

FALL / WINTER 2009

# FOCUS

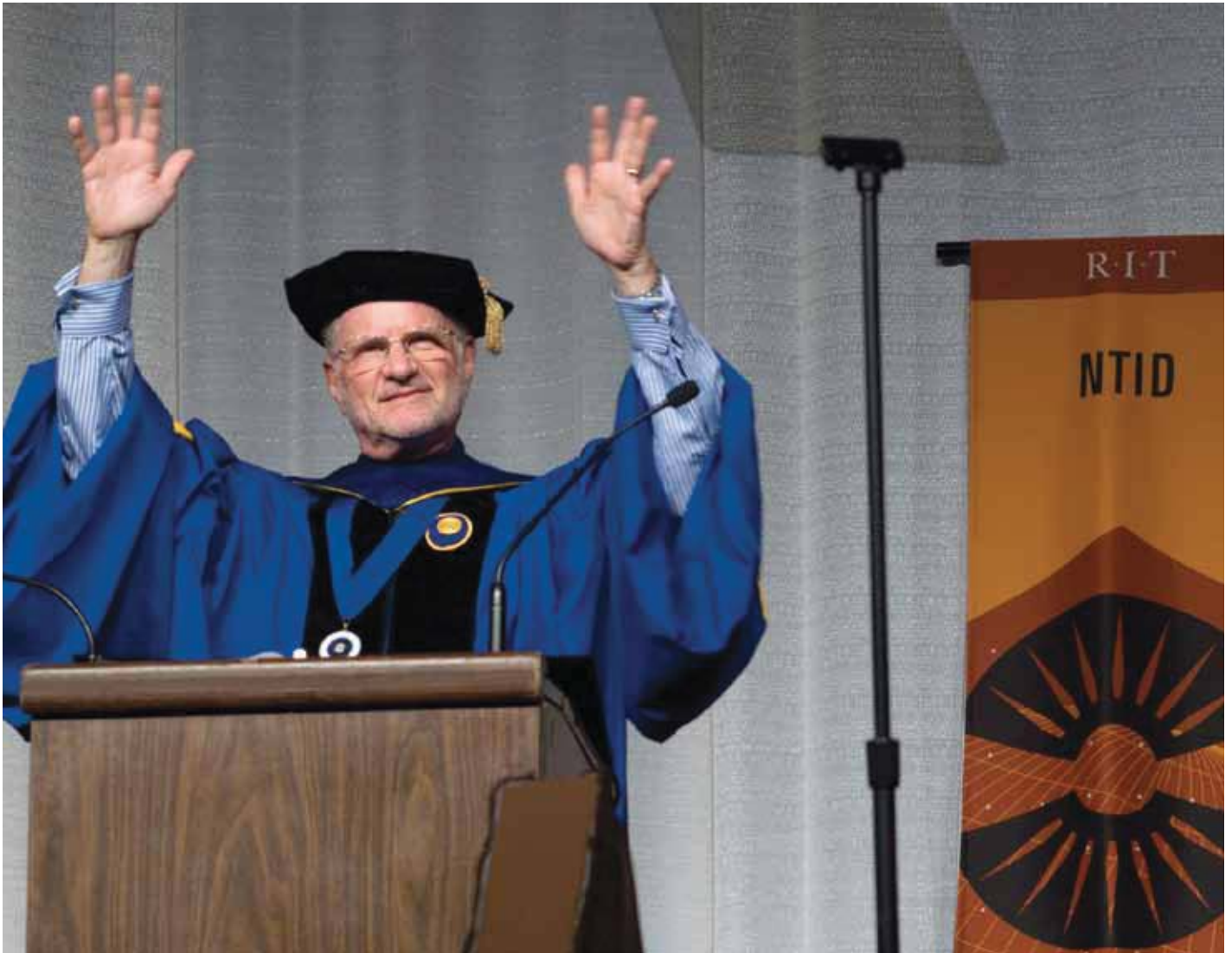
NTID

National Technical Institute for the Deaf • Rochester Institute of Technology



NTID Job Fair

# Fond Farewell



MARK BENJAMIN

**D**r. T. Alan Hurwitz, NTID president and RIT vice president and dean for NTID, is leaving RIT/NTID to become president of Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C.

Hurwitz came to RIT/NTID in 1970 after working as an engineer and computer programmer for McDonnell-Douglas. He taught and served in various administrative positions and has headed NTID since 2003.

“Dr. Hurwitz has been an outstanding faculty member, educational administrator and leader at our university,” says RIT President Bill Destler. “He is highly respected by the students, faculty and administration of NTID and the greater university. It has been my distinct pleasure to work with Alan since assuming the presidency of RIT, and I have nothing but the highest respect for him as a colleague and

friend. I wish him the very best and know that he will be as productive, creative and innovative in his new post as he has been during his tenure at RIT.”

Dr. James J. DeCaro, who served as dean of NTID for 14 years, including two years as interim director and CEO, has been selected to serve as interim president of NTID and interim RIT vice president and dean for NTID, effective Dec. 1.

“I leave NTID in good hands,” says Hurwitz. “We’ve never been in better shape. Our applications continue to be strong. Enrollment is the highest it’s ever been in our 42-year history. Our students are still finding good jobs upon graduation, despite tough economic times. Our reputation is well regarded throughout the nation. And our faculty and staff are dedicated, hard-working men and women who have a passion for their mission here.”

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COVER PHOTOS BY JASON WITTIG AND AUSTIN WHITNEY

### ABOUT THE COVER

More than 85 representatives from 33 companies from all over the country talked with, and gathered resumes from, hundreds of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, alumni and community members who participated in the ninth annual NTID Job Fair on October 14. BNY Mellon, IBM, Microsoft, Raytheon Company, the U.S. Department of Defense, and Naval Air Systems Command were just some of the employers who shared information about their organizations and reviewed resumes of potential future employees.

RIT/NTID 2009 *FOCUS* magazines are printed on a paper that has 10-percent postconsumer recycled fiber, which results in a total environmental savings of 10.02 trees; 28.96 pounds waterborne waste; 4,260 gallons wastewater flow; 472 pounds solid waste; 928 pounds net greenhouse gases and 7,103,110 BTUs.



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# FOCUS

NTID

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*RIT will admit and hire men and women; veterans; persons with disabilities; and individuals of any race, creed, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, age or marital status, in compliance with all appropriate legislation.*

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MARK BENJAMIN

## Making the Investment

**W**e all know that the next several years may hold great uncertainty in terms of the economy. And as a result, some students and their families may be thinking, Can I afford college? Will I get a job when I graduate? Is all this time, money and energy worth it?

Unequivocally, yes.

For the past five years, the employment rate for our graduates has been an impressive 94 percent. Few colleges can boast that kind of success for their deaf and hard-of-hearing graduates.

How do we do it?

First, our academic programs have never been stronger or more diverse. We forecast job trends, adjust curricula accordingly and help students find great job opportunities. And the NTID

Center on Employment offers a comprehensive array of services that help students put their best foot forward in the marketplace.

Secondly, our co-op program continues to be outstanding. All RIT/NTID programs include mandatory or optional cooperative work experiences or some other form of experiential education, such as field placements or internships. Such opportunities help meet employers' desire to hire workers who can adapt quickly to evolving technologies and who are ready to meet the needs of a global workplace.

Finally, the fact that we are part of RIT, one of the country's fastest growing private universities, means that employers around the country and around the world recognize the quality of our students and graduates. As we look to the future, RIT/NTID will continue to provide outstanding career education that prepares students to find rewarding jobs after they graduate.

College historically has been an investment for the future. It still is. And RIT/NTID offers students a terrific return.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of the students, alumni, faculty, staff and friends of RIT/NTID for all of the wonderful opportunities, experiences and memories over the past 40 years. As you may know, I will be leaving RIT/NTID to become president of Gallaudet University in January. The RIT/NTID community will always hold a special place in my heart. I wish you all the best.

*Alan*

Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz  
NTID President  
RIT Vice President and Dean for NTID

# The Power of Positive Mentoring

by Ilene J. Avallone

**F**reshman year of college is an exhilarating and sometimes challenging time. New friends, new freedoms and new responsibilities can create both excitement and apprehension. Learning to navigate a campus, deciding on a major or joining a club or sports team can sometimes seem overwhelming. It's this strange mix of feelings that can make the first year of college unsettling for some new students.

Zohaib Qureshi, however, says his transition from high school in Milton, Ontario, Canada, to RIT/NTID was not as intimidating as he thought it would be, in part, because of his involvement with NTID's Big Brother/Big Sister Program, a Business Studies Department mentoring program that groups first-year students with second- and third-year students to provide support, encourage student involvement and promote success by fostering a sense of community among students, faculty and staff.

"National research shows that if we can increase peer interaction among first-year students, and help them navigate through their first year of college, we'll increase the retention rate for those students," says NTID Counselor and Academic Advisor Bill Moore, whose idea it was to implement the Big Brother/Big Sister Program within the NTID Business Studies Department.

"Students who don't access available support systems are more likely to transfer or drop out," he explains. "Students who are connected to RIT/NTID and feel comfortable here are more likely to graduate from this institution."

Since its inception in 2007, the Big Brother/Big Sister Program continues to grow in popularity. It's open to all new RIT/NTID first-year Business Studies students, who are grouped with experienced Business Studies student mentors. Approximately 40 first-year students participate in the program every year, and meet in groups of four with one student mentor per group.



**Making Connections** Peer mentor Nathaly Mendez, an Accounting major in RIT's College of Business, introduces herself to a first-year student at the NTID Business Studies Department's first Big Brother/Big Sister event of the academic year.

"Instead of pairing students one to one, we assemble them in small groups to encourage peer interaction and relationship development," says Moore.

Being a big brother or big sister is an opportunity for NTID student mentors to be leaders and role models for students new to the RIT/NTID community, and to provide support and resources that enhance the transition to college for new students.

"Our big brothers and big sisters are knowledgeable about academic issues, college life and campus resources," says Mary Lou Basile, the program's advisor and chairperson of the Business Studies Department. "Their goal is to make life easier for first-year students, and they gladly meet with those students to talk about their concerns, answer their questions or just chat with them."

"First-year students really need someone to look up to and confide in," says big sister Maneesha McIlwain, an Accounting Technology major. "And many times they prefer to talk to a peer instead of a teacher because they

feel more comfortable talking to someone closer in age. I'm both a friend and a resource."

During the academic year, first-year students informally meet with their peer mentors and let them know what help they need. It might be finding their way around campus, getting information about an organization or learning about campus social life.

All participants also get together as one large group for structured activities several times per quarter.

"At these events, we hold team-building activities for the students, and bring in professional speakers to discuss business topics of interest," says Basile.

At a recent gathering, teams competed against each other to see who could build the tallest free-standing structure. With paper, cardboard and tape in hand, students learned the importance of sharing ideas, communicating and working together.

"It was my favorite event because we inspired each other in creative

ways that made the activity fun and interactive,” says Robin Ching, a second-year student in the 2+2 (associate + bachelor’s degree) Business program.

Peer mentors are enthusiastic about sharing their experiences with new students and helping them adjust to college life. Many were themselves former little brothers and sisters.

“I decided to be a big brother, so I could pass down everything I learned from my big brother,” says Harry Chang, a graduate from NTID’s 2+2 program in Hospitality and Service Management, and now a student in RIT’s College of Applied Science and Technology.

“I wanted to make a difference in another student’s life just as my big sister did for me,” adds McIlwain.

The opportunity to be a role model is extremely valuable, according to big sister Nathaly Mendez, a 2+2 Business Studies graduate and an Accounting major in RIT’s College of Business.

“My experience was rewarding,” she says. “It gave me the opportunity to meet many new students and enhance my leadership skills, and influenced me to start the NTID Business Club to give business students even more opportunities for personal and professional support and development.”



**Guiding the Way** Sally Skyer, NTID counseling and academic advisor, works with business students as they participate in a relationship building activity.

Other staff and faculty involved with the program, including Sally Skyer, counseling and academic advisor; Denise Kavin, associate director, PEPNet-Northeast; and Michael Kane, Business Studies faculty member, value the unique relationships the program has enabled them to have with their students.

“It’s wonderful to see students progress and grow throughout the

academic year, especially the first-year students,” says Kavin.

“Seeing the impact older students have on younger students, and the enthusiasm shared by all, is what I enjoy the most about participating in the program,” adds Skyer.

Initial results from the NTID Retention Committee show that the Big Brother/Big Sister Program has had a positive effect on students achieving their educational goals. First-year business students who participate in the program have high grade point averages and feel supported within their department.

“While NTID presently enjoys one of the highest graduation rates in the world among programs serving deaf and hard-of-hearing students, we are committed to continuous improvement by implementing effective retention strategies like this program,” says Basile.

The Big Brother/Big Sister Program has been adopted by other NTID academic departments, including Information and Computing Studies, and most recently, Arts & Imaging Studies. The next step will be for the NTID Retention Committee to analyze what impact the student mentoring program has had on students within those departments as well.



**Sharing Experiences** At the Big Brother/Big Sister kick-off meeting this fall, first-year business students were grouped with their peer mentor. Seated left to right are peer mentor Nathan Reichert and first-year students Kristen Hanes, Umar Zubair and Ashleen Evans.

# RIT/NTID Welcomes Veterans with Hearing Loss

by Susan L. Murad

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that more than 78,000 veterans will return from Iraq and Afghanistan with some form of hearing loss.

In response, RIT/NTID has launched the Veterans with Hearing Loss Project. Veterans can earn bachelor's or graduate-level degrees at RIT and receive access services, including real-time captioning and notetaking services, and benefit from NTID's fully staffed audiological services department.

"When we learned of the number of military personnel who will be transitioning to civilian life with adult-onset hearing loss, we felt it was our duty to develop a program to help," says Dr. Gerard Buckley, NTID assistant vice president for college advancement. "We put together a core team of professionals on campus and appropriate personnel from veteran service organizations, and others, to ensure we developed a program that would meet the needs of these veterans."

Buckley then tapped Allen Ford, assistant professor in NTID's Business Studies Department, as the project coordinator. A former second lieutenant in the U.S. Army, Ford retired from military service after experiencing hearing loss.

"Allen is uniquely qualified to serve as the coordinator of this project, since he has a firsthand understanding of the needs of military personnel with hearing loss who are adjusting to life outside of the military," says Buckley.

Ford has been meeting with military and veteran service organizations across the country, and has presented at national conferences to spread the word about the project.

"We want vets to know that we're here, that we understand their needs, and that we can help," says Ford. "RIT/NTID has more to offer these



veterans than any other college in the country."

RIT/NTID also has partnered with the Hearing Loss Association of America to provide additional services to veterans. The college plans to partner with still more national organizations to broaden the types of opportunities available to veterans.

U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan and Iraq have been in combat longer than troops who have served in any other U.S. military conflict. The Department of Veterans Affairs notes that hearing damage is the most common disability for veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Along with traumatic brain injury, it is considered one of the top two "signature" injuries of these conflicts.

RIT recently announced it has been designated as a "Yellow Ribbon" university by the Department of Veterans Affairs, which will allow RIT to work with the VA to cover any difference

between GI Bill benefits and the cost of tuition. As many as 10 veterans could be admitted to the Veterans with Hearing Loss program each year, growing to up to 50 veterans over time. The same standard academic requirements for admission to RIT/NTID will be applied to veterans.

"It makes sense for RIT/NTID to welcome the men and women serving our country who will benefit from the education and access services we offer," says Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz, NTID president and RIT vice president and dean for NTID. "Our faculty and staff have experience working with those who have experienced a sudden hearing loss. RIT/NTID is a perfect option for veterans seeking to continue their education. We are proud to serve the men and women who have sacrificed so much for our country."

For information about the Veterans with Hearing Loss Project, visit [www.rit.edu/ntid/veterans](http://www.rit.edu/ntid/veterans).

# Dual-credit Program Makes the Grade

by Ilene J. Avallone



MARK BENJAMIN

**Hands-on Preparation** RIT/NTID faculty member Karen Beiter (standing) works with high school teachers who teach dual-credit information technology courses at their schools.

Deaf and hard-of-hearing students interested in information technology can take advantage of Project Fast Forward, a program funded by a National Science Foundation grant to jump start students' transition from high school to college.

Project Fast Forward makes it possible for qualified deaf and hard-of-hearing students to simultaneously earn high school and college credit for information technology courses they take at their high school. Through Project Fast Forward, deaf and hard-of-hearing students can use the credit they earn toward a degree at RIT/NTID, or at other colleges across the country that will accept it.

"Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals historically have been underrepresented in the information technology field," says Myra Pelz, principal investigator on Project Fast Forward and associate professor in RIT/NTID's Information and Computing Studies Department.

Pelz and Donna Lange, co-principal investigator and RIT/NTID associate

professor, applied for the National Science Foundation grant in 2006, specifically to increase the number of deaf and hard-of-hearing students who choose computer-related fields in college.

Now, three years later, Project Fast Forward has grown steadily, both in student enrollment and geographic reach. Starting with six high schools in 2006, more partnerships have been added with schools across the country, schools for the deaf as well as public high schools with large mainstream programs. At present, RIT/NTID is working with 14 high schools in New York, Texas, Florida, Virginia, California, Massachusetts and Maryland, and nearly 140 deaf and hard-of-hearing students have completed dual-credit courses in three areas: Microsoft® Office applications, Web development and desktop publishing.

"We are particularly proud of this accomplishment, since we originally proposed that only 65-85 students would be able to receive dual-credit over the course of the grant," says Pelz.

Research shows that students who complete dual-credit courses benefit in several ways: they not only receive college credit, but their academic transition from high school to college is smoother. The transition is easier because students who complete dual-credit courses demonstrate their ability to do college-level work, and as a result, gain the confidence and skills they need to succeed in college. Some of these useful skills are organizing and managing their time effectively, using self-discipline, following a syllabus and improving and applying high-level thinking skills.

"When I was a senior at Rochester School for the Deaf, I took dual-credit courses in Office applications and Web development because I thought it was a great opportunity for me to earn college credit and learn about computer-related careers," says Monica Wilmot, now a second-year student in RIT/NTID's Administrative Support Technology program. "The classes were challenging, and I struggled at times,



but I learned so much, and I'm glad I took them."

Second-year Psychology major Lisa Meyer says that the chance to fulfill her high school requirements at Lexington School for the Deaf while earning college credit was what motivated her to take a dual-credit course in Office applications.

"I knew this computer-related class would challenge me and help me prepare for college," she says.

Deaf and hard-of-hearing students who take dual-credit courses are not the only ones who benefit from Project Fast Forward—their teachers and guidance counselors do, too.

During the summer, high school teachers participate in a week-long professional development training program at RIT/NTID to learn about the course content and new methods of classroom instruction. They also receive training on careers in information technology, and learn about the opportunities available for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in computer-related fields. Faculty who teach in mainstream classrooms receive additional training to help them improve their teaching practices, so that deaf and hard-of-hearing students have better access to learning.

Guidance counselors also participate in training workshops. They meet with RIT/NTID career counselors to discuss student issues, and with admissions representatives to get answers to questions regarding admission requirements and procedures for first-year students.

To date, 26 teachers and 14 guidance counselors have completed the professional development training program at RIT/NTID.

Says one participant, "Project Fast Forward made it possible for me to provide deaf and hard-of-hearing students access to technology courses previously not offered at my high school. And through my training, I learned new teaching styles to keep these students motivated and engaged."

High school teachers also felt that students taking classes through the Project Fast Forward program gained a realistic expectation of college work,

were better able to manage their time, and were more adept at learning independently.

"The program helps students to start thinking about their future, and allows them the ability to see how things they are doing now really do relate to their future," says a faculty participant.

Karen Beiter and Deborah Poe, faculty members in the RIT/NTID Information and Computing Studies Department, work as "consultant teachers" for the project. They visit partner schools during the academic year and meet with teachers, administrators and students to assess student progress in the dual-credit courses. They also consult with

teachers, administrators and students to assess student progress in the courses, and to gauge student and high school satisfaction with the project. His findings are reported yearly to the National Science Foundation.

"What I enjoy most is witnessing, through my school visits and the subsequent interviews, the combined effect that all the project components have on students successfully gaining college credit," says Walter. "Perhaps most notable to me is the effect the summer training has had on improving teachers' and counselors' ability to use the dual-credit option to stretch the expectations of their students to attend college."



**Facilitating Instruction** Karen Beiter (left) and Deborah Poe, both RIT/NTID consultant teachers on Project Fast Forward, work with Mark Sperr, a senior at Rochester School for the Deaf, in a dual-credit Web development course.

teachers on curriculum and teaching issues throughout the school year.

"I've been very pleased with the results of this program," says Beiter. "The students have proven that they can do college-level work."

Adds Poe, "What I enjoy most about traveling to schools is chatting with students and learning about their career interests, as well as reviewing their class work. I am so impressed with the quality of work these high school students produce."

Dr. Gerard (Jerry) Walter is the evaluator for Project Fast Forward. He also visits partner schools during the academic year, and meets with

Project Fast Forward will continue through the 2009-2010 academic year, with additional funding support from NTID.

"RIT/NTID has the experience and resources to provide high schools with course materials and career information to help move deaf and hard-of-hearing students from high school to college and on to professional careers in many different areas," says Lange. "We think Project Fast Forward can serve as a framework for an envisioned national dual-credit program, offering a range of college-credit courses within high schools that serve deaf and hard-of-hearing students across the country."

# Conniree Francis

by Susan L. Murad



A. SUE WESSLER

Much of Alaska's beauty comes from its solitude. But when you're the only hard-of-hearing student in your mainstream high school in Chugiak, Alaska, that solitude can motivate you to look for a place where you'll find others who have similar experiences. And like many students, Conniree Francis spent her last year of high school searching for a college with the right "fit" for her.

"I wasn't too certain that I would stay in Alaska to attend college," the 25-year-old explains. "Then my VR counselor, Andrew Jose, told me about RIT/NTID and his experience when he attended there. He said that the services for deaf and hard-of-hearing students were wonderful, and he showed me a video about the campus with information on majors, campus diversity, as well as the various services and activities that all students benefit from. After viewing the clip, my family and I decided that RIT/NTID would be the best place for me."

Francis, an RIT Business Management graduate, is a second-year student in the Master of Science program in Secondary Education of Students who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing. She decided to enter the MSSE program because it offers dual certification that will allow her to teach deaf and hard-of-hearing students as well as hearing students.

"I can work in either a residential school for the deaf or in mainstream public schools," she says.

Of her growth through the MSSE program, Francis says, "I had to keep in mind that there would be times when I'd be given constructive criticism. I use that feedback to enhance my teaching skills. It helps give me confidence for my time in the classroom."

For Conniree Francis, the solitude and beauty of Alaska have been replaced by the beauty of teaching other deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

# Jeret Hackbarth

by Kathy A. Johncox



A. SUE WESSLER

When his high school English teacher at the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind asked who would like to make a movie for a major class project, Jeret Hackbarth's hand shot up. During the project, his teacher recognized his acting, directing and editing abilities and encouraged him to attend RIT to study film and animation.

Hackbarth, 23, originally from Irvine, Calif., enrolled at RIT, but his interests have taken him in a different direction. He is pursuing a Web Production concentration in the Arts & Imaging Studies program because he feels the major offers him many opportunities.

"My program is so creative," he says. "I'm learning many new things about the potential of computers. I chose RIT because it has the technology that helps me specialize and offers deaf students the opportunity and support to take advanced courses in different technologies."

Hackbarth also is drawn to the performing arts, which have been an important part of his RIT experience.

"I started acting because I was a little bored, then I discovered I had a knack for it," he says. "I like being someone different. Being onstage in front of an audience allows me to be a storyteller."

Hackbarth has appeared in NTID performances of *Macbeth*, in which he held the title role; *The Crucible*; *The Elephant Man*; and *Noises Off!* He earned an NTID Performing Arts Scholarship for 2007-2008, and was awarded the Elizabeth Williams Scholarship in the Performing Arts the following year.

When he's not studying or rehearsing, Hackbarth enjoys socializing with friends, making videos, taking photos and being outdoors.

While he's not sure what the future will hold, Hackbarth is sure that his Web production skills will help him get a good job. For now, he sees RIT as a second home.

"I have lived both in the dorms and in an apartment and have made a lot of friends here who support me," he says. "RIT is a good place to live and experience life on my own."

# Janna Luksha

by Ilene J. Avallone

Janna Luksha, 20, from North Yarmouth, Maine, credits her father with helping her make the decision to attend college. “He told me earning a college degree was essential for having a successful future,” she says. “I chose RIT because it offered me what other colleges didn’t—the opportunity to get the best career preparation and to form friendships with other deaf students.

“RIT is a perfect match for me,” says Luksha. “I attended a mainstream high school, but I grew up in a deaf family, so I’m comfortable in both the hearing and deaf environments. I like that there is a large deaf community that I can communicate with here.”

Luksha is pursuing an associate degree in Computer Integrated Machining Technology. She likes working with numbers and her hands, and prefers not sitting at a desk all day.

“The CIMT program is the best program for me,” she says. “I really enjoy the hands-on work I get to do on state-of-the-art industrial machines.”

She admits that blueprint reading has been her biggest challenge within her major so far, but her professors are very approachable, and her classmates are helpful, too, when she needs clarification.

Luksha completed a cooperative work experience at Tobyhanna Army Depot in Pennsylvania, and learned a lot.

“I was amazed at how many different machines I was required to learn how to use during my co-op, and I know the experience I gained will help me when I look for employment after I graduate,” she says.

Luksha keeps busy outside of class—playing basketball, skiing and socializing with her friends. She enjoys her time here at RIT, and still is undecided about her immediate plans after she graduates.

“I may continue my education and pursue a bachelor’s degree instead of heading directly to work,” she says. “But in five years I see myself working at a job, earning good pay and having a great life.”



A. SUE WESSLER

# Azael Perry

by Susan L. Murad

Azael Perry believes in seeking new experiences. The only deaf member of his family, Perry was adopted from Honduras. The 20-year-old, third-year Psychology major attended Rio Mesa High School in California. When it was time for college, he chose RIT/NTID over colleges in his home state, because he wanted to broaden his horizons.

“I wanted to experience a whole different culture, environment and people,” he explains. “I also wanted to learn more about Deaf culture.”

When Perry first came to RIT, he majored in Applied Mathematics and planned to become a math teacher for deaf students.

“As a teacher, I wanted to make a difference in young deaf students’ lives and see them grow to become awesome people,” he says. “I switched to psychology because it offers me the opportunity to help individuals with their personal issues and mental health.”

Last summer, at a Honduran deaf Christian camp, he had a life-changing experience.

Perry’s goal shifted, and he decided to become a counselor in the United States as well as in Honduras, and he is considering continuing on to seminary school and earning a degree in religion.

“My goal has changed because I know that God is calling me to work in a Christian ministry for deaf people in Honduras,” he says.

He is an active member of Campus Crusade for Christ and was vice president of NTID’s Hispanic Deaf Club.

Perry advises others who are trying to search for the purpose in their lives or decide what to do with their future to look to their faith for inspiration.

“Ask yourself: is this something that motivates you to work harder? Is it something that you would be happy with at the end of the day? By turning to your faith for the answers, you will be able to discover your life’s purpose,” he says.



A. SUE WESSLER

# Making Connections with Social Media

by Susan L. Murad

The desire to communicate is as old as humanity itself. Each new generation develops innovative ways to communicate to meet this basic human need. Here at RIT/NTID some of the newest communication developments—incorporating social media applications such as Facebook® and sending news and information via YouTube® and Twitter™—are providing enhanced communication opportunities and increased interaction between RIT/NTID and prospective and current students, parents, alumni, employers and the world.

“Every potential audience for RIT/NTID benefits from increased use of social networking and Web 2.0 innovations,” says Matt Dana, NTID’s marketing communications web manager. “We know that these applications bring RIT/NTID to the world and the world to us.”

But have no doubt, each “gee whiz” application has a strategic purpose behind it.

“We don’t just adopt these new technologies without having a specific goal outlined,” explains Dr. Gerard Buckley, NTID assistant vice president for college advancement. “Each is a solution to a very real set of goals and areas the college and greater university has identified.”

One example is the development of a private social media experience for high school juniors and seniors attending RIT/NTID’s Explore Your Future, a summer career exploration program. For the past three years, these students have been able to upload their EYF photos, chat with each other and stay in touch after EYF through the program’s Ning®-based social networking account. Dana chose Ning over other social networking products

for its additional security options.

“We wanted parents to feel comfortable that the only people in the Ning group were other EYF attendees,” says Dana. “Ning also offered other features such as an integrated way to share video and photos, chat, an activity feed and discussion forums that were not available on other social media products at the time.”

RIT/NTID’s YouTube channel ([www.youtube.com/user/RITNTID](http://www.youtube.com/user/RITNTID)) and Twitter newsfeed ([twitter.com/NTID\\_News](http://twitter.com/NTID_News)) also provide audiences with access to archived videos and the latest news and information.



**Be a fan!** RIT/NTID’s Facebook fan page is part of the college’s overall social media strategy.

For those who use the popular social network Facebook, RIT/NTID has developed a Facebook “fan” page ([www.facebook.com/RITNTID](http://www.facebook.com/RITNTID)) that has more than 2,000 members. It’s a way for prospective and current students, alumni, parents and friends of the college to stay connected and to stay informed about RIT/NTID news and events.

RIT/NTID alumni have also created additional Facebook pages for individual college Summer Vestibule Program entry years, affinity groups and majors.

Alumni also connect to the institute through a new online, interactive

version of *AlumniNews* ([www.ntid.rit.edu/alumni/news](http://www.ntid.rit.edu/alumni/news)).

RIT/NTID recently moved its twice-yearly printed alumni newsletter to this new format. Now, alumni and friends can enjoy *AlumniNews* four times a year, complete with video and full color photo galleries of recent alumni events. They can explore links and comment on articles in the newsletter, answer the “Question of the Quarter” and even register for alumni receptions and events such as RIT’s Brick City Homecoming.

“Our goal in moving to an online version of *AlumniNews* is to connect

with alumni more frequently and provide them with timely, relevant content,” says Director of NTID Alumni Relations Matthew Driscoll, ’94. “Better engagement leads to stronger loyalty, and increases the affinity our alumni have for their alma mater.”

Current students also find social media an effective way to communicate about activities and events to encourage participation.

“More than ever, we depend on the strength of visual communication such as texting, Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, videophones and webcams,” says Greg Pollock, a third-year Professional and Technical Communication major and president of the NTID Student Congress. “Technology has allowed us more virtual interaction. Why? Because it’s easy. Time is increasingly valuable in today’s society, and people want information quickly. Information going out to hundreds of receivers in seconds makes our communication lines shorter and faster, and fuels the life of our student community.”

# Alumni Fly High at NASA

by Susan L. Murad

Students often are encouraged to “reach for the stars” as they begin their careers, and four RIT/NTID alumni have taken that advice literally. Bryan Dixon, Namrita Owens, Apurva Varia and William Yuknis reach for the stars and beyond every day in their work at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA) Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md.

## Bryan Dixon

Bryan Dixon, a senior network engineer at Goddard, works in the Unified NASA Information Technology Services program, which is part of NASA Integrated Services Network Mission Communications (<http://nism.nasa.gov/>) and provides network engineering and operations support to NASA’s mission networks. He earned an associate degree in NTID’s Electro-Mechanical Technology program, a bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering Technology in RIT’s College of Applied Science and Technology and a number of IT/networking certifications, including Cisco System’s Certified Internetwork Expert, recognized as one of the highest-level qualifications in the industry.

The Springfield, Va., resident’s duties at Goddard include engineering analysis, design, implementation, troubleshooting and operations of mission networks. Dixon credits RIT/NTID and additional certifications as key to his success.

“I got my start in this industry because I had computer programming experience from RIT/NTID,” he says. “Maybe that’s why my favorite phrase is ‘Knowledge is POWER!’”

## Namrita “Rita” K. (Kapur) Owens

Namrita Owens graduated in 1993 with a bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering from RIT’s College of Engineering. The Potomac, Md., resident went on to earn a master’s degree in Electrical Engineering from Johns Hopkins University. She is a



Namrita “Rita” K. (Kapur) Owens



Bryan Dixon, William Yuknis, Apurva Varia

senior electronics engineer at Goddard.

“I provide engineering support to the Instrument Electronics Module Subsystem of a science instrument called the Advanced Topographic Laser Altimeter System on the satellite, ICESAT-2,” Owens explains. “The ATLAS instrument primarily uses lasers to perform ice measurements and will be launched on the ICESAT-2 spacecraft mission in 2014.”

She also chairs NASA’s Equal Accessibility Advisory committee, a center-wide committee that serves all employees with accessibility needs.

Her RIT co-op experiences led to her career at NASA.

“My co-ops at NASA gave me an opportunity to experience a few different areas of engineering and to choose one that interests me most,” she says.

Owens also is involved in Deaf Women in Science and Engineering, and has developed a website: [www.deafwise.org](http://www.deafwise.org).

To learn more about NASA’s ICESAT-2 project, visit <http://icesat.gsfc.nasa.gov/>.

## Apurva Varia

Apurva Varia graduated in 1997 with a bachelor’s degree in Mechanical Engineering from RIT’s College of Engineering and went on to earn a master’s degree in Aerospace Engineering at Syracuse University.

The Columbia, Md., aerospace engineer designs, builds and delivers propulsion systems, including tanks, thrusters and various components as part of spacecrafts.

“The best part of my job is working with fellow engineers to solve problems as a team,” he says. “Building spacecrafts is both challenging and wonderful.”

Varia also credits his co-op experiences as key to finding the right career for him.

“The experience I gained from co-ops was an important part of my RIT education,” he

says. “Also, taking general technical courses and doing hands-on activities really helped hone my skills.”

To learn more about two of Varia’s recent projects, visit <http://sdo.gsfc.nasa.gov/> and <http://stp.gsfc.nasa.gov/missions/mms/mms.htm>.

## William Yuknis

Known as “Yuke” during his undergraduate years at RIT/NTID, William Yuknis was the first deaf person to graduate from the Computer Engineering program in RIT’s College of Engineering in 1994. The Laurel, Md., resident went on to earn a master’s degree from Johns Hopkins University in Electrical Engineering with an emphasis on data communications.

Yuknis was the product design lead for the Command and Data Handling Subsystem for NASA’s Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, which launched in July, and he is responsible for leading a team of engineers to design, build and test electronic hardware for various missions.

“I supported LRO’s recent launch and helped ensure that the spacecraft arrived safely on the moon,” he says. “My favorite part of my work is when we finish designing, building and testing spacecraft hardware. It’s an immensely rewarding experience because the road taken during that process of building and testing is often fraught with emotional highs and lows.”

Yuknis says his RIT education was the framework for his success at NASA.

“As I have progressed through my career, my RIT education has served as a solid foundation to build upon,” he explains. “I believe that with a strong foundation, you can build skills for life.”

To learn more about NASA’s LRO project, visit [www.nasa.gov/mission\\_pages/LRO/main/](http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/LRO/main/).

# Pathway to Career Education

by Kathy A. Johncox

In 2006, RIT/NTID launched its first outreach programs, designed to connect with younger deaf and hard-of-hearing students to help them learn, grow and be exposed to a variety of careers.

“Our outreach programs are designed as career education experiences,” says Dr. Gerard Buckley, NTID assistant vice president for college advancement. “The pre-college experiences introduce deaf and hard-of-hearing students to career opportunities and connect them with role models in the field who can help to mentor them. These experiences foster personal and social growth as well.”

In 2007, high school students Amy Lucero and Luis Fernandez came to RIT to participate in the RIT National Science Fair for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students. Warrance Yu and Toby Fitch made the trip to RIT in 2007 and 2008, respectively, as winners of the Digital Arts, Film and Animation Competition. None of these students had ever been to RIT before their visit, but after experiencing the university and looking at the different career options available through RIT majors, each decided that this was the place to be. Today, they all are RIT students with unique goals and dreams, well on their way to successful futures.

“Career education is a lifelong process,” says Mark Sommer, director of NTID Pre-College Outreach. “The value of a college education is clear, and the path to career success often can begin when students like Amy, Luis, Warrance and Toby can participate in pre-college programs that help focus their plans for the future.”

## Amy Lucero

With the encouragement of her 11<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher, Amy Lucero, of Santa Fe, N.M., entered the RIT science fair with a project comparing heart rates of video game rookies and video game experts of both genders before, during and after they played an Xbox® video game. Her project was a winner.

“I felt so awestruck and proud of myself because I knew I had worked so hard on the project,” says Lucero. “The project turned out to be an enriching experience. To prepare for the fair, I learned how to create an excellent laboratory report to go along with my display board, and I learned I could present my information without being too nervous if I showed I knew what I was talking about.”

On her visit to campus, Lucero was impressed by the friendly, pleasant

and accessible environment at RIT.

“I was amazed that RIT had such good support systems, providing interpreters, notetakers and C-print® captionists,” she says. “After I returned home, I decided that RIT had a lot to offer me, and that I would apply.”

Lucero, who started in NTID’s Laboratory Science Technology program, is taking advantage of the LST+2 program, which allowed her to transfer into RIT’s Biochemistry program this fall.

She used her networking skills this past summer to get an interview at Los Alamos National Laboratories in New Mexico, where she was hired for a co-op in the bioscience division, working on genotypes of various kinds of bacteria.

“My goal is to graduate with my bachelor’s degree, get a master’s degree and then hopefully get into medical school,” says Lucero.

## Luis Fernandez

Luis Fernandez, a second-year student from Providence, R.I., had participated in many science fair competitions in the Rhode Island area. When he was a high school senior, his teacher told him about the RIT science fair, and both his teacher and his mother encouraged him to enter the competition. This 2007 science fair winner says his experience in the competition was awesome.

“I didn’t have any idea which college to enroll in,” says Fernandez. “I thought I’d give the science fair a shot to see what RIT was all about. I was so proud when I learned I had won. But coming to campus and making friendships with other science fair participants and learning about their projects was almost more rewarding.”



Amy Lucero

A. SUE WEISLER



A. SUE WEISLER

**Luis Fernandez**

In addition to being amazed at the size of the campus, Fernandez was surprised to learn that more than 1,200 students with hearing loss from around the world live and study with more than 12,000 hearing undergraduate students on the RIT campus.

“I chose RIT because of the LST program and how it fits with my love for science,” says Fernandez, who currently is enrolled in the LST+2 program. “I enjoy this major because of the quality of instruction, high-tech analytical instrumentation and because many graduates of the program have great careers in the field of chemistry.”

He intends to pursue a bachelor’s degree in chemistry at RIT, and then pursue his ultimate goal of being a veterinarian.

Fernandez says, “There is no doubt that my strong chemistry background and bench skills from the LST+2 program will give me many options for future study and help my career choice.”

## **Warrance Yu**

A poster at his high school advertising RIT’s Digital Arts, Film and Animation Competition for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students caught Warrance Yu’s attention. Yu says his love of art made him want to enter the competition, and he’s glad he did because he won first place for graphic design during the 2007 competition. It was his first time entering a contest, and winning it made him want to do more.

“I was overwhelmed with happiness, and even more motivated than before,” says Yu, a second-year student from Markham, Ontario, Canada. “I hadn’t planned to visit RIT, but when I won the contest, I got a free trip for a three-day visit. I immediately decided to go to RIT no matter what. And now, here I am.”

His major is Arts & Imaging Studies with a concentration in Graphic Design, and his dream is to work for a large company like IBM, maybe as a graphic designer.

“From my very first visit to RIT, I was psyched!” says Yu. “I felt I was a step closer to my dreams.”



A. SUE WEISLER

**Warrance Yu**

## **Toby Fitch**

“My teacher urged me to enter the Digital Arts, Film and Animation Competition because he felt I was talented, and both he and my parents were confident I could do it,” says Toby Fitch, a second-year student majoring in Arts & Imaging Studies with a concentration in New Media Design. Fitch, from Zanesville, Ohio, won a trip to RIT in 2008 for his first-place, 3-D animation project, *Jay Leno on Vacation*.

When Fitch got word that he had won, he says he felt “overwhelmed and a little shocked” because it was a national competition, and he never expected to win anything national.

“As soon as I left for home after the awards weekend at RIT, I really felt I would fit in, and that RIT had so much to offer me,” says Fitch. “While I was there, I learned that RIT is a well-known school with a high job-hire rate, and that pretty much sold me. I knew it was the college for me.”

Fitch’s goal is to influence the world with his art and maybe someday own his own design firm. He’s got a good start—the paper construction sculptures he designed for one of his classes were chosen for the RIT/NTID 2009 Student Honors Exhibition.



A. SUE WEISLER

**Toby Fitch**

# Kathleen Dollinger-Meyer

by Kathy A. Johncox



**K**athleen Dollinger-Meyer knows what it's like to have dreams—and to make them come true.

Dollinger-Meyer, an employment specialist at the NTID Center on Employment, is living her dream by working with students and helping them pursue their own dreams and goals.

Dollinger-Meyer worked at NTID as a teaching assistant for American Sign Language classes and as a counselor during the Summer Vestibule and Explore Your Future programs. She then completed her bachelor's degree at Nazareth College of Rochester and earned a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling for the Deaf from Northern Illinois University.

"I started college in the 1970s, and it was difficult," says Dollinger-Meyer. "Colleges were not required to offer access services. My Vocational Rehabilitation counselor paid people in the community who knew sign language to be 'interpreters' in most of my classes at the college. With that support, I managed it well."

After college, she had jobs involving

counseling and human resources at Rochester School for the Deaf, NTID and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Then in 1998, a position became available at NCE, and she jumped at the chance.

"I like to mentor students and encourage them to go for it," says Dollinger-Meyer. "Some are a little intimidated by the idea of going on cooperative work experiences, but I tell them they can do it. It's so gratifying to talk to my students when they return from co-op and see how their self-esteem and confidence has grown. It's amazing."

Professionally, Dollinger-Meyer's proudest achievement is traveling to different states to present NCE's Working Together: Deaf and Hearing People workshop to employers. Her proudest personal achievement is her family. She says that her husband, Gary, and her children, Ashley, age 22, and Jonathan, age 19, and even their dog, Lucy, have taught her so many things about life.

"I have benefited from many people and many deaf role models in my life, and I hope I can be that for the students I work with," she says.

# Thomas Warfield

by Kathy A. Johncox



"I have had a magical life," says Thomas Warfield, assistant professor in NTID's Cultural and Creative Studies Department, and former chairperson of the RIT President's Commission on Pluralism and Inclusion. Other titles Warfield can claim are world-renowned dancer, singer, actor, choreographer, director, producer, educator, activist and poet.

"In some ways I haven't chosen my life's direction," he says. "I've tried to allow it to unfold and be open to opportunities as they present themselves."

Warfield has welcomed many opportunities. Names of people he's worked with—Spike Lee, Marvin Hamlisch, Carl Sagan, Beverly Sills and Plácido Domingo, and places he's performed—the Joffrey Ballet, the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance and the Alvin Ailey School—give an idea of the scope of Warfield's experiences.

The son of a minister and a musical conductor, Warfield grew up in Rochester, N.Y., and started performing as a first grader. At age 12, he performed with

the Opera Company Children's Chorus in Rochester, and by sixth grade, he had written his first play. After graduating from SUNY Purchase, he joined the Dragon Dance Company of Macao and was influenced by his global experiences to become the founder/artistic director of PeaceArt International, a global outreach not-for-profit organization using the arts and the creative process to foster world peace.

He came to RIT/NTID in 1998.

"Working with deaf students made me develop new ideas and expand my thinking about dance and the meaning of it as well as embrace the many levels of experience and the diversity here," says Warfield.

He enjoys having the ability to create his own dance composition/choreography program.

"The word 'adventure' comes to mind when I describe my work here," says Warfield. "It's both challenge and discovery. The challenge is making it all happen—the discovery through that process is unparalleled."



# BNY Mellon and RIT/NTID: A Long-standing Relationship

by Susan L. Murad

A partnership between RIT/NTID and BNY Mellon that began in 2003 continues to have a positive impact on both organizations.

Since that initial contact, members of the NTID Center on Employment staff have continued to develop the relationship by serving as members of a committee established at BNY Mellon to increase the organization's employment of people with disabilities. As part of BNY Mellon's diversity initiatives, NCE has provided feedback on enhancing the company's recruitment website, making it easier for RIT/NTID students and graduates and other candidates with disabilities to access the site.

"BNY Mellon has enlisted the services of our co-op students every year since 2003," says NCE Director John Macko. "They also have hired our students for full-time employment after graduation."

NCE staff have advised BNY Mellon on the development of an internal document that provides information to department managers about current technologies available to

provide accommodations for deaf and hard-of-hearing employees and how they can be accessed.

"This type of initiative demonstrates BNY Mellon's commitment to ensuring that deaf employees will have the tools necessary to fulfill their roles effectively," Macko says.

Since 2003, the company has hired more than 10 summer co-op students in various departments of the company. Audrey Bonnett, HR governance/affirmative action manager of BNY Mellon, and the recruitment team come to campus each fall to participate in NTID's Job Fair, and set-up interviews and informational workshops for deaf and hard-of-hearing students looking for summer co-op positions.

"An internship is a great way to apply coursework to a real-work setting," says Jay Monitz, a fourth-year Finance major from Chicago, Ill. "After my internship with BNY Mellon, I feel prepared to begin full-time employment after I graduate."

"Our two institutions share common goals, specifically the support of educational and professional skills development, and scholarship support for people with hearing loss," says Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz, NTID president and RIT vice president and dean for NTID. "We are very grateful for the steadfast support that BNY Mellon continues to provide our students and alumni."

Since 2007, BNY Mellon has provided scholarships for students from the New York State School for the Deaf, Horace Mann School for the Deaf and Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, making it possible for deaf and hard-of-hearing high school students to attend RIT/NTID's Explore Your Future career exploration program each summer.

In 2007, the former Mellon Financial Corporation Foundation awarded NTID a \$25,000 grant to implement the Reaching Out to Rising Stars



**A Day at the Park** RIT/NTID student Jay Monitz (left) at a Boston Red Sox game with BNY Mellon Recruiting Administrator Keith Wayshville.

educational workshop program in 10 cities nationwide for deaf and hard-of-hearing middle and high school students and their parents. As a result, NTID offered these workshops to more than 300 parents and students. In September, a grant from The Bank of New York Mellon Corporation Foundation provided \$25,000 to continue these outreach efforts to parents and students in 10 additional cities.

Also in 2009, the BNY Mellon Charitable Foundation approved a grant to implement technology job training and career development workshops in the Pittsburgh region through NTID's Deaf Initiative in Technology program, a series of workshops that provide a variety of technical and business-based training for deaf and hard-of-hearing adults.

"BNY Mellon's mission fits perfectly with NTID's," says Bonnett. "BNY Mellon is committed to enriching and strengthening the diverse communities served by the company. BNY Mellon Foundation supports nonprofit organizations and projects that increase inclusion and create opportunities for diverse populations, which is exactly what RIT/NTID is all about. It has been, and continues to be, a great partnership."



**From Intern to Employee** Audrey Bonnett (left), HR governance/affirmative action manager of BNY Mellon, shares information with Fan Zhang, a former RIT/NTID student from Pittsburgh, Pa., who, after completing his co-op experience, is now a member of BNY Mellon's employee recruitment team.

# Precision Partnership

by Greg Livadas



COURTESY OF NAVAIR

**Expert Machining** RIT/NTID alumnus Ben Johnson manufactures aircraft parts for the Naval Air Systems Command. His supervisors were so impressed with his skills that they sought additional co-op and permanent hires from RIT/NTID.

When Ben Johnson began manufacturing aircraft parts at the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) in Cherry Point, N.C., his supervisors were impressed. They wanted to know where he learned his machining skills and if they could find more employees like him.

Johnson graduated from NTID's Manufacturing Processes program in 1982, and those skills that impressed his bosses eventually led to a close relationship between NAVAIR and NTID, and a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was launched to help find students who could work for NAVAIR as they gained valuable real-world employment experience. It remains the oldest partnership between NTID and an employer.

Since 2002, nearly 50 RIT/NTID students have completed cooperative work experiences, or co-ops, with NAVAIR in Cherry Point as well as NAVAIR centers in Patuxent River, Md., Orlando, Fla., and Lakehurst,

N.J. Several NAVAIR co-op students have been permanently employed by NAVAIR or have landed jobs with other government agencies.

NAVAIR values diversity in its national workforce, and the organization's website affirms this by noting that, "Every employee will be valued and respected and have the opportunity to reach his or her full potential."

NAVAIR provides engineering, testing, evaluation, in-service support and program management capabilities to develop, deliver and sustain aircraft for the Navy and Marine Corps. NAVAIR has been a frequent exhibitor at the NTID Job Fair, held each fall when prospective employers come to campus to collect resumes and talk with students.

"NAVAIR has always been very supportive of our students," says John Macko, director of the NTID Center on Employment. He says students also benefit from learning a variety of jobs during their co-op experience because they often rotate positions throughout

their 10-week internships.

And Macko says, NAVAIR has always agreed to help accommodate students as needed.

Laurel Ann McLeod had co-ops with NAVAIR in Florida and Maryland when she was a student at RIT/NTID in 2005. She worked then as a student assistant, helping with accounting, scanning and filing.

"The work environment was casual and friendly," she says. "I was not scared or nervous because I knew there were some other deaf people who worked there, too."

McLeod, a native of Florida, said NAVAIR always provided an interpreter for weekly team meetings.

At the NTID Job Fair in 2008, McLeod gave her resume to a NAVAIR representative.

"They called me for an interview, and we were on the phone for an hour," she says. "In a few months, they sent me an email, and they offered me a job."

McLeod, who received an associate degree in Accounting Technology and a bachelor's degree in Business Management



COURTESY OF NAVAIR

in 2008, returned to NAVAIR in Maryland in May as a business assistant and is training to become a contract specialist, a three-year process.

"The co-workers are very friendly and have dignity and respect for other people. I admire that the most," she says.

# Hollywood Comes to Campus



A. SUE WESSLER

A Los Angeles-based film crew was in Rochester this fall to make a movie based on Matt Hamill, the RIT/NTID championship wrestler who graduated in 1999 with a degree in Electromechanical Technology, and who since has gained fame in the Ultimate Fighting Championship. Hamill (sitting at right) was on the movie set during filming in RIT's Clark Gym on Sept. 29.

The movie was written and is being produced by Eben Kostbar and Joseph McKelheer of Film Harvest, an independent film production company. *Hamill* was shot entirely in the Rochester area, including several places on the RIT/NTID campus. The title role in the film is played by Russell Harvard, a deaf actor from Texas. RIT/NTID alumnus Michael Spady, who graduated in 2006 with a bachelor's degree in Applied Science and Technology, also has a leading role as Hamill's friend and roommate.

As an RIT/NTID student, Hamill won three NCAA Division III national wrestling championships. He was a three-time All-American, New York State Champion and RIT Invitational Champion. He achieved a career record of 89-3 and was undefeated in his senior year. He also holds the all-time RIT record for the most tournament wins (71) and was inducted into the RIT Athletic Hall of Fame in 2007.

# R·I·T

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**Tiger Spirit Woven In** Created in 2005 by RIT/NTID alumna Theresa Matteson Coughlan, who graduated in 1994 with a BFA from the Weaving and Textile program, *Tiger Diversity Quilt* weaves together RIT's tiger mascot, bricks that are so prevalent in campus buildings, and hand shapes representing American Sign Language and the presence of NTID on campus. The quilt is part of NTID's permanent collection of art and hangs in the CSD Student Development Center. This fall, it was part of a quilt show in NTID's Dyer Arts Center, which featured work by Coughlan as well as quilts by RIT/NTID alumna Rita Straubhaar.

MARK BENJAMIN