but they did possess a strong sense of community. They were humbled by their present circumstances and thankful for everything they had. As one woman told me, “Are we troubled? Yes. However, trouble is the perfect opportunity for God to do His work.”

Every morning, our group would break up into two separate teams to be transported by bus to the various locations we had been assigned by Sister Grace. The first half of our trip was dedicated to servicing the inner-city communities of Whitfield Town, Myrrh Villa, Lyndhurst Park, and Ferry. The second half of the trip required us to travel outside of Kingston to rural Braes River and Santa Cruz, where we saw patients in already established public health clinics. Each new day would lead us to a new place of work. Churches, recreation centers, schools, and even a storage container became home to our team. Basically, if it had a roof, we used it.

The luxuries that we as Americans have the privilege of enjoying on a daily basis were nonexistent in these facilities. Air conditioning was nothing but a distant memory. There were no plush seats, flat screen TVs, or refreshments being offered. The concept of patient privacy came in the form of a bed sheet. It wasn’t uncommon for the waiting area, triage, physician, and the pharmacy to be crammed into one single space. As a team leader, I was faced with the task of communicating with the in-country coordinators to ensure that the logistics in the clinical setting were not only efficient, but effective. In addition, I was responsible for controlling patient flow, maintaining a consistent work schedule, and ensuring the accuracy of our medication distribution system.

Overall, our medical mission team was able to provide care to more than 800 patients during our short stay in Jamaica. It was a blessing to be surrounded by a talented team of health care professionals who were energetic, engaged and excited about the work they had set out to do. By transporting our medical suitcases from one site to another, we were able to treat a variety of diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, infections and gynecological illnesses. I became frustrated by the fact that a large majority of the patients’ diseases were completely preventable, such as malnutrition, hookworms and parasites. By simply increasing the accessibility to basic resources and education, these conditions could be drastically reduced. However, this concept is obviously easier said than done. Important supplies such as eye glasses, walking canes, braces, and supports were also distributed accordingly. One of my favorite memories of the trip was when we handed out stickers and toothbrushes to the children as gifts. I swear by the smiles on their faces you would have thought we had just given them a million dollars.

My time in Jamaica was a life-changing experience, and, although the task of solving the world’s problems may seem overwhelming and even impossible at times, I think it’s important for us not to remain complacent on the issue. As stated in Luke’s Gospel chapter 12 verse 48, “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required.” The Niagara University community can be a light to the world if we choose to accept this challenge. 🗣️
Creating a Welcoming and Inclusive Niagara Campus
In his best-selling book “The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century,” Thomas L. Friedman analyzed globalization and the shift required for countries, companies and individuals to remain competitive in a global market. In this global society, people, organizations and corporations will increasingly find themselves working across countries, nationalities and cultures.

This means that today’s college students must be better prepared to take their places in a workforce that will come from a much wider geographic region and a much more diverse ethnic and cultural background than previous generations.

“The simple reality for NU is that if we are to prepare our graduates for success in a global economy, they must learn to work with people from many backgrounds,” says Dr. Bonnie Rose, executive vice president and vice president for academic affairs. “If we are to achieve our goals for modest growth in the future, we also must attract and retain a more diverse student body. In order to accomplish this, we must be a campus that not only welcomes, but celebrates, diversity among our employees, faculty and staff.”

This global shift can often take on two different perspectives. First, it focuses on educating and informing people about different backgrounds and cultures. Second, it welcomes people of different backgrounds and cultures.

Second, it welcomes people of different backgrounds into the community. For some organizations, this can be a major change in their vision for the future. For Niagara University however, it is really a reemphasis on its heritage and mission.

“One imperative of a Vincentian university is to reach out and provide educational opportunities to those who may be marginalized and who might not otherwise be able to afford the privilege of a Catholic private education,” Rose adds. “The reality is that large numbers of people in these groups are from very diverse backgrounds.”

**diversity in the classroom**

Because preparing students for success in an increasingly global marketplace is vital to Niagara’s educational mission, the university’s four colleges are taking steps to expand their curriculums and to meet these needs.

“We have an obligation to construct opportunities for our students to learn and engage with people who have backgrounds that are not similar to their own,” Rose says. “This is important from the perspective of the values we wish to teach, but also from the pragmatic perspective of preparing our students to succeed in a global economy.”

In the College of Arts and Sciences, for example, a minor in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies was launched last spring, and its women’s studies program annually hosts events to commemorate Susan B. Anthony Day in February and Women’s History Month in March. This year’s events focused on women who made significant contributions to history but had been, in effect, written out, says Dr. Abigail Levin, assistant professor of philosophy.

The college’s nursing department hosted a conference that discussed a variety of faith traditions and their implications for health care. Breakout sessions featured representatives from Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Christianity, and Buddhism.

The college also offers a long-distance international course in Latin American studies that is taught by a Colombian professor from the Universidad Javeriana.

The College of Business Administration’s curriculum places special emphasis on the world marketplace and provides opportunities for students and faculty to engage in practical interaction with the business community on a regional, national and global scale. Its recently launched MBA health care administration concentration includes an opportunity for students to travel to Jamaica on medical missions. The college also participates in the Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education Mobility Project, a joint endeavor with five other institutions in the United States, Canada and Mexico. This study-abroad/faculty-exchange program is designed to develop an integrated, tri-national course in comparative accounting systems.

A global perspective is an intrinsic part of the courses offered by the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, and students meet a diverse group of international industry leaders each year at the college’s annual convocation, in classrooms as speakers, and in their varied international options, including a newly launched dual degree program with the International University of Applied Sciences in Bad Honnef, Germany. The college’s students also annually participate in the Thanksgiving celebration hosted by Journey’s End Refugee Services, an organization that assists refugees resettling in Western New York.

Perhaps the most comprehensive model for successfully integrating diversity-related initiatives throughout the curriculum is the College of Education. In accordance with the college’s strategic plan, diversity is incorporated into all areas of the program, including faculty development, curriculum, assessment
of candidate performance, partnerships with high-needs schools, work with high-needs students on campus, and field and clinical experiences. The college’s committee on diversity is charged with ensuring that the curriculum, field experiences, and assessments in all programs meet diversity outcome standards; that faculty and staff are knowledgeable about diversity with access to current theory and practice; and that faculty and candidates represent a balance of diversity.

Sylvia Valentin, associate professor of education, was involved in this effort. “We are aware of its importance and why we need to add issues pertaining to diversity,” she says. “We’re preparing our students to work with diversity, differing abilities, different belief systems. That’s what’s going to make them successful in their careers. We want them to have the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to be able to function in a world that is diverse.”

All teacher candidates in the initial program are required to successfully complete three courses related to the education of students from different backgrounds and varying needs, and complete field experiences, teaching assistantships, and student teaching in schools that educate those student populations. Clinical faculty ensures that candidates work with students from a wide array of backgrounds, including ethnic/racial background, linguistic differences, gender, socioeconomic status, and disabilities.

The college’s faculty has been involved in numerous scholarly and service activities related to the education of students from different cultural backgrounds and nearly half have been involved in international study and research on diversity topics. Their work is directly applied to the classes they teach, offering students cutting-edge pedagogy in these issues.

The college’s graduate programs, which are offered both on campus and in Ontario, Canada, enroll international students with considerable linguistic and cultural diversity, providing additional opportunities for candidates to learn about ethnic heritages different from their own.

welcoming a diverse campus life

For Niagara students, the college experience expands well beyond the classroom. While Niagara’s focus on learning and diversity is woven throughout the campus, the center for diversity may be the Office of Multicultural International Students Affairs. MISA seeks to help students maximize their college experience through learning more about themselves as well as others. It creates programs that make Niagara an even more enjoyable place to be, and provides the information necessary for students to reach their goals.

The MISA department is charged with three tasks. First, MISA looks to educate the entire campus community on a variety of cultures and cultural issues. In addition, it serves the needs of Niagara’s under-represented students, and assists Niagara’s international student population.

“Niagara is a great place for diversity to flourish because of our mission statement and what St. Vincent was about,” says David Blackburn, director of MISA. “We inherently value people regardless of some of the superficial things that separate us.”

MISA is designed to “keep the pulse of what the students want to experience culturally,” Blackburn says, so that appropriate events can be hosted that meet their interests while providing an educational experience. Blackburn notes that often, the students his office serves don’t participate in other extracurricular activities, so these events give them the opportunity to have a full campus life. Blackburn says these activities have helped “students of color become more empowered, become more excited about getting involved and getting to know people who are different from themselves. They are more ambitious to be part of groups that may not have people that look like them.”

Some of the ongoing activities that the office sponsors include the MISA ball, a formal dinner dance; a “Just Dance” social that features the music, food, and dance from a particular ethnic heritage; and an international supper club that brings students to a variety of restaurants to sample foods from different cultures. There are also one-time events, like the recent “Bollywood Meets Nollywood” night, which focused on the food and culture of India and Nigeria. MISA’s student board is instrumental in developing and carrying out these events, Blackburn says.

In addition to providing extracurricular activities, the MISA office also assists
students who may be having a difficult time transitioning to the campus. Blackburn explains that he often helps students find things like calling cards to phone home or restaurants that serve foods familiar to them.

In addition to offices and initiatives that are operated by the university, student-run organizations and activities, like the Diversity Advocates, help to bring both awareness and change to the Niagara campus. The group, which is an officially recognized student organization, holds regular meetings each week and plans a variety of events including “Become a Match: Spark the Flame of Diversity and Inclusion,” an interactive workshop that encouraged participants to confront their own belief systems about themselves and others.

Recognizing that campuswide changes will require the support and involvement of the entire university community, the group has held several dinners with faculty and administrators to update them about their progress, goals, and lingering concerns.

“It can’t just come from the students,” says Crystal Brea, the group’s president. “It has to come from faculty and administrators as well because they ultimately create the environment in the classroom.”

About the same time that the students were forming their group, a Faculty/Student Engagement Group was established. This group, co-moderated by Dr. Christopher Lee, assistant professor of political science, and Dr. James McCutcheon, assistant professor of Spanish, holds events and forums to help educate the university community on diversity issues and has worked with the Diversity Advocates on a number of projects.

“This group lets students and faculty and staff know that there are people who are concerned about these issues and it’s not just words,” Lee says. “There are people working to make Niagara a comfortable and a more welcoming place.”

The group partnered with the Diversity Advocates to host “A Celebration of Unity and Hope,” an event held on Inauguration Day 2009. The celebration provided an opportunity for the more than 1,000 in attendance to view the inauguration and for the university to use the historic day as an educational experience. Various classes prepared poster presentations on civil rights and the historic, political and other aspects of the inauguration, and remarks from across the political spectrum were offered.

niagara’s diverse future

Through its continued efforts to diversify the campus, Niagara is creating opportunities for honest discourse on the underlying issues that are inherent in a diverse community.

This has helped the university recognize that, while there have been many positive changes in promoting diversity and understanding among the university community, there are still challenges to be met.

“There is a fine balance between clearly advancing our Catholic identity and promoting a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for all on campus,” Rose admits. “As a small campus that traditionally draws its student population from a very homogeneous population, Niagara University has much more to learn, to do, and to accomplish if it is to become a more diverse institution. As we strive to do so, we must be guided by the ideals that stem from our Catholic identity, and motivated by the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul to translate those ideals into action.”

Chaired by Blackburn, and co-chaired by Valentin and Carlos Tejada, associate dean for graduate recruitment, the committee is charged to engage groups and individuals from throughout the campus community in making the university more diverse and inclusive.

The committee has several working groups and standing committees that focus on particular issues, such as curriculum, enrollment, research, persons with disabilities, and mission/respect. Many were in existence before the larger university diversity committee was established, an indication of the range of activities and program areas that have already begun to take steps to diversify the campus.
Of the numerous diversity initiatives Niagara University has engaged in over the last five years, the Niagara — Sergio Arboleda University Professor Exchange Program is one of the most unique. The program provides a weeklong intellectual and cultural exchange, allowing faculty members from Niagara University and Universidad Sergio Arboleda to visit, lecture, tour and research in Colombia and the United States. The program was established several years ago by Gina Ponce de Leon, associate professor of Spanish, and the Latin American studies program to facilitate a cross-cultural experience between faculty members across colleges and to meet cultural diversity objectives of the strategic plan. Since the program’s first exchange in 2007, Dr. Joseph Little, assistant professor of English; Dr. Tenpao Lee, professor of commerce; and Dr. Abdiweli Ali, associate professor of economics, have all spent a week in Bogotá lecturing on various topics and absorbing Colombian culture.

This past March, I was delighted to join the program as the fourth participant. Initially, I was a bit apprehensive because Colombia has frequently been featured on the U.S. State Department travel-warning list for its problems with drug wars, kidnappings, and guerilla conflicts. Notwithstanding these reservations, from my first moment there, the Colombia I encountered was vastly different from the one in the American imagination.

Bogotá is an impressive city: romantic, majestic, and open. The majestic plateau in the Andes Mountains, some 8,000 feet above sea level, is home to more than 7 million people. The city has experienced substantial economic growth in the last seven years and has become an increasingly popular destination for American investors and tourists. It presents an optimistic outlook of endless possibilities in a culturally diverse and politically stable Latin America.

In addition to its economic boom, the city is an interesting place to learn about race, class, urban development, and economics. People migrate to Bogotá from all over Colombia in hopes of finding better opportunities. Many have succeeded, but many others slide deeper into poverty. Thus the “Athens of Latin America,” as it is called, faces common challenges of urbanization in the modern era akin to New York, Johannesburg, and Shanghai.

Universidad Sergio Arboleda grew like a tree from the midst of these historical challenges. It was established as a private university with a mission to train skilled professionals in science, research, and culture, structured according to the principles of Christian and humanistic philosophy. Its founders intended it to develop leaders in economic development, as well as scholars of cultural and international issues. The main campus is nestled in the heart of the city and is bustling with student activity during the day. Many of the students I met were very similar to their American counterparts — entrepreneurial-minded, optimistic, and curious about the outside world. During the seven lectures I gave on various topics in African and African American history, I was peppered with a series of critical questions about race and politics in the United States, the economy, and Niagara University.

While there, I also spent a significant time with professors, addressing intellectual problems in a cross-cultural interdisciplinary framework. For example, I participated in a series of discussions...
with professor Catherine González comparing the conditions of indigenous populations in Colombia to Afro-Colombians and Afro-Americans. Discussions with Maria Christina Lizcano helped me to understand the proliferation of African influence in the music of Colombia from cumbia to bajaranto. I also spent a bit of time discussing perspectives of race and business culture that I had not previously considered with Javier Gomez, a professor of marketing, who participated in the exchange the year prior to my arrival.

Collectively, these exchanges helped me to think of my research on Afro-Americans in the light of a broader historical narrative, but also helped me to more clearly explain the significance of these historical problems to a broader audience. In the past, I have given numerous lectures on American slavery, but when I delivered this lecture to a Colombian marketing class, I had to think about the global tragedy from a different perspective. Additionally, I had to confront questions about the moral impact of slavery to an audience whose nation had vastly different economic and cultural outcomes with slavery than the United States.

For the final component of the exchange, I flew to the northern coast of the country and spent two days at Universidad Sergio Arboleda’s Santa Marta campus. Santa Marta is a diverse coastal community that reveals the rich cultural diversity of the country. Colombia has the third largest population of African people in South America with a population of 4-8 million. In Bogotá, the influence of African and indigenous population is muted, but in Santa Marta the pluralism and syncretism of Colombian culture is readily revealed in the bustling street markets, bombastic bajaranto music blaring from stereos, and the ubiquity of Koguis mochila (bag) design patterns. There I delivered a lecture on Afro-American politics to the School of Communication and Journalism. I was warmly greeted and engaged by the students and faculty there. My hosts provided me with a thorough cultural and historical tour of the area — including the famous Tairona State Park and the Quinta de San Pedro Alejandrino. Equally important, we had many discussions about similarities, differences, and parallels in the histories of the United States and Colombia. They had a keen interest in issues of race and politics in the United States and I wanted to learn about perceptions and developments of similar issues in Colombia. It was a wonderful exchange!

The day I left Colombia I shed silent tears, but my joy returned when my Colombian counterpart, professor Luis Angel Madrid, arrived at Niagara University to complete this year’s exchange. Professor Madrid completed a series of lectures around the campus as I had done in Colombia. A highlight of his visit occurred when he lectured my Introduction to Africana Studies on race and class in Colombia. The students were thoroughly engaged in the subject as he outlined the hidden-in-plain-view history of Afro-Colombians in the country from El Choco to Cartagena. His brilliant lecture on Afro-Colombians was complementary to a semester-long course objective to explore cultural diversity within the African Diaspora. I was pleased to continue the exchange of ideas that I had begun with him in Colombia and inspired to continue to research the subject.

The Niagara – Universidad Sergio Arboleda Professor Exchange Program is a unique initiative that will continue to contribute to cultural diversity initiatives on campus. We hope to see the program continue to grow in its fifth year. It has already yielded significant academic fruit with the publication of an article by Abdiweli Ali in Universidad Sergio Arboleda’s journal Empressa y Economia. I am scheduled to submit a piece for a forthcoming issue. While the program provides a significant cultural and intellectual exchange for Niagara and Sergio faculty, in the future we hope that we can expand the program to meet the need for our students to explore Latin American history and politics, the African Diaspora, and the Spanish language firsthand. Work on this initiative has already begun.

The scholar swap pioneered by Niagara University and Universidad Sergio Arboleda is truly a neo-Colombian exchange that will transform both campuses in ways that none of us can imagine.
In China, food has an inextricable relationship with culture. It plays an integral role in health, entertainment, business relationships, and way of life for the Chinese people. According to Dr. Zongqing Zhou, an associate professor of hospitality and tourism, the relationship between food and culture is “so interwoven that sometimes it’s hard to tell the difference.”

For about a decade, Zhou has shared this distinctive relationship with students in his Chinese Cuisine and Culture course. Initially offered on an occasional basis, the course’s popularity and student demand has led to it being offered each spring as a cultural diversity course, available to all Niagara University students.

It’s easy to see why the course is so popular. Classroom work is combined with field trips and lab work in the kitchen to create an environment that engages students and makes them “feel that taking this course is like visiting China,” Zhou says. Zhou, a Chinese native who has lived in the United States for more than 20 years, notes that both his prior experience as a Chinese restaurant manager and his ethnicity add authenticity to the course.

Because the course focuses on how culture influences the Chinese way of eating and vice versa, much of the work involves food; specifically, food and its relationship to subcultures, medicine and health, entertainment, philosophy, and social relationships. Students learn about the philosophical and medical concept of Yin and Yang and how foods are classified as one or the other; how food and medicine are linked; the role of meals in Chinese business deals; the importance of food during festivals; and the symbolism in food, both in name and in how and when it is served. They also learn how to use Chinese utensils like the wok and the cleave and the Chinese way of setting a table and serving food so that its flavor is preserved. Field trips to restaurants in Toronto’s Chinatown provide unique opportunities for experiential learning and help to reinforce the classroom work. At the end of the semester, students demonstrate what they have learned by planning, cooking and serving a three-course Chinese meal that shows their knowledge of the relationship of the menu items to culture and regional subcultures, as well as their mastery of basic Chinese cooking techniques and the use of popular Chinese ingredients. The meal is served to the hospitality college’s faculty and staff, under Zhou’s guidance. It has become a highly anticipated event among the guests.

This knowledge has far-ranging applications, says Zhou. From business majors who aspire to careers with multinational corporations, to hospitality and tourism students who will be serving Chinese tourists at restaurants, hotels, and other attractions, the class participants can apply their understanding of culture and cuisine in a variety of ways.

“The attractiveness of this course comes not only from opening up students’ eyes to a very unique and interesting culture,” says Zhou, “but also in enabling students to start thinking about the relationships between food and culture in their own cultures and how they can use this knowledge in the pursuit of their careers.”

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### Food Symbolism

#### Chinese New Year
- Bamboo shoots - wealth
- Black moss seaweed - wealth
- Dried bean curd - happiness (note: fresh tofu is not served because the color white symbolizes death and misfortune in Chinese culture)
- Chicken - happiness and marriage (especially when served with “dragon foods,” such as lobster, Family reunion (if served whole).
- Eggs - fertility
- Egg rolls - wealth
- Fish served whole - prosperity
- Chinese garlic chives - everlasting, a long life
- Lychee nuts - everlasting, a long life
- Oranges - wealth
- Peanuts - a long life
- Pomelo - abundance, prosperity, having children
- Seeds - having a large number of children
- Tangerines – luck

Source: [http://chinesefood.about.com/library/blnewyearsfoodsymbols.htm](http://chinesefood.about.com/library/blnewyearsfoodsymbols.htm)

#### Other Occasions

Birthday celebrations usually include noodles, eaten before the actual birthday, because the long noodles indicate longevity in China. After middle age, peaches in many forms will also be eaten to symbolize longevity and immortality.

On a wedding day, it is customary to serve Chinese dates, peanuts, longan (a fruit) and chestnuts together as a wish for the couple to soon have a baby in accord with the Chinese proclamation.

During the Dragon Boat Festival, whether or not they watch the boat race, people will eat zongzi, a pyramid-shaped dumpling made of glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves.

When a baby is born in Central China, the happy father will send red boiled eggs to announce the news. Eggs with a black pointed end and dots in an even number indicate a boy’s birth; those without a black point and an odd number of dots will announce the baby is a girl.

Source: [www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/cuisine.htm](http://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/cuisine.htm)
John Magnan, ’67

When John Magnan’s wife was diagnosed with Stage III ovarian cancer, he turned to art “out of fear” and used his work as a way to document her experience. Now, his 16-piece exhibit, “body image/body essence” is helping countless other cancer patients find solace.

Magnan, ’67, who had recently retired from his job as a senior executive with the National Security Agency, was pursuing a lifelong avocation in woodworking as a student in the MFA program at the University of Massachusetts when he met Mary Wellman. The two married a year later. Less than two years after that, they heard the devastating news that Mary had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

“We knew nothing about ovarian cancer,” Magnan says. The couple turned to the Internet to find out as much as they could about the disease. What they found out was alarming — survival rates at this stage were extremely low.

“I started dealing with it by making art,” Magnan says. “It turned out to be a way for both of us to cope.”

Magnan’s first piece was “Sharps,” a wooden egg he covered with 46,000 pinheads. He used the cut-off pin ends to form a prickly nest. The work took seven months and “became both a calming mantra and symbol of my wife’s convalescence.”

“Mary had just started chemotherapy and her hair started falling out, so I became interested in the question of hair,” Magnan says. Starting with a graduate school art project, an 8-inch egg made of wood, he began experimenting with ways to represent hair. The egg became, for Magnan, the symbol for the exhibition.

As Mary’s illness progressed, she and Magnan met other women and their families who were battling cancer. He became inspired by their stories and created, over a 15-month period, the “body image/body essence” exhibit.

Many of the pieces are about hair, he says. For example, “Day 17,” a mirror crafted of cherry wood, is dedicated to a woman Magnan met who lost her hair all at once, while shampooing. He notes that she squeezed the water out of the ball of hair, put it in the sink, “and then shuddered to realize what she would see in the mirror when she looked up.”

Another piece, “They Say It Never Grows Back the Same,” is created of pine, birch and hairpins. Magnan says this was inspired by the conversation of women in chemotherapy, which “inevitably turns to a discussion of hair.” With this piece, he “attempted to capture the humor that tends to characterize these interactions.”

More upsetting than the loss of hair, for one woman, was realizing she could never have children. “The Nest,” made of copper, hair and holly, was Magnan’s way of representing her loss and showing how ovarian cancer “damages many eggs, defiling many nests.”

His favorite piece in the exhibit is called “The Burghers of Bigelow 7.” Sculpted of a variety of woods and steel, the piece is Magnan’s interpretation of IV poles as people. “Watching women recover from surgery and endure infusions, I came to view the ever-present IV pole as a human form,” he explains. “It was as if a second person followed them wherever they went.”

Magnan’s exhibition traveled the country for nine years. It was shown in 17 cities, documented in magazines, and featured on national, local and PBS television broadcasts. Mary was able to be part of 10 of those exhibitions, Magnan notes, adding that her dream was that one day, the exhibition would find a permanent home.

This summer, that dream will be realized when the exhibit is permanently installed in the new Women’s Cancer Center at the Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia, where Mary’s beloved oncologist recently accepted the position of president and CEO.

“Considering this a sign, I offered the exhibit, in its entirety, to the center, and they honored me with gracious acceptance,” Magnan says. “To have it go to the hospital where Mary’s doctor is is an amazing coincidence.”

This new home will enable the exhibit to continue to be a source of consolation and support for cancer patients, many of whom find that the art allows them to cry or share their feelings with others for the first time.

“As an artist, that’s pretty satisfying to know you’ve helped someone communicate to a loved one what they are feeling,” Magnan says. “If it gives them some catharsis, validation, then I’m happy.”

— Lisa McMahon
Fellow alumni,

What do you do after graduation? Our new “Purple Eagle” graduates will explore many endeavors. Jobs? Travel? Internships? Graduate school? Whatever the paths they travel, we wish them luck and a future rich with the Vincentian spirit!

The Vincentian teaching will be with them for a lifetime. This spirit of enthusiasm and giving is embraced by some more than others, but often becomes a part of their “well-fibered makeup.” I say this because many of them will be recognized simply by this sense of giving. Embrace it, for this is the Niagara legacy that develops and grooms us.

I invite our newest “Purple Eagles” to join us at alumni events, including the Little Three golf event at Transit Valley Country Club on June 28, Saratoga’s Day at the Races on July 24, Del Mar Race Track’s Day at the Races in California on Aug. 28, and Alumni Weekend at NU Oct. 8-10. Details on all of these events and lots of NU news can be found on the alumni Web page, Eagle’s Nest, at niagaraalumni.com.

Be part of your alma mater!

Sincerely,
Dr. Greg Hudecki, ’68
President, Niagara University Alumni Association

Alumni Chapters

Albany Chapter
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Atlanta Chapter
Melinda Smith, ’78
404-934-6135 or 770-935-4511
msfundraiser@bellsouth.net

Boston Chapter
Tony Lista, ’80
508-951-2641
tonylista@aol.com

Pictured clockwise from top left is Brendan Greeley, ’08, and Nick Sculli, ’09; Gigi Giorgi, ’09, Carolyn Hauck, ’09, and Meghan Moran, ’09; and Charlie Schiralli, ’00, Matt Scheuer, ’07, and Sarah Hart Schiralli, ’00, at the NU vs. Canisius game watch Jan. 29 at Matthew’s East End Grill in Rochester, N.Y.

Don, ’61, and Sarah Jones, and Joe Donlon, ’61, enjoyed a luncheon at The Villages in Orlando, Fla., Feb. 1.
Racing Coast to Coast

The alumni relations office will race coast to coast this summer with two exciting “Day at the Races” events! We have limited tickets for both events, so we recommend registering early on the Eagle’s Nest at www.niagaraalumni.com.

The Saratoga Day at the Races, hosted by the Albany chapter, will take place on Saturday, July 24. Join fellow alumni in the clubhouse in At the Rail Pavilion, where you will have a trackside view of all the live racing action. Your ticket includes admission, buffet, and conveniently located betting facilities. There will also be an informal gathering on Friday, July 23, at The Parting Glass.

Join us on Aug. 28 in San Diego, Calif., for the “Pacific Classic” at the Del Mar Race Track! The ticket is only $25 and includes admission to the clubhouse, seating, a program, and a $10 scrip that can be used for food or drink. See you there!

Mark Your Calendar

Alumni events are a great way to stay connected to Niagara, no matter your location! We have a lot in store for our chapters in the upcoming months. Don’t forget to add these dates to your calendar and check out the Eagle’s Nest at www.niagaraalumni.com for more information.*

| July       | Albany — Saratoga Day at the Races  
|           | (Friday evening social and Saturday races) |
| August    | Tri-state — Young Alumni Harbor Cruise: Pier 61, Chelsea Piers |
| Aug. 28   | San Diego — “Pacific Classic” Day at the Races: Del Mar Race Track |
| September-October | Events in Rochester, Boston, Central New York, Central Maryland, Chicago, Delaware Valley, and Las Vegas |
| Sept. 23  | Washington, D.C. — “Buffalo Nite” |
| Oct. 8-10 | Alumni Weekend — Niagara University |

*Event calendar is subject to change. The listing includes only the confirmed events as of printing. Check the Eagle's Nest for the full listing.

Stephen Klein, ’85, and Edward Barrett, ’85, (above left) and Jeanne Klein, ’85, and Steven Wiseman, ’85, (above right) at the Tri-state Pre-St. Patrick's Day Party March 12 at McFadden's.
NU Grad Finds Tragedy and Hope in Haiti

Determined to help his family, Plantin arranged a two-week trip to Haiti in February. With the help of his friends and co-workers, he was able to bring money and clothes for his family with him. Although the trip was an emotionally difficult one, Plantin says he plans to return each year to help in whatever way he can, and is optimistic that, with the continued support of people around the world, Haiti can be rebuilt.

“It will take a while, but we will get there!” he says.

Plantin’s desire to help others extends to his professional life as well. He chose social work as a career because he “was always passionate about assisting others to better their lives.” Recently accepted into a master’s program in public administration, Plantin wants to go on to earn master’s and doctoral degrees in higher education administration with the goal of working as an adviser to international and immigrant students at a public university.

For now, however, Plantin’s role as a counselor to homeless adults suffering from mental illness and substance abuse is a satisfying one. His goal, he says, is to help these individuals become independent so that they can get permanent housing.

“The best part of my job is seeing the glow on a client’s face after he/she has completed the program and receives a key to their first apartment,” he says.

— Lisa McMahon

Kims Plantin, ’07, with his sister, Guerline.
Atanas Kobryn, ’71 (CE), North Port, Fla., was elected chair of the North Port Citizens’ Tax Oversight Committee and reelected vice chair of the Community Health Center of North Port’s board of directors.

John Sarto, ’71 (TTT), Pawleys Island, S.C., has returned to Qualcomm Enterprise Services as senior vice president of business development.

Lawrence Scheg, ’72 (CE/English), Modesto, Calif., has been recognized by Cambridge Who’s Who for demonstrating dedication, leadership and excellence in higher education.

John S. Barsanti, ’73 (CBA/Accounting), Syracuse, N.Y., has been named chief operating officer for the Diocese of Syracuse.

Rev. Joseph Hubbert, C.M., ’73 (CA&S), Niagara University, N.Y., was selected to be grand marshal of the 2010 St. Patrick’s Day Parade in Niagara Falls by the Rev. James J. Browne Division of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Father Hubbert was honored for his many years of faithful service as chaplain to division members along with his efforts to promote Irish culture and traditions in the Niagara Falls area.

Charles Diamond, ’75 (CE/French), Waterlivel, N.Y., was appointed a member of the New York State Racing and Wagering Board by Gov. David A. Paterson and confirmed by the New York State Senate on Feb. 23. Prior to joining the board, he was an elected member of the Waterlivel City Council, serving since 1996. He retired from the U.S. House of Representatives in 2009 after serving 20 years as a district chief of staff for U.S. Rep. Michael R. McNulty.

Larry Hahn, ’75 (CBA/Marketing), Rochester, N.Y., has accepted the position of corporate account executive with Allens, Inc., the largest privately held vegetable company in the nation.

Jerome Banko, ’76 (CBA), Erie, Pa., recently retired after a 31-year career with the U.S. Postal Service.

Paul Smith, ’76 (CBA/Accounting), Chattanooga, Tenn., was elected by the Chattanooga Mortgage Bankers Association to serve as a board member and secretary.

Joseph J. Delello, ’78 (CA&S), Orange, Calif., was transferred to the U.S. headquarters of Mitsubishi Motors North America Inc. A 20-year employee of Mitsubishi, he is currently directing the operations of the new electric vehicle department.

Timothy McNamara, ’78 (CBA/Commerce), Lakeview, N.Y., has been appointed senior vice president of human resources for Upper Allegheny Health Systems. He will oversee the human resources functions of both Bradford Regional and Olean General Hospitals.

1980s Melody Dawn (Learned) Burow, ’80 (CN), Niagara Falls, N.Y., expanded ITSFromTheHeart.org to meet the needs of Spanish-speaking and reading veterans with a collection of cards for the injured in their dialect. She became aware of this need when she traveled to Puerto Rico in October 2009, where military bases participated in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.

Jane Dever-Barry, ’80 (CA&S/Social Work), Hanover, Mass., has joined TD Bank, America’s Most Convenient Bank, as the store manager, responsible for managing day-to-day operations.

Dianne Morrison-Beedy, ’80 (CN), Victor, N.Y., has accepted the position of dean of the College of Nursing at the University of South Florida Health.

James F. Notter, ’81 (CE), Broward County superintendent, received the Superintendent of the Year award from the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations for his exemplary leadership.

David Crooks, ’82 (TTT), Dedham, Mass., serves as vice president of cruise product and industry relations for World Travel Holdings, a multibrand travel distributor.

Brian J. Reddington, ’82 (CBA/Business Administration), Washington, D.C., has joined PBS as senior vice president of development.

Thomas Sica, ’85 (CA&S), Laconia, N.H., was hired as assistant principal at Concord High School, Concord, N.H.

1990s Kim McKeown, ’90 (CBA), Bolton, Mass., has accepted a position as pharmacy IT business analyst at UMass Memorial Medical Center in Worcester, Mass.

Michael S. Harrington, ’91 (CA&S/Political Science), Glenmore, Pa., was awarded the distinguished “Leaders in Law” ranking in the 2010 Chambers USA Guide.

John B. Hofmeister, ’92 (CA&S), Evans, Ga., was promoted to the position of blind rehabilitation outpatient specialist at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System serving blind and visually impaired veterans and injured soldiers in northwest and southwest Pennsylvania.

Ellen (Gould) Rychlik, ’96 (CN), Lake View, N.Y., will be honored as Registered Nurse of the Year by the New York State Health Facilities Association during its convention in June. She is currently the director of nursing at Elderwood Health Care at Lakewood, in Hamburg, N.Y.

60 Seconds With:
Jay Ganz, ’05, MBA’07

Hometown: Buffalo, N.Y.

Degrees: B.S. in marketing, MBA

Current job: Hewlett Packard sales rep at Ingram Micro

My best memories at Niagara are: all the events, activities, and functions that forged a lifetime of friendships.

My favorite hangout was: 909 (a club on Third Street in Niagara Falls).

The most important life lesson I learned at NU was: don’t second-guess yourself; you will be pleased with the result.

I am inspired by: common decency and entrepreneurial spirits.

My favorite part of my job is: building new relationships.

When I’m not working you’ll find me: on the rugby pitch or traveling.

I still want to learn how to: speak fluent Russian and German.

Five random facts about me:
1. I played rugby at Niagara and currently play for the Lockport Men’s Rugby Club.
2. I have traveled to 13 different countries, including England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Italy, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands.
3. I enjoy 12-14th century European history.
5. I am working toward attending the 2011 Rugby World Cup in New Zealand.

We’d like to get to know you better! In each issue of the Eagle, we’ll spend a minute (or so) with an alum from a random area of the country and ask a few questions to find out more about him or her. Will you be next?

Jane Dever-Barry, ’80

Afghanistan and Iraq wars.

Larry Hahn, ’75

Dianne Morrison-Beedy, ’80

Charles Diamond, ’75

Larry Hahn, ’75

John S. Barsanti, ’73

Rev. Joseph Hubbert, C.M., ’73

Rev. Joseph Hubbert, C.M., ’73

Larry Hahn, ’75

Jerome Banko, ’76

Paul Smith, ’76

Paul Smith, ’76

Michael S. Harrington, ’91

Michael S. Harrington, ’91

Ellen (Gould) Rychlik, ’96

Ellen (Gould) Rychlik, ’96
Our Apologies

Pam (Swanson) Spremulli, ’93, lives in Chagrin Falls, Ohio. Her hometown was mistakenly listed as Chagrin Falls, Ontario, in the February/March issue of the Eagle. We regret the error.

John A. Faso, ’97 (CBA/Management), Grand Island, N.Y., was appointed executive director of the Niagara County SPCA.

Kazuya Noda, ’97 (ITHRA/Hotel & Restaurant Management), Irvine, Calif., has accepted the position of accounting manager, CPA, with Mitsubishi Power Systems in Newport Beach, Calif.

2000s Kyle Andrews, ’02 (CA&S), Wilson, N.Y., was appointed Niagara County treasurer by Gov. David A. Paterson. In addition to his service in Niagara County, he is also in private legal practice, specializing in public finance, real estate transactions and estate planning.

Desirae Zontek, ’04 (CH/Hotel Planning), Strykersville, N.Y., was named general manager for Homewood Suites Buffalo-Airport by Buffalo Lodging Associates.

Steven P. Szymanski, ’05 (CA&S/Political Science), Columbus, Ga., recently moved to the JAG Trial Counsel Office to work as a prosecutor.

Daniel J. Aliieri, ’06 (CA&S/Biology), North Tonawanda, N.Y., has joined the Buffalo, N.Y., office of Harter Secrest & Emery LLP as an associate attorney in the firm’s trial practice area.

Suzanne (Marr) Hill, ’06 (CE/Social Studies), Niagara Falls, N.Y., has been named staff accountant by Chiampou, Travis, Besaw & Kershner, an Amherst accounting firm.

Military News

Lt. Col. Dawn (Metro) Flynn, ’89 (CN), Farmington, Utah, is currently stationed at Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City as the assistant chief nurse with the 328th Combat Support Hospital.

Lt. Col. Michael Rutkowski, ’93 (CBA/Management), Alexandria, Va., was promoted to lieutenant colonel in March. He currently works in the national capital region for the assistant secretary of the Army and was deployed in April to Iraq with the 1st Infantry Division.

Marriages


Lindsay Kriger, ’08, Yorkton, Saskatchewan, to Michael Johnson, ’09, Yorkton, Aug. 29, 2009.

Births/Adoptions

To Mr. and Mrs. Mark Flynn, ’86 (Dawn Metro, ’89), Farmington, Utah, a daughter, Abbey Catherine, April 2, 2010.

To Mr. and Mrs. David Zook, ’91 (Stacey Raymond, ’90), Grapevine, Texas, a son, Cayden Paul, Dec. 29, 2009.

To Mr. and Mrs. William Culkin, ’91, Westfield, N.J., a son, Braeden William, Dec. 23, 2009.

To Mr. and Mrs. Michael Scerra (Lisa Marie D’Andreamatteo, ’92), Hamburg, N.Y., a son, Michael Anthony, Feb. 20, 2010.


To Mr. and Mrs. William Crago (Victoria Ann Roty, ’93), North Tonawanda, N.Y., twin sons, Mason William and Chase Edward, July 19, 2009.

To Elizabeth Heavey, ’95, Rochester, N.Y., the adoption of a son, Nathaniel Isaiah, on March 17, 2010.

To Mr. and Mrs. Alan Myszka (Jaime Laughlin, ’99), Canandaigua, N.Y., a son, Trent Alexander, Dec. 31, 2009.

To Mr. and Mrs. Peter Ricketts, ’00 (Lauren Huk, ’00), Brampton, Ontario, a daughter, Leah Joan, March 3, 2010.

To Mr. and Mrs. James Sullivan (Kathleen Sweeney, ’00), Melrose, Mass., a son, Brady Patrick, Feb. 17, 2010.

To Mr. and Mrs. Charles Taylor (Shannon Woodruff, ’02), Dover, N.H., a son, Lucas Robert, Jan. 26, 2010.
“Greatest High School Teacher” Title Bestowed Upon NU Grad

It’s a simple fact of life: people change jobs and careers for a wide variety of reasons. For Tim Rudan, M.S.Ed.’01, that reason is something we’ll label “banking industry burnout.”

“I averaged 75- to 80-hour work weeks and found myself in three cities every week,” Rudan said. “I should receive royalties from the producers of ‘In the Air.’ I liked my job for the better part of my career, but life changes and, due to corporate reorganization, I found myself in a place and job I didn’t care for anymore. It was lacking something.”

As a result, he left a successful decade-long career behind to chase something more fulfilling — a career in education.

Rudan enrolled in Niagara’s master’s degree program in education and shortly after graduating, the Toronto, Ontario, resident was hired by the Toronto District School Board. He worked at York Mills Collegiate for a semester before joining the faculty at Weston Collegiate, where he continues to teach Canadian and international law and a bit of French.

While Rudan may have found something lacking in the banking industry, he has certainly made an impact as an educator. In fact, on March 30, he was honored by the Humber College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning as “Greatest High School Teacher.” He was nominated for the award by Kassandra Maharaj, his former student.

“Humbly, I do my job because I love my job,” Rudan said when asked about winning the impressive award. “I chose to work with inner-city youth and feel I learn along with them every day. That is the challenge to live up to. I will also miss the staff and students next year since I have been seconded to York University’s Faculty of Education. The three-year placement will commence September 2010. I am very excited to be working with teacher candidates.”

At NU, Rudan said he learned a great deal that he can still share with his students today. “I am a strong advocate for NU,” he said. “My experiences with faculty such as Dr. Vermette, Dr. Foote and Dr. Sheeran helped me model the best practices and approaches to people and challenge them to learn.”

— Joe Kirchmyer

Dorothy Behringer, former dean of the College of Nursing, Saratoga Springs, N.Y., April 6, 2010.

Taking Flight

Be on the lookout as the alumni relations department launches the new design of the Eagle’s Nest this summer! Check us out at www.niagaraalumni.com to stay up-to-date with events, news, job postings and more!
Welcome Class of 2010!

Congrats to the Class of 2010 on your commencement and welcome to the alumni community! The Eagle’s Nest keeps you connected with alumni events, news, job postings, and more! To log into the Eagle’s Nest for the first time:

1) Go to the Eagle’s Nest at www.niagaraalumni.com.
2) On the top left of the screen, click on “First Time Login.”
3) Enter your ID number (found above your name on the address label of this magazine).
4) Enter your last name and click “Find.”
5) Select your name and click “Next” at the bottom of the screen.
6) Complete the “My Information” pages.

Questions? Contact us at alumni@niagara.edu or by phone at 716-286-8787. See you on the Nest soon!

with sympathy

To Roxanne (Burke) Smith, ’75, Lockport, N.Y., on the death of her father, John E. Burke, Jan. 5, 2010.
To Ann (Modney) Uldrich, ’77, Kenmore, N.Y., on the death of her father, William Modney, March 26, 2010; and on the death of her mother, Ann Modney, March 30, 2010.
To Robert Swanson, ’81, and Mary (Modney) Swanson, ’82, Youngstown, N.Y., on the death of his father-in-law and her father, William Modney, March 26, 2010; and on the death of his mother-in-law and her mother, Ann Modney, March 30, 2010.
To Debra (LaMendola) Amedio, ’91, Chaska, Minn., on the death of her father, Richard LaMendola, Jan. 8, 2010.
To Lona (Geiser) Lachiusa, ’93, Amherst, N.Y., on the death of her mother, Martha Geiser, Jan. 14, 2010.
To David Geiser, ’00, Buffalo, N.Y., on the death of his mother, Martha Geiser, Jan. 14, 2010.
To Eric Swanson, ’02, Fayetteville, N.C., on the death of his grandfather, William Modney, March 26, 2010; and on the death of his grandmother, Ann Modney, March 30, 2010.
To Annie Ventresca, ’03, Welland, Ontario, on the death of her father, Domenico Ventresca, Jan. 10, 2010.
To Andrew Swanson, ’07, Tonawanda, N.Y., on the death of his grandfather, William Modney, March 26, 2010; and on the death of his grandmother, Ann Modney, March 30, 2010.
To Margaret Swanson, ’09, Batavia, N.Y., on the death of her grandfather, William Modney, March 26, 2010; and on the death of her grandmother, Ann Modney, March 30, 2010.

Renee Coates-Smith, ’91, Publishes First Book

Renee Coates-Smith, ’91, is a busy woman — educator, lecturer, consultant, and television producer. With the publication of “Bobby’s Secret is Out,” the first in the Bobby Jones Children’s Series, she adds author to that list.

“Bobby’s Secret is Out,” a book designed for fourth through eighth graders, encourages youth to identify and use their hidden gifts and talents to benefit their communities. It is inspired by the life of Dr. Bobby Jones, host and executive producer of “Bobby Jones Gospel,” one of Black Entertainment Television’s longest running and most popular shows.

“I want youth to not suppress their great qualities because all gifts and talents are needed worldwide,” Coates-Smith says. “I have met youth who were afraid to expose their great abilities and that really bothered me.”

Coates-Smith also serves as president of Imani Productions, LLC, a company that provides educational services in reading education through conferences, workshops, and consultation. She says she has a passion for children’s literature and helping teachers to really know and understand their “calling” in the classroom. Many of her workshops address literature and the African American student.

Dedicated to promoting diversity, Coates-Smith produces “The Renee Show” on Community Access Television Channel 2 in Erie, Pa., a program that focuses on global education and culture. She also serves on the board of the National Association of African American Studies and Affiliates, a national scholarly organization that advances diversity through research projects, scholarly papers, artistic offerings, and conferences that provide African American, Hispanic and Latino, Native American, and Asian perspectives.

As a board member, Coates-Smith was provided the opportunity to visit China. She lectured in Beijing for two weeks each in 2004 and 2005 before deciding to live in that country to experience its culture firsthand. In 2006, she moved to Zibo for three months, where she taught contemporary college English at Shandong University of Technology. “The highlight of my educational experience was stepping into the first classroom where Confucius taught his first students,” she says. “Also, I traveled to Shanghai, Jinan, Quindao, and other places, and got a chance to see the Great Wall, Summer Palace, Forbidden City, Buddhist temples, Yellow River (where Confucius is buried), and many, many other great sites. I am very grateful for the fruitful friendships that I have established there.”


Eric Swanson, ’07, on the death of his grandfather, William Modney.
To Margaret Swanson, ’09, on the death of her grandfather, William Modney.
To Andrew Swanson, ’07, on the death of his grandfather, William Modney.
To Annie Ventresca, ’03, on the death of her father.
To Robert Swanson, ’81, and Mary (Modney) Swanson, ’82, on the death of their mother.
To Edmund Okoniewski, ’51, on the death of his wife.
To Ann (Modney) Uldrich, ’77, on the death of her mother.
To Roxanne (Burke) Smith, ’75, on the death of her father.
To Lona (Geiser) Lachiusa, ’93, on the death of her mother.
To Raymond Geiser, ’94, on the death of his mother.
To David Geiser, ’00, on the death of his mother.
To Eric Swanson, ’02, on the death of his grandfather.
To Annie Ventresca, ’03, on the death of her father.
To Andrew Swanson, ’07, on the death of his grandfather.
To Margaret Swanson, ’09, on the death of her grandfather.
To Edmund Okoniewski, ’51, on the death of his wife.
To Roxanne (Burke) Smith, ’75, on the death of her father.
To Ann (Modney) Uldrich, ’77, on the death of her mother.
To Robert Swanson, ’81, and Mary (Modney) Swanson, ’82, on the death of their mother.
Have you heard of a book entitled “Catch 22” by Joseph Heller? It tells the story of John Yossarian, an Air Force bombardier in World War II caught in a “no-win situation.” To avoid dangerous bombing missions and save his life, he had to request an insanity hearing. Yet, the ability to make such a request was viewed as confirmation of his sanity. Thus, he would be sent on missions. The title, “Catch 22,” became a cultural catchword for one caught in a no-win situation.

Life is full of many seemingly no-win situations. I experienced this last summer when my oncologist told me that my colon cancer had spread to my liver. Advised by my oncologist to have a liver resection (a surgical removal of a section of the liver), he advised me that the liver would regenerate itself. After surgery came six months of chemotherapy.

“Catch 22” became real to me when the oncologist explained the odds: a 70 percent chance of cancer returning if I elected not to do chemotherapy, and a 50 percent chance of cancer returning or spreading even if I did go through with chemo. By my own estimation these did not seem very good odds. I am not a gambler, and I usually only bet on a sure thing. But this was definitely not a sure thing. In this “Catch 22,” I had no choice but to play the game. My life depended upon it!

On my better days, I envisioned Pac Man or some other electronic game figure devouring the cancerous cells in my body. However, I realize the meds coursing through my veins are eating both good and bad white blood cells. Their effects have been tough and included chronic fatigue, nausea, dizziness, blurred vision, shortness of breath, vomiting, dry skin, and pain in my fingers and toes. There were many times I wished I could have high-level negotiations with God as to how I might more easily extend my life. Yet, my own calculating comes up way short!

Someone who has kindled a renewed faith for me in this experience is John Carmody, a theologian and fellow cancer sufferer. In his book, “Cancer and Faith: Reflections on Living with a Terminal Illness,” he tells it like it is, without syrupy sayings from someone not in the trenches of illness. Carmody's meditations are compelling and evoke within me a call to a deeper faith. He reflected on just how short his own life was and calculated his future. Yet he quickly realized his efforts were futile. How can one finite negotiate with an infinite God about one's future?

A couple of years ago, I visited the Hayden Planetarium in New York City. Against the backdrop of amazing galaxies and unfathomable distances between them, I felt incredibly small. Yet, when I view my life within God’s infinite design, I gain a very different sense of my future. It gives me a profound reason to have hope. It is for this reason that John Carmody’s insight really hit home. John writes:

“The Word of God is unlimited. It exists at another level, from which we enter when we try to imagine the reaches of the galaxies, the time or extent of the Big Bang. We measure some of these natural things, using reason to make sense of infinity, but we ourselves are not the measure. All our final measuring is negative. The best we can do with ultimacy is to imagine no bounds, no hindrances, no death. If we are the measure, the world is mortal and joy does not reign. We die and there is no hope for happiness. But if Jesus, one of us without limit, can be our measure, then humanity can be the primal sacrament of God.”

It is easy to feel like a small fish in a vast ocean when pondering God. Being ill and quite uncertain about my future, as I am, makes the comparison even more difficult. Yet, the Scriptures speak of the beginning of wisdom coming with a profound sense of awe before the Lord. There is amazement before God who has fashioned the heavens, the moon, the stars, and even each of us! These mighty works defy our human imagination and intellect.

But God is truly mindful of you and me! I have seen this in the numerous expressions of concern, prayers and well wishes I have received here at NU and beyond. It is a source of great consolation, and I thank you from the depths of my heart. My belief is that your lives and mine are in the hands of One all powerful and all loving. Through his son, Jesus, God has gone through the trenches of life in the unspoken suffering of the cross for us.

My faith gives me a different calculus on life. I need not conclude that I am in a “Catch 22” situation. I can live my life, and I hope and pray that you and those you know who suffer from cancer and other illnesses can do the same.
We are looking to conserve resources — both natural and financial — and as a result will be sending ALL alumni event invitations through e-mail only (with the exception of Alumni Weekend). So we’d really like to get your e-mail address to ensure that you don’t miss out on hearing about anything happening in your area or on campus.

Here are three easy ways you can give your e-mail to us:
1. Send it to alumni@niagara.edu (include your name and class year)
2. Call 716-286-8787
3. Go to www.niagaraalumni.com and submit it online

Thanks for helping the Purple and White go green!