LIZARD LOVER

Dinosaur expert Kristi Curry Rogers makes her mark at Mac.

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ON THE COVER: Kristi Curry Rogers, assistant professor of biology and noted dinosaur expert
(photo by Darin Back)
Interesting reading
I really enjoyed the Fall 2008 issue of Macalester Today. From the small piece on student internships to the alumni profile of Dan Shertzer and from the article on host families to the musings on being a full-time mother, I found the content varied and interesting. I continue to take pride in my alma mater. Keep up the good work!

KATE NORLANDER ’91
New Brighton, Minnesota

Happily hosted
I read with interest your recent feature “Homes Away from Home” (Fall 2008). My host parents—Doug Strandness ’74 and his wife, Lynnette—were such an integral part of my Macalester experience, from the help they gave me settling into a life halfway across the world to their enthusiastic attempts to show me the joys of Minnesota winters (cross-country skiing!). They also invited me to stay with them when other students returned home for holidays. Thanks largely to their efforts, St. Paul truly felt like home for the years I was at Mac. Their generosity and interest in the world will always remind me of the best of Minnesota.

DIKSHA MUBBHARY-SITAULA ’01
New York City

The fall of 1973, I arrived at Macalester as an international student, a Dutch citizen from Aruba who had mostly grown up in the Middle East. Though I was experienced in living away from home (having gone to boarding school), I had never lived in Minnesota and had not lived in the states since I was a child. I signed up for the host family program and was matched with Bob and Joanne Scobie (Bob was a professor of education), who lived with their two sons within walking distance of Mac. I spent many wonderful times with them over the four years I was at Mac, enjoying home-cooked dinners, community events, and Thanksgiving. I truly appreciated my “home away from home” with the Scobies. Now my husband, Stephen Hickman ’75, and I have served as a host family for nearly 20 years at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Through the town of Amherst Hospitality Program we have been matched with students from countries as diverse as China, India, Morocco, and Italy. International students have joined our family in carving Halloween pumpkins, eating Thanksgiving turkeys, decorating Easter eggs, attending community theater performances, going on hikes, and watching local sporting events. Our daughters, now grown, have learned about a wide variety of cultural traditions, and the students have enjoyed the contact with a family and the chance to get off campus and experience everyday American life. I am happy to know that Macalester’s host family program has continued, and I strongly encourage local families to get involved. We have been greatly enriched by the relationships we’ve had with all of our international students.

RUTH HARMS ’77
Amherst, Massachusetts

Correction
In the lovely article on my father, Flip Schulke ’54 (“Picture This,” Fall 2008), there was one inaccuracy: Dad was no longer married to Donna Schulke when he died in May.

ELIZABETH LIVINGSTON SCHULKE DAVIDSON ’78
San Francisco

Letters Policy
We invite letters of 300 words or fewer. Letters may be edited for clarity, style, and space and will be published based on their relevance to issues discussed in Macalester Today. You can send letters by email to: llambi@macalester.edu. Or: Letters to the Editor, Macalester Today, College Relations, Macalester College, 1600 Grand Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105-1899.
Through the Looking Glass

“If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there.”
—Lewis Carroll

Surely it is a sign of the bewildering state in which we find ourselves that as I write this column, two months before its publication, I can only guess at the extent to which it appropriately addresses its subject. That subject is the impact of a recessionary economy and the turbulent credit and equities markets on the work of Macalester. The rapidity with which events are transpiring has made Monday’s prognostications outdated by Wednesday, let alone sufficient for the following weeks and months. We seem to have entered a different world, one in which my chief financial officer has taken to quoting Lewis Carroll more often than the Wall Street Journal.

That said, it seems important to provide you with some sense of how we expect Macalester to respond to the financial challenges by which all of us are confronted. Put simply, we will respond with calmness, prudence, caution, and ingenuity: with a commitment to our core mission and purpose but a willingness to think creatively about how best to carry out that mission in the midst of changing circumstances over which we have little control.

Though colleges have typically fared better than many other enterprises during economic downturns, we are not immune to their effects. All our revenue sources—tuition and fees, endowment income, and fund-raising income—are highly sensitive to external economic forces. John Nelson, managing director of Moody’s Investors Service, has said that while “the vast majority of colleges are going to be fine,” it is “kind of news for any of them to be in financial stress.” Indeed.

We are and should be planning for smaller increases, more pressure on the financial aid budget, a protracted period of weak or even negative returns on our investments, diminished access to credit, and a difficult fund-raising environment. We are and should be looking for opportunities to cut costs by being more efficient, by distinguishing the essential from the desirable, and by at times acknowledging that we cannot do everything and therefore making difficult choices.

It is essential as we work through these decisions that we have a clear sense of the institution’s highest priorities. At the top of the list is preserving and indeed continuing to enhance the strength of our core academic work: we exist to educate; students attend Macalester first and foremost because of the quality of that education; and we must ensure that we are delivering on our promise to provide those students with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to succeed and make a positive difference in the world.

Other high priorities include retaining and adequately compensating our faculty and staff, without whom that educational work would be impossible, and continuing to make Macalester affordable to an economically diverse group of students. Losing our best people or weakening our commitment to access might save us money in the short term, but would in the long term harm both the fiscal health and the national reputation of the college.

With those priorities in mind, we will build budgets that are lean and efficient (we are pretty good at this, having had some practice). Where cuts are necessary, they will come first in areas that have the least impact on our core commitments.

The Step Forward campaign will proceed as planned, though of course we will be respectful of the personal situations of our supporters. It will proceed not only because the campaign has met with remarkable success but because the priorities for which we are seeking philanthropic support are still important and the need for help is greater than ever.

The anxieties of the moment have a way of turning us into bad historians. Now more than ever, we must remember that Macalester has survived the Great Depression, many recessions, and two world wars, not to mention a series of internal financial challenges that would have crushed many institutions whose leaders and communities had less fortitude.

Let me assure you that the college’s goal during this financial crisis is not simply to muddle through. It is to ensure through careful planning and fidelity to our invaluable mission that we continue to strengthen both our financial health and our distinctive programs and emerge a stronger and better place. This is what Macalester has always done, and those of us charged with stewardship of the college today should expect of ourselves no less.

Brian Rosenberg, the president of Macalester, writes a regular column for Macalester Today. He can be reached at rosenbergb@macalester.edu.
Mapping Minnesota

HIGHWAY MAPS, state park maps, plat maps, waterways maps, even vice maps. For 500 years before Google Maps, cartographers were charting what came to be known as Minnesota. In honor of the state’s sesquicentennial, geography professor David Lanegran—assisted by Carol Urness, curator emerita of the James Ford Bell Library—has written Minnesota On the Map: A Historical Atlas (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2008).

The book contains nearly 100 beautifully reproduced maps from the times of the early explorers to the present, as well as text in which Lanegran explains how maps played a role in events ranging from Duluth’s port war with Superior to the tourism bonanza of the Boundary Waters.

“As I started the book,” says Lanegran, “I sifted through the map drawers in my office and found maps I’d forgotten I had. It gave me an ironclad reason to buy more maps. I went on quests to see maps I had only read about, and was taken into the vaults at the Minnesota Historical Society to see some of the treasures.

“For me, looking at maps is akin to watching a moving picture. The map brings to mind images of places and the people that make them, of changes in geography that occur over time, and I can reflect on the brave and hardy people who gathered the information shown on the map, and the talented and diligent people who produced it. Historic maps are wonderful windows into the past and great tools to analyze the present.”
**TIME CAPSULES**

**WHILE DISMANTLING BRICKS**
from the old gymnasium
(which were reused), workers found a time capsule from 1924. Its contents included two bibles, two 1923 dimes, an aerial photo of campus, and a 1910 history of Macalester. Because there was no record of this time capsule, it was found entirely by chance. During October 11 dedication ceremonies for the Leonard Center, a new time capsule was placed behind the 2008 date stone, just south of the main entrance. The new version contains a copy of the college’s 2008–09 budget, a Café Mac menu, a Minnesota quarter, and a new aerial photo of campus, among other items. This capsule’s contents are listed in the building’s dedication program so that future Macites will know what to look for.

**WHAT HAS 24 HANDS**, more than 30 needles and hooks, and a charitable mission? Macalester Young Artists for Revolutionary Needlework, or MacYARN. For the past year this group’s dozen members have been bringing their hands together to knit and crochet for people in need.

Peggy Polta ’11 (Golden Valley, Minnesota) formed MacYARN after reading *Knitting for Peace* by Betty Christiansen (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2006), a book of inspirational stories about fiber artists making a hands-on impact with their donated needlework. The book supplies knitters with simple patterns for blankets, hats, and socks, and information on how to donate their projects to chemotherapy patients, premature babies, battered women, and the homeless.

Last year each MacYARN member knit squares, which were combined to create a blanket for a terminally ill child through Project Linus. MacYARN’s contribution is one of nearly 2.5 million blankets that organization has delivered to sick children throughout the United States.

Macalester’s fiber artists also made shawls for Sheila’s Shawls, an organization named for Sheila Wellstone, to benefit victims of domestic abuse. Now the group is working on hats for cancer patients at Regions Hospital in St Paul.

The group uses its budget to purchase yarn for these charitable projects, and this year will also fund a members’ trip to Wellspring Woolens, a southern Minnesota sheep farm. The sheep-farm visit “is a fun opportunity to learn how yarn is made, and also an education in sustainability, since the yarn is both handmade and local,” says Polta.

With some help from Ruby Levine ’11 (Montpelier, Vermont), initially the only crochet artist in the group, even Mac students with no experience can learn how to knit and crochet. “The group is there for support on projects, whether it’s help reading a pattern or working a tricky stitch or just talking about needlework with other people who understand what you’re talking about,” says Levine.

Knitting and crocheting recently have found renewed popularity among college students. “In a college context, it’s a stress-reliever, a study break, a way to be productive without doing homework, something to be proud of even if that paper you’re working on isn’t going so hot,” says Polta.

MacYARN is a social space as well as a stitching place. “It’s a great way to meet new people and make friends,” says Levine.

**ANNA ROCKNE ’09** is a student worker in College Relations.
Another Rhodes

Macalester chalked up another honor in November, when 21-year-old senior Michael Waul was named a Rhodes Scholar from his native Jamaica. A biochemistry major and geography minor, he is the only Caribbean recipient this year of the prestigious scholarship.

Waul is the fourth Caribbean student in the past eight years from Macalester to be awarded this honor and the 13th Rhodes Scholar in the college’s history.

Some of his Macalester professors and friends thought he had a good chance but Waul wasn’t as sure. “When I got to the interviews, there were a number of other talented and well-accomplished final candidates,” says Waul, who was delighted to be selected for the coveted scholarship.

Waul will pursue a two-year master’s degree in medicinal chemistry at Oxford University in England. His academic adviser, chemistry professor Ronald Brisbois, says, “Michael is a diligent, mature, enthusiastic, and pleasant young man whose senses of humor and perspective, as well as his ever-present smile, draw people to him. He has the innate foundations of aptitude, attitude, self-motivation, and charisma that make it easy for me to envision great things for and from him.”

Waul, who was featured in the fall issue of Macalester Today for his emergency room internship, will begin studying at Oxford University in September.

Earth Award

Timothy Den Herder–Thomas ’09 was one of six young people awarded a Brower Youth Award last fall by the Earth Island Institute. The institute established the awards in 2000 to highlight the accomplishments of rising environmental leaders.

Den Herder-Thomas led the creation of Mac’s Clean Energy Revolving Fund (CERF), a student-designed financial pool that funds energy-efficiency projects on campus. Beyond campus, he and his program, Cooperative Energy Futures, convened labor groups, nonprofits, local businesses, and students to engage with the City of St. Paul in designing sustainable, mixed-use development on the site of a closed Ford plant. The plan focuses on green manufacturing, mixed-income residential units, carbon neutrality, and mass transportation.

The annual accolade goes to six young people who have demonstrated outstanding achievements in environmental and social justice advocacy.

Stiliyana Stamenova ’09 (Sofia, Bulgaria) was halfway through high school before she got her first computer, and came to Macalester knowing no computer languages. Just three years later, she started her senior year with scholarships from two of the giants in computer technology—the 2008 Google Anita Borg Memorial Scholarship and a Microsoft Technical Scholarship—and a contract to work as a software engineer at Microsoft’s Seattle headquarters following graduation. Talk about finding your passion.

Stamenova, who grew up in Kjustendil, Bulgaria, and attended a United World College in Italy, chose an introductory computer science class with Professor Susan Fox as her first-year course. And so a star was born. “Most of our students are so smart, but Stiliyana came in wanting to push herself from the beginning,” says Fox. “She did summer research with me between her sophomore and junior years. I would give her something to work on for a few days, and she’d be back with it in the afternoon. I had to work hard to keep up with her.”

For her honors project, advised by Fox, Stamenova is doing artificial intelligence research in “localization and vision.” Expressed in the simplest terms, she’s developing ways for a robot to use a camera to recognize its surroundings and navigate successfully through them. She also works in the library’s computer lab and as a preceptor in the Mathematics and Computer Science Department. A double major in math and computer science, she loves the overlapping theoretical areas and enjoys the application of math in computer science.

As a junior, Stamenova applied for the Anita Borg Memorial Scholarship from Google, winning a partial scholarship and a March trip to San Francisco for a celebration and a seminar on excelling in the field. The competition was fierce—many of the other winners are PhD candidates. Stamenova won a summer internship at Microsoft as well, spending last summer in Seattle working on a product that encrypts movies and music. She thrived in the intense environment, working “with a real team with real deadlines, designing and implementing real software.”
Power Projects

IT’S WORTH A DOUBLE TAKE. A pink Power Wheels Jeep circumnavigates the Olin-Rice Science Center sans driver. No, it’s not remotely controlled. Equipped with a laptop computer, the Jeep is “seeing” the environment, identifying sidewalks, and avoiding obstacles.

The project grew out of a computer science course in robotics that senior Sean Cooke (Mesa, Arizona) took with Professor Susan Fox. The Jeep is equipped with a simple webcam and uses color-tracking techniques Fox and Cooke developed specifically for the project. The vehicle identifies colored signs, road cones, and the path ahead, then uses the information to determine where it can drive safely.

In another corner of Olin-Rice, junior Munadir Ahmed (Dhaka, Bangladesh) spent his summer addressing a different challenge—developing a better process for making commercial-level solar cells. Solar energy is one of the promising energy alternatives, but it is four times more expensive than gas or coal, according to physics professor James Doyle, Ahmed’s project adviser.

Ahmed says their research into electrodeposition, which is similar to electroplating, may help manufacturers produce solar cells at a more affordable price. Ahmed has a personal interest in this research: Less expensive solar cells could provide electricity to people living in rural areas beyond the reach of the grid in his home country.

Alumni Gym Tip-off

The Macalester women’s basketball team took on Whitman College (Walla Walla, Washington) in its first game in the new Leonard Center Alumni Gymnasium on November 21. At press time the team was 5–1, its best six-game start in 16 years.

Michelle Obama at Mac

Just days after the Leonard Center was officially inaugurated on October 11, the United States’ future first lady spoke to a crowd of students, faculty, staff, and people from the wider Twin Cities area in the facility’s fieldhouse. The talk, organized by the Obama campaign, was a unique opportunity for students to engage in presidential politics.
BY DEVELOPING A REUSABLE take-out container program at Café Mac, junior Hannah Rivenburgh (Woodinville, Washington) has helped bring Macalester a step closer to its goal of producing zero waste.

When ordering food to go from the Grill, Mac community members who pay a one-time $3 fee now receive their food in a reusable container. They don’t even have to wash the container—just return it—to get another clean reusable container with their next order. Reusable containers are preferable to recyclable or compostable options because they don’t enter the waste stream until the end of their useful life.

Rivenburgh and food service staff members Deb Novotny, Lisa Percy, and Amanda Rizzo were given a Green Star Award for the program. “As Macalester works toward zero waste,” says Rivenburgh, “it’s important to move beyond the mentality of ‘throwing away,’ and to work with all partners in this process.” Rivenburgh was a sustainability student worker with the Procurement Office last summer when she proposed the idea.

“Many departments on campus would love to work on sustainability projects, but don’t have the staff time to research projects or track data,” says Sustainability Manager Suzanne Savanick Hansen. She says that Justin Lee ’08 and Nicole Kligerman’10 worked last year as sustainability student workers and “helped tremendously in getting projects off the ground.”

The concept of student workers focused on sustainability came about last year as Lee researched and worked on renovating EcoHouse (Macalester Today, Spring 2008). “When I was puttering around Facilities, I managed to find some sustainable, cost-saving measures and convinced them to hire me for the school year to continue doing that,” he says. The same thing happened with the Procurement Office. Word spread, and Lee, now a sustainability associate at Mac, says, “People heard about the sustainability student workers and their projects, and somehow I turned around and we had nine student workers. I’m not sure how it happened, but I’m thrilled.”

Staff members had ideas for sustainability, Lee discovered, but little time to evaluate and implement those ideas. “People get touched by the idea of sustainability, and you start to get that cultural change. There are only two of us in the sustainability office, but now we have student workers in eight different departments making connections. That multiplies tenfold our efforts.”

Specific projects include drafting a printing policy for the college, establishing a campus listing service for free goods, developing a proposal for waste composting at Café Mac, and drafting an environmentally preferable purchasing policy (now being tested with furniture vendors considered for the Institute for Global Citizenship building).

GREEN STARDOM

The Green Star Award is designed to congratulate students, staff, and faculty members who have done something to improve sustainability on campus. Recipients are awarded a green paper star embedded with flower seeds, suitable for display or planting.
MIDDLE EAST DIRECT

FEW OF THEM SPOKE ARABIC, but when nine Macalester faculty and staff members traveled to the Middle East last summer with the Faculty Development International Seminar, language wasn’t the main logistical difficulty—checkpoints were.

Hundreds of checkpoints control travel to, from, and within the Palestinian Territories. Although holding American passports eased their passage, negotiating the checkpoints gave these scholars a personal taste of life in Arab East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Hebron.

Direct experience is key to the three-week, biannual international seminar, which facilitates scholarly exchange between Macalester faculty members and their colleagues around the world. This year’s seminar, “The Israeli-Palestinian Impasse: Dialogic Transformations,” took participants to multiple cities to meet with their colleagues in music, anthropology, political science, and other disciplines.

International Center Director Mike Monahan and Dean of the Institute for Global Citizenship Ahmed Samatar “did an excellent job linking us with research centers and organizations. I wanted to meet some of the people on the ground in the Palestinian-Irani issues, people dealing with occupation, border issues, refugee issues, the wall,” says Khaldoun Samman, director of the Middle Eastern Studies and Islamic Civilization program. “It was a fabulous opportunity for me. I also wanted to make some good connections with universities in the occupied territories, and I was able to do that with Bethlehem University and Birzeit University.”

Back on campus, students benefit from the faculty’s firsthand experience of these regions and from their connections with organizations abroad where students may one day study or work. Past seminars have taken faculty members to China, Turkey, Malaysia, South Africa, Brazil, and Hungary.

One of the seminar’s intangibles is the collegiality that it develops among faculty members whose disparate disciplines would otherwise rarely bring them together. “Because the United States is seen as having some responsibility for conditions in the occupied territories, we were constantly engaged by Palestinians on the subject of U.S. policy,” says Samman. “The Mac faculty members took it all in an open and receptive way; it was moving to see, and we all became closer because of it.”

FDIS Revealed

The Faculty Development International Seminar engages up to 15 Macalester faculty members in a three-week intensive research seminar with overseas colleagues. The seminar’s format and content are designed to fit the interests of both Macalester College and its host partners. It focuses on selected themes of great importance to the region, while also providing insight into other issues in the sciences, arts, humanities, and social sciences.

Beth Severy-Hoven, chair of the Classics Department, has been teaching Lysistrata for years. So when she sat in on a class about the Greek comedy taught by Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow Corby Kelly, she wasn’t expecting to gain new insight into a play she knew so well.

“Corby has a lot of performance experience, so he was teaching students about more than just an ancient text,” she says. “The class had a conversation about how a director might have more influence on a performance than the author or translator. They discussed modern ideas about gender, and how you might stage the play without offending people. It was fascinating—and it will change how I teach that text now.”

For Severy-Hoven, that experience got to the heart of what the Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship is all about. The two-year fellowships, which offer funding for up to two promising humanities and social sciences scholars each year, help Macalester breathe new life into its curricula while providing a launching pad for the careers of freshly minted professors. “It’s wonderful to have somebody new for a couple of years,” she says. “The fellows get to develop their teaching and research, and it energizes a department and gets them thinking about what they do in a fresh way.”

With the help of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Macalester began offering fellowships in 1999. Since then, 11 new professors in disciplines ranging from economics to English have served as fellows. When the funding term ended in 2005, Macalester received $1.5 million from Mellon to create an endowment that will permanently sustain the program for two fellows each year. The college has raised another $1.5 million to fully endow the program.

Provost Kathleen Murray says the program has paid and will continue to pay big dividends. “The fellows really enrich the intellectual community,” she says. “When you bring in these bright young stars, their enthusiasm is infectious, and I think that has a genuine benefit campus-wide.”
Mellon fellow Corby Kelly in the Janet Wallace Fine Arts Center’s main stage theater and (left) with classics students in his classroom.
MOVING MACALESTER FORWARD

The Mellon program started as an experiment. Although many saw the potential for a program that would provide two-year positions to promising scholars, no one was sure it would succeed. “That’s where Mellon came in,” says Murray. “They provide funding for a time, and if it’s a program that works, they expect you to figure out how to sustain it.” Similar Mellon-funded programs are offered at several other colleges across the nation.

When the program began, it gave a boost to several initiatives that Macalester had been working on, including lowering the student-faculty ratio and increasing the number of faculty members doing interdisciplinary work. “It helped us move from a 12:1 student-faculty ratio to a 10:1 ratio,” says Murray. “And although we knew we would eventually be hiring tenure-track faculty members with an interdisciplinary emphasis, this program helped us get there a bit earlier than we would have otherwise.”

The program is also luring some of the nation’s best scholars from large research universities. The prestigious fellowships, which offer low teaching loads, relatively high salaries, and plenty of mentoring from veteran faculty members, encourage scholars to take a closer look at careers at small, private liberal arts schools, which might not otherwise have been on their radar. “If we can bring these scholars in for two years, we have a chance to show them the value of this type of education,” says Murray.

It’s a strategy that works: While the positions are capped at two years, one former fellow, Sarah West, has gone on to take a tenure-track position in Macalester’s Department of Economics. Others speak glowingly of their time at the school, and are more inclined to recruit graduate school students from colleges like Mac.

The short time commitment makes the hiring process less challenging, and also encourages departments to take risks on scholars who might not fit the traditional Macalester mold. Often, the scholars end up being a perfect fit.

Andrew Billing, who started his two-year fellowship in the French and Francophone Studies Department last fall, says the scholars do their share to boost Macalester’s reputation. A significant portion of the fellow’s time is devoted to research, and the college reaps some of the benefits of their work. “We go to conferences and publish under the Macalester name,” he says. “Hopefully, that’s good for the profile of the college.”

STUDENT-CENTERED

While academic departments are always happy to have another member and fellows are delighted with the time to focus on their research, students are the primary beneficiaries of the program. Because of the fellows, Mac students can take new courses, connect with scholars who share their academic interests, and get candid advice about academic life after college.

Adding a professor to a small department like classics has an immediate impact, says Severy-Hoven. During fall semester, for example, Kelly taught a course on Greek comedy that the department hasn’t been able to offer in the past. Jacob Cormack ’10 says a Latin class he took with Kelly last year encouraged him to take on a larger independent project translating Latin poetry this year. “Corby’s enthusiasm and passion for Latin rubbed off on me,” says Cormack. “It wasn’t until I had a class with him that I began to fully appreciate the beauty of Latin poetry. He’s had a big influence on the direction I’m taking in my Latin studies.”

Because fellows arrive at Macalester soon after completing graduate school, they offer some of the most cutting-edge research in the field. This gives Macalester students an advantage as they look forward to graduate school or careers after commencement.

The French Department’s Billing says his responsibilities to students extend well beyond the classes he teaches. He’s talked to several students about graduate school—what they should look for and when they should go, he says. “I think it’s helpful that I’ve done graduate work recently. I can tell them what it’s like and what the job market is like today.”

Kelly has assisted with a range of student endeavors, including reading senior honors projects, supervising independent study projects, and getting the Aristophones play The Birds produced on campus. Says Kelly, “There’s no limit to the things you can get involved in here.”

The influence of Mellon fellows like Kelly and Billing begins when they step on campus, but doesn’t end when they move on. “Fellows contribute new ideas and directions that we can pursue even after they’ve left,” Severy-Hoven says. “And that long-term ripple effect is really valuable.”

ERIN PETERSON is a regular contributor to Macalester Today.
Macalester alums take the college’s lessons of civic engagement into the workplace and out into the world.

BY LAURA BILLINGS

KATE MAEHR ’89 admits that she isn’t the most likely person to run one of the Midwest’s largest food distribution networks. The executive who preceded her in this huge Chicago warehouse was a retired Marine brigadier general, more accustomed to giving orders and deploying personnel than is Maehr, an English major and mother of two with a passion for Madame Bovary.

Still, she picked up a skill at Macalester while running the campus literary magazine that has served her surprisingly well in a field she never imagined entering. “I’ve always been fascinated by the power of narrative,” says Maehr. “Now I use those skills I learned at Mac to tell the story of what it’s like to be hungry in Chicago—and then I tell people what they can do about it.”

Maehr is executive director of the Greater Chicago Food Depository, the largest food shelf network in the country, which distributes 46 million pounds of food to more than a half million of Chicago’s hungry every year. Her storytelling abilities helped drive a $30 million development effort to build the centralized warehouse where she now works, managing a staff of 150 employees, thousands of volunteers and donors, and an annual budget of $18 million.

Not a trained logistician, engineer, or MBA, Maehr has a management style she picked up in her first-year seminar. “Probably the most important thing I took away from Macalester was the ability to ask why. Why do we do it this way? Why do we make people go to one place for food stamps, another place to visit a WIC site, and another place to get food at a food shelf?” says Maehr, who admits that challenging the status quo “doesn’t always make me the most popular person in the room.”

But her inquiring method does get results, particularly during the relief effort she coordinated in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina, which earned her recognition on the cover of Crain’s Chicago Business as one of the “40 under 40” civic leaders to watch. Maehr herself believes that her husband, Sam Pickering ’89, is more deserving of recognition for community service. “He’s a Chicago public school teacher,” she says. “They’re the real champions of the world.”

Yet her career path is instructive in the growing debate in higher education that asks whether colleges are producing enough graduates like Maehr, who plan to use their campus-honed talents to make the world a better place. In fact, in her commencement address last spring, Harvard’s new president, Drew Gilpin Faust, raised concerns about the fact that nearly half of Harvard graduates entering the workplace in 2007 took high-salary jobs with financial and consulting firms, rather than work in the public sector or non-profit world. Even in 2008, with a more challenging economy, 39 percent of Harvard grads made the same choice. The trend is so strong that a prominent Harvard professor has begun teaching a “reflections” seminar to students at Harvard, Amherst, and Colby, pushing them to ponder their education and aspirations.

But many Macalester alums offer a different perspective on that debate about whether it’s necessary to choose a life of civic engagement over a livable salary. “It’s kind of corny, but almost everyone I met at Macalester wants to change the world,” says Kes Puckorius ’03, an economics major from Lithuania. “And it’s amazing how many of them are doing that.” Their experiences suggest that there may be no single path from college into community service—though for many, coming to Macalester was the first step.
Kate Maehr ’89 leads the Greater Chicago Food Depository, which made national news on Thanksgiving when President-elect Obama (inset) and his family helped distribute food from the group’s Producemobile.
**FINDING A MISSION**

From its beginnings as a Presbyterian college, Macalester has always attracted students with a strong sense of mission, and today’s students carry on those traditions in new ways. For the last two decades, the annual Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys of the country’s incoming freshmen have consistently shown that Macalester students have higher rates of volunteerism and greater interest in promoting racial understanding, community action, and changing social values than do their peers at other institutions.

“I see a lot of students who come to Macalester in part to find these kindred spirits—young people who want to be change agents,” says Karin Trail-Johnson, associate dean of the Institute for Global Citizenship, and director of the Civic Engagement Center (CEC). “When you ask them what they want to do, they want to do it all. So our job as educators is to keep that flame alive by showing them what they can accomplish, even in their time on campus.”

That lesson starts during first-year students week, when all 500 students take part in a one-day service project or community exploration event that helps “set the expectation that this is part of the college mission,” says Trail-Johnson, noting that the CEC works with nearly half the student body every year. In fact, 92 percent of Macalester students will take part in some kind of community service before they graduate—volunteering for a local non-profit, interning for a public service agency, working in one of the 45 work/study community service positions, or taking one of the 36 classes that include some aspect of community-based outreach or research in their coursework.

Although these projects are generally located close to campus, students are often surprised to find their community service connects them to a wider world than they may have expected to find in the Twin Cities. When Munem Alidina ’05 went on a retreat with several professors to the Mercado Central, a cooperative Latin American marketplace in Minneapolis, it was the Tanzanian native’s “introduction to how many cultures there really are here,” he recalls. Alidina became especially interested in the wave of Somali refugees who began arriving in the Twin Cities in the 1990s. “Maybe being from East Africa myself is why it first interested me,” says Alidina, who went on to teach English and other skills to Somali immigrants at Volunteers of America (VOA) on Minneapolis’s West Bank.

Although he works now as a consultant for the financial services firm Deloitte, with assignments that frequently take him away from Minneapolis, Alidina recently corralled coworkers to spend a day at the VOA refurbishing computers, doing landscape work, and learning about the needs of the West Bank community during a Deloitte community service day. “It seemed like a good opportunity to introduce people to the work that goes on there,” he says.

Such community service projects are also a way to introduce Mac students to work they might like to do in the future. Trail-Johnson reports that many graduates find jobs with organizations they’ve interned for during college, among them the Minnesota Public Interest Research Group and Campus Compact. Other students find that their community service work helps them hone their career interests even before commencement. For instance, Rachel Farris ’05 worked at Planned Parenthood while she was a student, providing direct service to clients. Gaining on-the-job experience and a growing knowledge of Twin Cities women’s advocacy groups helped Farris find a job as operations administrator for the Jeremiah Program, founded by Macalester alumna Gloria Perez Jordan ’99. The Twin Cities non-profit fosters self-sufficiency in single mothers by offering them housing and mentoring while they earn post-secondary degrees.

Farris recently visited one of Trail-Johnson’s classes and shared what she’s learned about community service and finding a career. “She was really struck by how many ways you can effect change working in philanthropy,” recalls Trail-Johnson. “It was exciting to hear such a recent alum make that discovery, because that’s a message we really try to emphasize. Community service doesn’t have to mean joining the Peace Corps, or leaving your job every lunch hour to volunteer as an ESL teacher—it means being a change agent wherever you are. Whether you’re a CEO or a social worker, you can make the world a better place by working for change within your own sphere.”

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“**If you can help to tell a story in a way that engages people and increases their understanding of a part of the world they didn’t know anything about, you can show them why this matters, and why they should care.”** —KARIN RONNOW ’84

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**CHANGE AGENTS ON THE JOB**

That’s a lesson that many alums say they learned at Macalester, even before there was an official Civic Engagement Center on campus. “Macalester taught me to be an independent thinker, and not to be afraid of what I believe in,” recalls Rebecca Otto ’85. The first Democratic woman ever elected state auditor of Minnesota, Otto is also a passionate advocate for green building, and lives in a passive solar, super-insulated, wind-powered house she and her husband built together. She uses their home to spread the word about energy efficient building, and recently distributed her own “Best Practices Guide” to local governments showing them what they can do to save energy and reduce costs. “When people say, ‘One person can’t make a difference,’ Macalester taught me to say, ‘Watch me,’” she says.

It was an assignment from anthropology professor Jack Weatherford asking students to learn and locate every country in the world
that first got Ann Jolicoeur Thomas ’93 thinking about how to build community across cultures. That’s now one of her goals for SEEdebate.org, an online classroom tool she and a partner launched recently, which allows students to discuss and debate current events with classrooms across the country. Although she spent 10 years running her family’s paper business in Massachusetts, the 2004 election prompted her to make a change: “I wanted to get young people interested in politics and voting, and engaged in the world around them.” Though SEEdebate.org is still in its infancy, more than 2,500 users have already found the site and used it to share their varying viewpoints. The discussions about gun control between students in Montana and in Queens, New York, “have been just awesome,” says Thomas.

Karin Ronnow ’84 recently saw an opportunity in her job to make some global connections to her own community of Bozeman, Montana. Bozeman is also home to Greg Mortenson, co-author of the best-selling Three Cups of Tea and co-founder of the Central Asia Institute, which has created community-based schools in remote areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Bozeman Daily Chronicle, where Ronnow works as managing editor, originally declined her proposal to follow Mortenson on a trip to Afghanistan, so Ronnow and a photographer paid for the journey themselves. The five-part series they returned with proved so popular with readers, however, that the publisher decided to reimburse them for their expenses. Now 150,000 additional copies of their series have been distributed far outside of Bozeman.

“That project has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career,” says Ronnow, who plans to travel with Mortenson again. “If you can help to tell a story in a way that engages people and increases their understanding of a part of the world they didn’t know anything about, then you can show them why this matters, and why they should care.”

In her work with the Global Fund for Children, Joan Shifrin ’79 saw firsthand what a difference could be made in the lives of children in developing countries by improving the lives of their mothers. “We know that when you put money in the hands of women they tend to spend it in more effective ways—they feed their children, they send them to school,” says the former international studies major.

Ten years ago, she and a partner launched Global Goods Partners, a fair-trade, non-profit group that promotes women-led development initiatives by selling textiles and handcrafts made in marginalized communities in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. “One of the lessons I learned at Macalester was that small change...
Rachel Farris '05 in a Jeremiah Program child care center. Says Farris, "I do a mixture of human resources, facilities management, fishing people’s keys out of the elevator—it can be 100 different things in a day."
can lead to bigger change,” says Shifrin, who says the same principle applies to her non-profit, where “a small purchase can have a very big effect on other people’s lives.”

GET A SALARY, SAVE THE WORLD?

It’s worth noting that Shifrin, who attended graduate school at Johns Hopkins, didn’t go directly into non-profit work. “I worked in the private sector, and I felt like that’s where I needed to be financially,” she says. “It was only after becoming a mother, and looking at what I really felt invested in personally that I made the move to non-profits.”

In fact, many Macalester alumni who have worked in both worlds say there may be less cause for concern in the trend toward high-salary jobs right after graduation. “I remember when I went to work for a consulting firm, some of my friends thought I’d sold my soul to the capitalists,” jokes Fred Swaniker ’99, originally from Ghana (see story on page 32). Yet it was the experience he gained working for a consulting firm in Johannesburg, South Africa, and the skills he took from the Stanford business school training the firm paid for that gave him the tools he needed to open the African Leadership Academy.

Though Swaniker did ultimately give up his consulting work to “focus on my dream,” other Mac alums have managed to combine careers in business with civic engagement work. For instance, former economics major Michael Okrob ’04 works for a management consulting firm in Berlin but has also co-founded Teach First, a German version of Teach for America.

Kes Puckorius ’03 went to work for the Analysis Group in Boston, and inspired by the non-profit work of his wife, Robin Rich ’03, has also served on the boards of a charter school, a homeless shelter, and a music-based youth development program, among other non-profit work. Now finishing his second year at Wharton business school, he’s a guest board member of the White-Williams Scholars, a program designed to help high-achieving Philadelphia public school students get to college. After he completes graduate school, Puckorius and his wife plan to return to Boston, where he expects to take up careers that combine equal parts private sector work and community service. “I think you can do both,” he says.

“We need to have an ecosystem in which everybody has a role to play,” agrees Swaniker. “It’s not one group against another—we’re all partners in making the world a better place. That’s something I love about the spirit of Macalester, that desire to do good and change the world.”

Chicago food bank director Maehr hopes that spirit continues to move other Macalester grads into jobs like hers, where the needs are only growing in this uncertain economy. “The stakes are high,” says Maehr, who saw customers to Chicago area food shelves shoot up by nearly 40 percent last fall. “We need the best and brightest doing this work.”

St. Paul resident LAURA BILLINGS is a regular contributor to Macalester Today.
ONE FATEFUL WEDNESDAY IN 1980, 6-year-old Kristi Curry squirmed excitedly in her desk in a first-grade classroom in Sikeston, Missouri. Her teacher was about to pass out that week’s issue of Weekly Reader, and Curry looked forward to losing herself in the stories inside the national magazine for schoolchildren. On that particular day, she read a story that changed her life.

“It was written by Jack Horner, who is now a celebrity paleontologist. He’s the real-life scientist that the Jurassic Park character is based on,” Mac Professor Kristi Curry Rogers recalls now in her campus office, where skulls and specimen jars share shelf space with books and photographs.

Horner’s Weekly Reader article mesmerized her as a young student with a topic most kids love: babies. He’d written about his discovery of the first dinosaur eggs and embryos in the Western Hemisphere, on Egg Mountain in Montana. The discovery established Horner’s career, and settled questions of whether some dinosaurs were sociable, built nests, and cared for their young. Horner and his partner named the new dinosaur genus Maiasaura, meaning “good mother lizard.”

“I was stunned to think about dinosaurs looking after their young,” Curry Rogers remembers. “I had only thought of dinosaurs as cold-blooded, dim-witted creatures to be feared. But to think of them as good parents . . . how cool is that?”

The first-grader bounded home from school and let loose a torrent of dinosaur questions that never ended. At first, her parents encouraged her. “My dad was especially supportive, because he was interested himself,” she says. “We’d get books and articles and watch specials on public television.” Eventually, though, she wanted to search for real fossils. “When I was in seventh grade, I wrote to a professor at the nearest university, asking about excavation work and where to find fossils. He wrote back and offered to meet me.” Curry and her father drove to the campus, and came away with a carefully marked map of the best nearby fossil-finding sites. Many hours of father-daughter amateur fieldwork followed.

Around the same time, Curry saw an announcement for a Girl Scout summer camp, a program of Montana State University and the Museum of the Rockies, in which 16- to 18-year-old girls could do hands-on work at a real excavation site. Even better, her old hero, Jack Horner, also worked at those institutions and was associated with the camp. At 14, though, Curry was too young to participate. “My parents made me a deal: If I stayed in Girls Scouts and the camp came around again, they’d let me go.”

The camp did come around again, the summer before Curry’s senior year, and her parents kept their word—although they made their daughter pay her own way, which she did by washing cars and giving baton-twirling lessons. Finally, she was off to Montana for a real dinosaur dig.

“My parents hoped I’d come back cured,” she laughs. “They were starting to worry about when I would grow out of the idea of paleontology as a career. They didn’t see it as a realistic future for me. They’d say, ‘You wouldn’t like it. You don’t like to get dirty, you don’t like to be hot, you sunburn like crazy, this isn’t the life for...”
Kristi Curry Rogers in Olin-Rice’s Lepp Museum with bones from the oldest known dinosaurs—Herrerasaurus and Eoraptor.
you.’ So the main reason they let me go to dinosaur camp was to end this obsession.”

That plan backfired magnificently. Curry loved everything about the camp, and when she returned to Missouri she began sending letters back to Montana in hopes of securing a job for the following summer. “My mind was made up,” says Curry Rogers. “I was going back to Montana after graduation to work at the camp. I was going to meet Jack Horner, convince him to give me a job in his department, pay my way at Montana State University, and pursue my dream of paleontology.”

She got hired on as kitchen help at the camp and it was then, her second summer in Montana, when Curry finally met Jack Horner. “He stuck out his hand by way of introduction, and I couldn’t believe it,” she says. “He gave me this limp, cold fish handshake! And since my dad had always carefully instructed me in how to present myself, I blurted out, ‘Didn’t anyone ever teach you how to shake hands?’ And Jack Horner said, ‘I guess not.’ So I demonstrated a proper handshake. And then I was mortified, convinced that I’d ruined my plan to impress this man.”

Two weeks later, when Curry spotted Horner at a public lecture, she tried to slip past him unnoticed, but he called out, “Haven’t we met before?” and stuck out his hand again. This time his handshake was firm. “You’ve been practicing,” Curry said. Before the conversation was over, she had landed a job in Horner’s research department and was on her way toward a biology degree from Montana State University.

That first degree was soon followed by a PhD in anatomical sciences from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, which Curry chose “expressly because my mentor would be a woman, and from the time I was a kid I just hadn’t seen that many women working in this field.” Mentor Cathy Forster was open-minded about how Curry would focus her research, and strongly encouraged her to do fieldwork. “In fact, Cathy gave me my first key opportunities and taught me how to do international fieldwork, where sometimes you just have to wait until the tribal elder says it’s okay to go out.”

Today there are a few more women in paleontology, due in part to a small group who’ve paved the way. That includes For-
ster and Curry Rogers, whose early fieldwork together in Madagascar led to the discovery of a skeleton of a new species of titanosaur (among the giants of the dinosaur world), the first recovered almost perfectly intact with its skull still attached to its body. Curry Rogers named her newly discovered species—now known as Rapetosaurus—“mischievous giant lizard.” The Rapetosaurus skeleton is currently mounted at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago.

Fieldwork has since taken Curry Rogers from Madagascar to Montana and museum studies have taken her across the United States and to places as far-flung as Romania.

But it was love that brought her to Minnesota. “Ray and I met on the Mahajanga Basin Project in Madagascar,” she explains about her marriage to Macalester geology professor Ray Rogers. By their second expedition together they had become friends. “When the expedition was over,” says Curry Rogers, “we went on two dates and got married.” Ray was already established at Macalester, so Minnesota became the couple’s home.

Soon Curry Rogers was working at the Science Museum of Minnesota as a curator, and later started guest teaching at Macalester, offering a popular class on dinosaurs. When last year she was faced with deciding between teaching and curating, she says, “I found that I just didn’t want to give up teaching or research.”

Last fall Curry Rogers joined the Macalester biology department as a full-time professor. She balances teaching with mothering 5-year-old Lucy, once again breaking ground by bringing the small girl (who prefers princesses to dinosaurs) on fieldwork expeditions. “Last summer she canoed with us 50 miles down the Missouri River and paddled the whole way,” says Curry Rogers.

In the classroom, it’s the enthusiasm and creativity of Mac students that inspires Curry Rogers most. She says her group of first-year seminar students studying biodiversity and evolution “bring so much passion to the topic, it’s a joy to go to class.”

Her 55-student dinosaur course, by contrast, fulfills a distribution requirement and thus attracts everyone from art majors needing a science credit to biology majors intending to pursue careers in the field. “I essentially use dinosaurs to teach how science operates,” she says.

“Early on, paleontology was mostly about digging up bones because there was so little to go on. Now it’s about looking deeply at the big story of evolution, of how dinosaurs lived and interacted. Everything that’s a fossil is part of this context of the evolutionary history of life. That’s what’s inherently interesting to students—the idea of deep time, millions and billions of years, and how humans have had such a momentous impact in such a blip of time in the history of the earth.”

Predicting or understanding the impact of a moment in time is mysterious to be sure. But Curry Rogers’s parents—who today are delighted with their daughter’s career path—must still marvel at the cascading effects of a certain issue of Weekly Reader they have tucked away as a reminder of the day their daughter discovered dinosaurs.

JEANNIE OUELLETTE is a Minneapolis writer.
When Macalester’s Step Forward capital campaign kicked off with a series of mid-October events, attendees were invited to celebrate the college’s Scottish heritage by dusting off their tartans. Some took that invitation more seriously than others, but suffice it to say that for that weekend, at least, there was plenty of plaid.

The a cappella group The Traditions always takes the tartan directive to heart.
Libby Sneelson ‘78 (right), president of the Macalester Alumni Board, opted for sparkly plaid.

Board of Trustees chair David Deno with Anne Crandall Campbell (right)

Step Forward campaign chair Jerry Crawford ‘71 spoke to the gala crowd.

Lee Nystrom ‘73 with his wife, Gail Christenson Nystrom

Former president John B. Davis (left) with M Club president Steve Cox ‘76

Dr. John W. Ring ‘51 discusses a poster presentation with Avery Bowran ’10.
Macalester students and faculty took full advantage of...
WHEN THE REPUBLICAN National Convention convened in St. Paul from September 1 to 4, it was a rare opportunity for Macalester students to directly observe—and participate in—national political events. Recognizing how a gathering of that size would affect the availability of hotel rooms and airline flights, Macalester chose to start school a week earlier than usual, providing some unique educational opportunities.

**Prez Psych 101**

Psychology professor Kendrick Brown’s first-year class “Psychology of Presidential Politics” used psychological principles and theories to examine the formation of voters’ political beliefs and how Americans perceive presidential character and leadership. When Senator John McCain chose Governor Sarah Palin as his running mate, Brown’s class examined the choice in terms of social-identity theory, which deals with the idea of “in” groups and “out” groups. “Given this election, I felt like there was a lot to say,” Brown says. “I’m interested in the ebb and flow, the give and take, of politics.”
Math Meets Politics

Popular vote versus electoral vote, the apportionment problem, redistricting and gerrymandering—such topics are part of the mathematical field of game theory, as well as timely subjects for discussion during a national political convention, says mathematics professor Karen Saxe. Her course “Mathematics—Its Content and Spirit” focuses on the mathematics used in social choice and decision-making. Saxe moved the course from spring to fall, in part to coincide with the RNC. “We look at how elections work in the United States and other democracies and introduce such game theory concepts as pure and mixed strategies, Nash equilibria, bargaining, deterrence, cooperation, and the public good.”

Realpolitik

Political science professor Julie Dolan’s “Political Participation” and “Foundations of U.S. Politics” classes toured the RNC convention site before the delegates arrived, then spent a few course hours discussing the role of political party conventions and how they’ve changed over time. “Finally, we spent a day discussing protests surrounding the convention and how the media portrayed these protests,” says Dolan.

Set Design

Designers John Shaffner ’74 and partner Joe Stewart designed the set for the Republican National Convention, as they have for the previous two RNCs. Although the set was relatively simple this year—a podium and the largest four-millimeter high-definition LED screen ever assembled—preparing for such high-profile events is never simple. “The project always provides for a fascinating up-close, front-seat view of the American political process in addition to the challenges of working in such a large venue,” says Shaffner. He and Stewart have won six Emmys—three for David Copperfield specials, two for The Ellen DeGeneres Show, and one for The George Lopez Show. They have designed for the Super Bowl halftime show, the American Music Awards, Friends, and specials for such stars as Willie Nelson, Michael Jackson, and Andy Williams. In addition, Shaffner is chair of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

“...the Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars. With Macalester support, three Mac students—chosen by lottery—took part in this group’s two-week seminar at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, then served as RNC interns. Their stories follow.

CNN

Senior Caroline Ettinger (New York City) was placed with CNN as a runner for the CNN Grill—actually St. Paul’s Eagle Street Grille as re-outfitted by the news organization. With its prized location inside the convention perimeter, the CNN Grill was a gathering spot for politicos, celebrities, and guests of CNN. Among the CNN runners were four students from Southern Methodist University and one from Northern Ireland. “The discussions I had with the other runners were among the most interesting of my life,” says Ettinger, who considers herself a liberal. “I started to understand why someone would be a Republican. My friend from Northern Ireland also provided an interesting viewpoint because on social issues such as health care and education he agreed with me, but on all other issues he agreed with the Texans, and overall he was a McCain supporter. This experience was the first time I had ever been in the political minority, and it really opened up my eyes to how half of this country thinks.”

Houston Chronicle

Junior Kyle Archer (Stow, Ohio) hit the jackpot in terms of fully experiencing the convention, first being assigned to the Houston Chronicle and then being briefly zip-tied and detained when the Rage Against the Machine concert let out in Minneapolis. (He was released after producing both press and RNC credentials.) In St. Paul, his Chronicle

INTERNS AT THE RNC

Set designer John Shaffner ’74 tries out the podium at the RNC.
Protests
An estimated 150 Macalester students and friends marched to the state capitol on Labor Day to respond to the RNC, according to Dean of Students Jim Hoppe. In anticipation of the RNC, Mac members of Students for a Democratic Society had helped out-of-town protestors find housing with students and sympathetic neighbors, and developed workshops on peaceful organizing. As they gathered on campus that day, preparing to march, they were met by police. At the request of President Rosenberg the police remained on the border of campus, since all events on campus had been peaceful. Vice President for Student Affairs Laurie Hamre, Director of Safety and Security Terry Gorman, and Hoppe were also on hand, which may have helped convince police that the protestors posed no threat. The march to the Capitol was peaceful. From there the Mac students joined with a larger group of protesters marching from the Capitol to the convention site. At the convention site conflicts with police ensued and some Mac students were pepper sprayed and arrested.

JAN SHAW-FLAMM ’76 is a regular contributor to Macalester Today.

Arabic Language TV
Junior David Klock (Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania) was assigned to the U.S. government-sponsored Arabic language satellite television network Al-Hurra, which is aimed at the Middle East. His responsibilities were light, so he spent much of his time exploring the convention and the protests outside, and blogging for Pennsylvania’s Pottstown Mercury. He saw most of the big names speak, including Governor Palin and Senator McCain. Although delegates were bused in and out of downtown St. Paul, interns were on their own to navigate their way around town. In one of his blog entries, Klock wrote about walking uneasily toward his car one evening with a Palestinian friend when they encountered “phalanxes of Guardsmen”: “The Guardsmen were clearly nervous themselves—which did nothing to help the situation. Eventually we reached the end of the road, where a fence and a group of Guardsmen blocked the intersection. We asked one to let us through, and he told us what was happening—a group of violent protestors was planning to march down the road, and they were preparing to defend it. The soldier eventually let us through, but he told us that once we were on the other side, we had better run—because if we were on the protestors’ side when the trouble started, the soldiers wouldn’t be able to tell us apart.”
RUBBISH Revolution

The Minneapolis company of Poldi Gerard-Ngo ’75 is helping Vietnam go green.
HEN POLDI GERARD-NGO ’75 graduated from Macalester with a sociology degree, she assumed—reasonably enough—that she’d apply her education to a career in social work. Instead, her company is now completing Vietnam’s first-ever project to make good use of rubbish.

The $52 million waste-to-compost plant outside of Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) will eventually employ 600 workers and process 1,200 tons of garbage daily. The end product—rich, organic fertilizer—will be marketed to farm-service companies. And an on-site facility will process plastic garbage bags into condensed pellets to supply Vietnamese plastic manufacturers who would otherwise import raw materials. Scheduled to begin operating last month, the facility will be replicated in several other cities in Vietnam and serve as a model throughout Southeast Asia.

Composting offers the perfect waste-management solution in climates with tropical heat and monsoon seasons, Gerard-Ngo explains. It’s a major green step forward in Vietnam, a country where poor waste-management practices and inadequately lined landfills have led to serious water pollution.

“Everything we do has a green tint,” says Gerard-Ngo of her Minneapolis-based company, Lemna International, Inc. Gerard-Ngo runs the operation with her husband, Viet Ngo, a University of Minnesota–trained engineer who arrived in the United States from Vietnam at age 18.

“We met at a disco dance class in 1979, but ignored each other for three weeks,” Gerard-Ngo recalls. “I said no to marriage at first, but he persisted, and the third time he asked I gave in.” Viet Ngo began his search for an all-natural wastewater treatment process in a garage in Brooklyn Park. Gerard-Ngo was involved with her husband’s work from the beginning, first by doing the bookkeeping.

She stepped away from the business to raise the couple’s three sons (now 27, 22, and 18), but 13 years ago turned her attention back, and is now vice president of marketing. This “involves a lot of thinking, and how to look beyond their words to understand people’s motivations. You have to understand where people are coming from, their needs, their cultural context and subtext. Learning this was, for me, like a light bulb going on.”

More than 30 years later, Gerard-Ngo finds her old sociology background still surfacing regularly, intensifying her curiosity and lending focus to her observations. “For instance, there’s great reverence for education and for teachers in Vietnam. Even after leaving school, people keep studying to improve themselves. Yet my Vietnamese employees sometimes resist digging in, rolling up their sleeves as an American might. They tend to instead seek the expert, someone they think will have just the right answer.”

Differences such as these intrigue Gerard-Ngo, and further convince her of the importance of experiencing cultures different from one’s own. “The opportunities I’ve had to experience other cultures have made me believe in the yin and yang of life, the good and not-so-good of every culture. It’s not a matter of ranking different cultures but of understanding their differences—and the implications of those differences.”

That same passion for observation and reflection underlies Lemna’s commitment to implement creative new solutions to environmental challenges. The company’s self-described mission is “to transform waste into useful compounds to reforest environmentally ravaged areas, create green belts and parkways for cities, promote eco-tourism, and protect and nurture endangered fauna and flora.” Their waste-to-compost facility outside of Ho Chi Minh City seems to manifest that mission beautifully. “This project is close to both our hearts,” Gerard-Ngo says. “This is our first venture into Vietnam, and a return for my husband. It’s such a win–win situation.”

Jeanne Ouellette is a Minneapolis freelance writer.
AFRICA
Fred Swaniker ’98 has founded an elite new residential secondary school in South Africa that is molding leaders for Africa’s future.

By Jan Shaw-Flamm ’76

The African Leadership Academy (ALA) on the outskirts of Johannesburg, South Africa, is already harder to get into than Harvard, and it just opened its doors last fall. The first class, made up of 97 secondary school students from 29 countries, is full of energetic and entrepreneurial types from throughout the continent.

Take, for example, William Kamkwamba of Malawi, who built a windmill to provide electricity for his family’s home. Or Belinda Munemo of Zimbabwe, who built an agricultural business to create ongoing income for an orphaned family. Then there’s Ethiopian Dawit Bekele Mekonnen, who proposed a restructuring of the Addis Ababa public transportation system. With students such as these, and driven and dedicated founder Fred Swaniker ’98, the ALA seems destined to play a significant role in an exhilarating new era in Africa.

Just a few years ago, with an MBA from Stanford, Swaniker was working as a consultant with McKinsey & Company in South Africa. He was poised to live the kind of life that dreams are made of. But Swaniker had another dream he couldn’t turn his back on: founding a two-year, coeducational boarding school for Africans of every country, one that would develop leaders and entrepreneurs with twin passions for Africa and public service.

On the ALA Web site, he explains, “I kept asking myself this question: ‘What will it take to make Africa prosper?’” He looked at prosperous societies and realized “people in those societies had developed important new ideas—some of them simple, some of them revolutionary—and implemented these ideas.”

Swaniker is uniquely qualified to launch a school with lofty, pan-African goals. Several generations of his family have been involved in founding schools in Africa. He helped launch a top private elementary school in Botswana and the leadership development program Global Leadership Adventures, with campuses in Ghana, South Africa, India, Brazil, and Costa Rica. He has lived in Ghana, the Gambia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Nigeria.

But there was the little matter of the $124,000 that McKinsey had advanced for Swaniker’s MBA, on the condition that he return to the firm after Stanford. Swaniker tried to hire someone to start the school he envisioned, but in October 2004 he wound up quitting McKinsey and committed to reimbursing them for the tuition. “I realized that I couldn’t outsource my dream,” he says. Apparently there were no hard feelings: two managers from McKinsey became his first backers. There have been many more since, including Cisco Systems, the JPMorgan Chase Foundation, and a host of other companies, foundations, and individuals, making it possible for Swaniker to buy and renovate a former printing college in Gauteng Province, home to Johannesburg and Pretoria, a cosmopolitan hub that places the school near plenty of mentors and guest speakers. The school will assist its graduating students in applying to top colleges and universities anywhere in the world.

At minimum, half of ALA’s students will pay nothing to attend (in its first year, this number is closer to 80 percent). But this isn’t a grant—it’s a “forgivable loan.” When graduates turn 25, ALA will contact them. If they are working in Africa and plan to do so for at least 10 more years, their debt will be waived. If they are working anywhere but Africa, they will owe tuition plus accrued interest.

Swaniker is serious about this unconventional tuition plan. He sees it as a way to start overcoming Africa’s colonial legacy, as expressed in a popular preference for “safe” civil service jobs. “Africa won’t come out of poverty unless we become entrepreneurs,” he told Forbes magazine for a recent article about ALA. “We want their talents back in Africa.”

“Over the next 50 years, African Leadership Academy will develop 6,000 leaders for Africa,” says Swaniker. “Entrepreneurial and ethical leaders who will launch large-scale enterprises that can eradicate poverty, who will establish innovative non-profit organizations that address Africa’s most pressing social and environmental challenges, and who will enable governments to make effective policies that will facilitate economic growth, public health, and political stability. Simply put, this academy aims to transform Africa.”

Jan Shaw-Flamm is a regular contributor to Macalester Today.

About the African Leadership Academy

- Opened September 2008
- Aims to develop the next generation of African leaders and entrepreneurs
- Two-year intensive program
- Admission merit-based
- Average class size: 12
- Target student body: 250
- World-renowned international faculty
- Language of instruction: English. Students are required to learn another language broadly spoken in Africa.

Web Connect: www.africanleadershipacademy.org
The Optional Auto

BY MARY MORSE MARTI ’82

FOR SEVERAL WEEKS last summer my husband and I were unfettered by the need to commute to work. Unfettered, too, by paychecks, and burdened with the knowledge that car emissions were killing the planet, it made sense to minimize our driving. The resulting experiment with walking and bicycling for daily errands was revelatory.

Though we live in the city, our stomping grounds are suburban in character. Neighborhood pharmacies and food stores were long ago converted to tanning parlors and martial arts studios. Despite the lovely boulevards and some bicycling amenities, our area is criss-crossed by multi-lane highway feeder streets that make non-recreational foot and bicycle travel unnerving, if not dangerous.

Still, we set out on our quiet metal machines, seeking dedicated bike trails to minimize our interaction with cars. Our favorite was the Midtown Greenway, which runs for 5.7 miles through south Minneapolis. Strange indeed to pedal four miles one way to pick up a bottle of ketchup, but the ride along the Greenway was so invigorating and refreshingly free of cars that that grocery store became a regular destination.

Everybody in our household took part in shunning cars. The irony of our son traveling to his driver’s education classes via bicycle did not escape notice. We declared destinations under two miles verboten unless reached by bike or on foot. Despite the higher prices charged by neighborhood businesses, we knew that we’d save money by not buying gasoline. Plus, we were overjoyed to avoid the psychically and physically exhausting heat islands that are parking lots of the big box stores.

We capped the summer with a 60-mile weekend trip to a regional park west of Minneapolis, bikes loaded with tent and sleeping bags. Other campers noticed our lack of a minivan and were astounded to learn that our family had traveled to the park almost entirely via bike trail. Instead of hauling a camp stove, we endured the hardship of dinner at a restaurant overlooking Lake Minnetonka.

It was a beautiful, nearly car-free summer, and we loved it. For most people, however, cars are simply the only game in town. A slavish devotion to privatization, a lack of public transportation, and bad urban planning have led to a near monopoly for private cars for over half a century. Cars have so many downsides, however, that I can’t help wondering why we love them so.

Cars stink. It’s not noticeable when you’re inside one, but get on your bike and head uphill alongside some fast-firing internal combustion engines—and be prepared to hold your nose.

Cars cause cellulite. Do you commute to work in a car each day and then log long hours in your office chair? After work, do you drive to the gym? When you get to the gym, do you ride a stationary bicycle? Think about it.

Cars take up space—ugly space at that. Roads and parking lots form gigantic expanses of impermeable asphalt, often littered with rotting fast food and road–kill. Take a fresh and honest look at the vehicle infrastructure outside your window, and get ready to weep.

Cars are expensive. Triple A estimates that it costs almost $10,000 a year to own and drive a mid-sized vehicle. Bicycles can be purchased for less than $500. A bus or train pass costs around $50 a month. Top-flight walking shoes and a backpack are $125 per year. Enough said.

Cars make us stupid. Instead of evolving, our ground transport technology stopped improving when cars came along. Where are those solar electric trolleys and mag–lev trains? Where is my near-Earth biogas hoverpod? Why are you telling me that corn ethanol is a smart choice?

Cars kill. More than 40,000 Americans are killed every year by or in cars. That’s 40,000 dead kids, moms, dads, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers, and sisters. It’s a national disgrace that we whine about high gasoline prices but do nothing to stop vehicular slaughter.

I don’t pretend to be some kind of patron saint of the car-free lifestyle. In fact, I’m kind of a gear–head (after all, I founded a Twin Cities car-sharing group). But I learned firsthand last summer that automobiles are not essential for getting around. If we focused more resources on alternative transportation that could improve life for all of us, we could truly make cars the choice of last resort.

MARY MORSE MARTI ’82 helped found HOURCAR, the Twin Cities car-sharing operation. She lives with her husband, Jim Marti ’80, and their teenage son, Max, in St. Paul.
The Institute for Global Citizenship building, on the northwest corner of Snelling and Grand, is going up fast. Its grand opening is scheduled for May 2009. This photo was taken in December 2008.