



## Staying True to the Mission; Facing the Coronavirus Pandemic

By Mary Price

“VMI is no stranger to adversity.” With those words, Gen. J.H. Binford Peay III '62, superintendent, began a March 23 letter to the VMI community—one in which he laid out a blueprint for the Institute going forward in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic that, by early April, had killed more Americans than the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and caused the Institute to move to a distance learning model for the first time in its 181-year history.

Early meetings about the coronavirus and its possible impacts on the VMI community were held in late January and early February. Those meetings focused on study abroad cadets, recalled Brig. Gen. Dallas Clark '99, deputy superintendent of finance, administration, and support, but as time went by, the focus began to shift.



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## A Global Connection

By Mary Price

As the coronavirus pandemic spread around the globe in March, with new waves of both infections and closures being announced daily, the two-person staff—Col. Dave Hall, director, and Patricia Hardin, assistant director—of VMI’s Office of International Programs found themselves responding. They had a front-row seat to the dramatic changes in regulations outside of Lexington.

This spring, 35 cadets were on study-abroad programs when the pandemic hit. By March 23, all had safely returned to the

United States. At first, it wasn’t clear that they were going to have to leave their host country—and many didn’t want to leave until they absolutely had to.

On March 19, the U.S. Department of State issued a Level 4 travel advisory for the entire globe in response to the coronavirus pandemic, stating: “In countries where commercial departure options remain available, U.S. citizens who live in the

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# Spring and Summer 2020 Events

The following is a partial listing of spring and summer 2020 events that have been canceled or postponed. All dates below are tentative and subject to change. ✪



We will miss seeing those rising firsts fully take on their new positions, and the challenges that come with each, and we will miss seeing those fresh faces of the new rising [2<sup>nd</sup> Class cadets], excited and nervous as they are about to take on one of the hardest but most rewarding positions at the school. For us, it feels like a job unfinished, and I think that is the hardest part.—  
*Skylar Birdie '20, Honor Court President.*

# 'Focus on What is Best for Cadets'

## Faculty Adapt to Distance Learning Environment

By Mary Price

data they would have acquired if they'd done the lab themselves, and then they use that data to write a lab report. And while Braun can't be in the same room with his cadets, he's tried to draw them together via the meetings function in Microsoft Teams.

"They find it useful to have that visual connection," he said. "That interface has been really nice."

Economics, of course, has seemingly little in common with either civil engineering or chemistry—but in all three disciplines, being able to see what you're doing is vital. Col. Tinni Sen, professor of economics and business, has chosen to teach her three sections of intermediate macroeconomics in real time. She explained that the class, which is heavily based on graphing economic variables, works best when cadets can see her as she's teaching. "It has to be very interactive," she commented.

But Sen doesn't have to worry about attendance, even when the class is virtual. "This is VML. They'll come to class. Our cadets are really good kids."

But because she's teaching synchronously, Sen has had to make some adjustments. On the first day of class, Sen noticed a cadet in her 9 a.m. section who looked less than alert. When she asked him



what was wrong, he replied, "Colonel Sen, it's 6 a.m. here." Sen very quickly told the cadet, a resident of California, that he would be welcome to join her 1 p.m. class.

Having taught online before, Maj. Michelle Iten, assistant professor of English, rhetoric, and humanistic studies, is well aware that what looks clear from her point of view isn't necessarily so for someone else.

"Probably the most challenging thing is trying to keep in mind how cadets will navigate the course, to imagine how the pacing and engagement will go from their perspective," said Iten a few days after online classes began March 25. "I've been trying to anticipate places of potential confusion and get ahead of them, but I'll only know how I did as we go forward."

Col. Howard Sanborn, professor of international studies, also observed a focus on meeting cadet needs during the transition to distance learning.

"What has come across to me, in working with several professors across multiple disciplines, is that we have a tremendous faculty that is working hard to attend to the intellectual and physical well-being of our cadets," he stated. "It turns out, when you focus on what is best for cadets, a lot of hard decisions become much easier to make."

Moreschi agreed that in a time of crisis, the faculty have risen to the occasion.

"It's really the faculty that have been the creative energy," the dean stated. "People have taken a can-do attitude." ❄

## ROTC Commissioning Goes Virtual

...the virtual commissioning ceremony was held on March 25, 2020. The ceremony was held via Microsoft Teams, and it was a very successful one. The cadets were able to participate in the ceremony from their homes, and they were able to see the other cadets and the faculty members. The ceremony was a great success, and it was a great way to celebrate the cadets' achievements.

# Support Services Continue Despite Empty Barracks

By Mary Price

Cadets, along with many faculty and staff members, are now away from post for an extended period of time, but the support services that help them are still available, typically just a phone call or a mouse click away. On the academic side, resources such as the

Mathematics Resource Education Center (MERC), the Writing Center, and the Office of Career Services are providing their services online. The following is a partial list of other on-post services that are also supporting cadets and faculty while they are away from post.

## Infirmary/Wellness

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Overall, it's been a quiet spring at the VMI Infirmary. But behind the scenes, Dr. David Copeland, Institute physician, has been busy with two tasks: helping cadets get refills on their medications, and looking over the medical records of incoming cadets to make sure they're medically qualified for VMI's intense physical training. That's a task he undertakes every year. In addition to these duties, Copeland has been monitoring the spread of the coronavirus and serving as a member of the VMI Coronavirus Task Force.

In mid-March, Copeland was needed when approximately 14 international cadets returned to barracks after the spring furlough. He asked the cadets questions about where they had been and took their temperatures before admitting them to barracks.

International cadets are a group "uniformly easy to take care of," Copeland noted, but he and Jenny Crance, nurse practitioner, were available in the infirmary each day if needed.

VMI's employee wellness program, meanwhile, has gone online with recorded workouts for yoga, cross training, high intensity interval training (HIIT), and more. Employees are also receiving email newsletters about health-related topics from CommonHealth, the state employee wellness program, and nutrition from Parkhurst Dining, VMI's food service partner.

Also ongoing through the wellness program is WW@Work, formerly known as Weight Watchers. That group is holding virtual meetings each week through Zoom and also has a private Facebook group.

## Bookstore

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Like nearly all other operations on post, the VMI Bookstore has had its normal way of doing business upended by the coronavirus pandemic.

This time of year, the bookstore would normally be doing a brisk business with the final admissions open house of the year and spring alumni reunions, both bringing visitors to post. This spring, though, with the bookstore closed since mid-March, those sales have evaporated.

"We've lost sales through the month of April. Admissions open house, that's gone. Then there's graduation, too," said Dalton Briley, who manages the bookstore for Follett, a Westchester, Illinois-based company that manages thousands of college bookstores nationwide.

Briley is currently the only bookstore employee still working—and he's only coming in on Monday (1-24) and Friday (1-25).

The VMI Archives, which contains many resources relating to VMI history and Civil War history, among other topics, is also available online, and archives staff are available by phone and email. They, too, can provide scans of documents needed by researchers.

The library's ongoing renovation, scheduled to be completed later this year, has been unaffected by the coronavirus pandemic. "Library construction continues to follow the phased sequence established at the outset," said Col. Diane Jacob, library director. "The main (5<sup>th</sup>) floor is on schedule to be complete in late June."

## Center for Leadership & Ethics

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The Center for Leadership & Ethics (CLE) was forced to cancel the Environment Virginia Symposium, a 30-plus-year tradition at VMI,

# Coronavirus Cuts Spring Visits at VMI Museums

By Mary Price

During what's typically one of their busiest visitation seasons, the VMI museums are eerily devoid of visitors, having closed March 16 due to the rapidly worsening coronavirus pandemic.

The three museums,



United States should arrange for immediate return to the United States, unless they are prepared to remain abroad for an indefinite period.”

Hall and Hardin swung into action. “We needed to recall all cadets who were studying abroad,” said Hall. He added that international travel at VMI is governed by General Order 73, which states that international travel is banned when the State Department issues a Level 3 or higher advisory.

Turner Leigh '22 had a particularly harrowing experience getting home from Cairo, Egypt. When the Level 4 travel advisory was issued, Leigh inquired about getting a flight home, but was told that the Cairo airport was closed.

Hardin tried to verify this information. She finally got word that seats were available on a flight out of Cairo the next day, albeit at a steep price. Hardin emailed Leigh to say, “Book that flight now.”

“So, on the flip of a dime I packed my bags, cleaned my apartment, called my landlady to let her know I was leaving, and caught an Uber to the airport, all the while praying that the flight was legit,” Leigh wrote in an email. He was home after a 26-hour, 3-flight trip.

Also, as the spring 2020 semester began,

# A Message from the VMI Alumni Agencies

By Stephen Maconi, *Chief Executive Officer, VMI Alumni Agencies*

These are unprecedented times for our nation and our beloved community. The uncertainty and unpredictability of this global pandemic creates a worldwide challenge unlike anything most of us have ever experienced. Yet, in a recent communication from Gen. J.H. Binford Peay III '62, superintendent, he mentioned that no community is better suited to overcome adversity than the VMI family.

Your VMI Alumni Agencies staff is working remotely, and we are open for business. While events and travel are suspended, we are determined to continue our important work by phone, letter and digital communications.

Our outreach efforts are centered around the importance of staying connected with our alumni in new, unique, and extraordinary ways and ensuring they are taken care of, feel supported, and know we care. It's also about finding moments of joy and happiness to celebrate during this time of uncertainty and creating opportunities to celebrate all that is great about VMI,

including how to recognize New Market Day and celebrate the cadets as they commission and graduate, thereby welcoming them

# College Closures Slow Lexington Businesses

By Mary Price

It's been a beautiful spring in Lexington, with temperatures in the 70s arriving well ahead of schedule, along with a show of vibrant color from daffodils, tulips, and hyacinths. The streets of downtown, though, are nearly empty as the coronavirus pandemic has turned what's typically the busiest season of the year for Lexington merchants into one of stress, anxiety, and worry over lost sales.

By mid-March, downtown Lexington was already feeling the weight of the coronavirus pandemic, with not only VMI but also Washington and Lee University switching to distance learning for the remainder of the spring semester. On March 24, Gov. Ralph Northam '81 ordered that all non-essential businesses must close—and the State Theatre, a long-time Lexington landmark, went dark. Restaurants were forced to close their dining areas, although they are still permitted to be open for takeout.

"We're all very sad. It's not just the cadets that are gone, but everybody's gone," said Rebecca Logan, executive director of Main Street Lexington. "Our local businesses are doing the best they can to keep the doors open."

Logan explained that in Lexington, merchants typically stock up on inventory over the winter in anticipation of spring sales—sales that are driven in part by people coming to town for reunions and graduations at VMI and W&L. With those events canceled, and sales consequently lost, "it doesn't give them a lot of reserves to weather this," said Logan.

# VMI Athletics: Understanding and Positive

By Maj. Michelle Ellwood

No one could have predicted the sudden halt of sports in the spring of 2020, from Little League to Major League Baseball and everything in between. The Southern Conference men's basketball tournament wrapped up March 9, one of several conferences able to complete the full season and championship process. VMI's last game was on March 7 against East Tennessee State University, the team that went on to win the tournament.

In mid-March, following the decisions of the NCAA and the various conferences in which VMI participates, VMI coaches, cadet-athletes, and staff put a hold on practices, winter wrap-ups, and spring match-ups.

Spring sports were certainly impacted the most, as many cadet-athletes found out about the cancellations in the midst of practice, or even during a game in the early season. Several sports have activities happening throughout the academic year, including track and field. Darrin Webb, director of men's and women's track and field and cross country said, "This is the first time in my 26 years at VMI that we've had to cancel our season." Webb is a former VMI athlete and coach. He has coached at VMI for 26 years and has coached at other schools as well. He has coached at VMI for 26 years and has coached at other schools as well. He has coached at VMI for 26 years and has coached at other schools as well.

scholarships may not be the same for the additional year. Dr. David Diles, VMI athletic director, said, "We are still evaluating how the additional year of eligibility will impact VMI's department. I expect that we will have a small number of spring sport cadet-athletes return for 2021."

Despite it all, cadet-athletes have displayed positivity and understanding. "I couldn't be prouder of how they have been able to take it for what it is, and understand that this is a necessary means to an end," said Jonathan Hadra, head baseball coach at VMI.

Webb agreed, sayingt iBT~~392~~

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# Post Operations Scale Down and Prepare for the Future

By Mary Price

“The Institute rolls on, even when the parking lots are empty.”

So said Brig. Gen. Dallas Clark '99 on April 2, as he and others attempted the Herculean task of keeping vital services going on post even as the coronavirus pandemic brought nearly all aspects of life at VMI and across the nation to a shuddering halt.

As deputy superintendent of finance, administration, and support, Clark oversees a plethora of seemingly disparate areas, ranging from Physical Plant to Parkhurst Dining, the company responsible for food service in Crozet Hall, to the comptroller's office and many more. All have been affected by the constantly changing pandemic situation.

“I have no answers. It's all so fluid. It'll change by next week,” said Lt. Col. Michelle Caruthers, director of Physical Plant, in early April.

“A lot of the decisions we're making target June 10, but it's likely that date could get pushed out beyond that. We have to have backup plans A, B, C, and D,” she continued.

With cadets not coming to post for the remainder of the academic year, and only some faculty coming to post to teach their classes remotely, Caruthers had to make the difficult decision to place 90 percent of her 130-person staff on public health emergency leave. The other 10 percent were needed for performing essential services such as grounds maintenance and cleaning PD (t) 2021 (e) m [10] nw 81g 5en) 4(n) 4(sd c) 88 DC BT (a) 9(u) 170-88 c) 7(a) (e) 2(c) 7(a) 98h 10 2 m [(e) 1a) BDC 9r) - (c) 6e) 2n) 7t we) 20

Parkhurst has laid off approximately 100 workers and encouraged them to apply for unemployment benefits through the Virginia Employment Commission. Parkhurst did keep a very small staff of employees working as long as cadets remained on post, however. The bookstore has laid off a small handful of employees since moving to online-only operations.

Some operations on post, though, are like Physical Plant—operating with a skeleton staff. The mailroom, for example, still has two people coming in each weekday to pick up VMI's mail from the Lexington post office to forward packages and other mail to cadets. Lee Clark noted that this time of year, many 1<sup>st</sup> Class cadets commissioning into the armed services order their uniforms and have them shipped to VMI. This year, of course, such cadets had no way of knowing they wouldn't be returning to post after spring furlough.

“We've got to do a turnaround and ship back to the [cadets],” said Lee Clark. ↘

