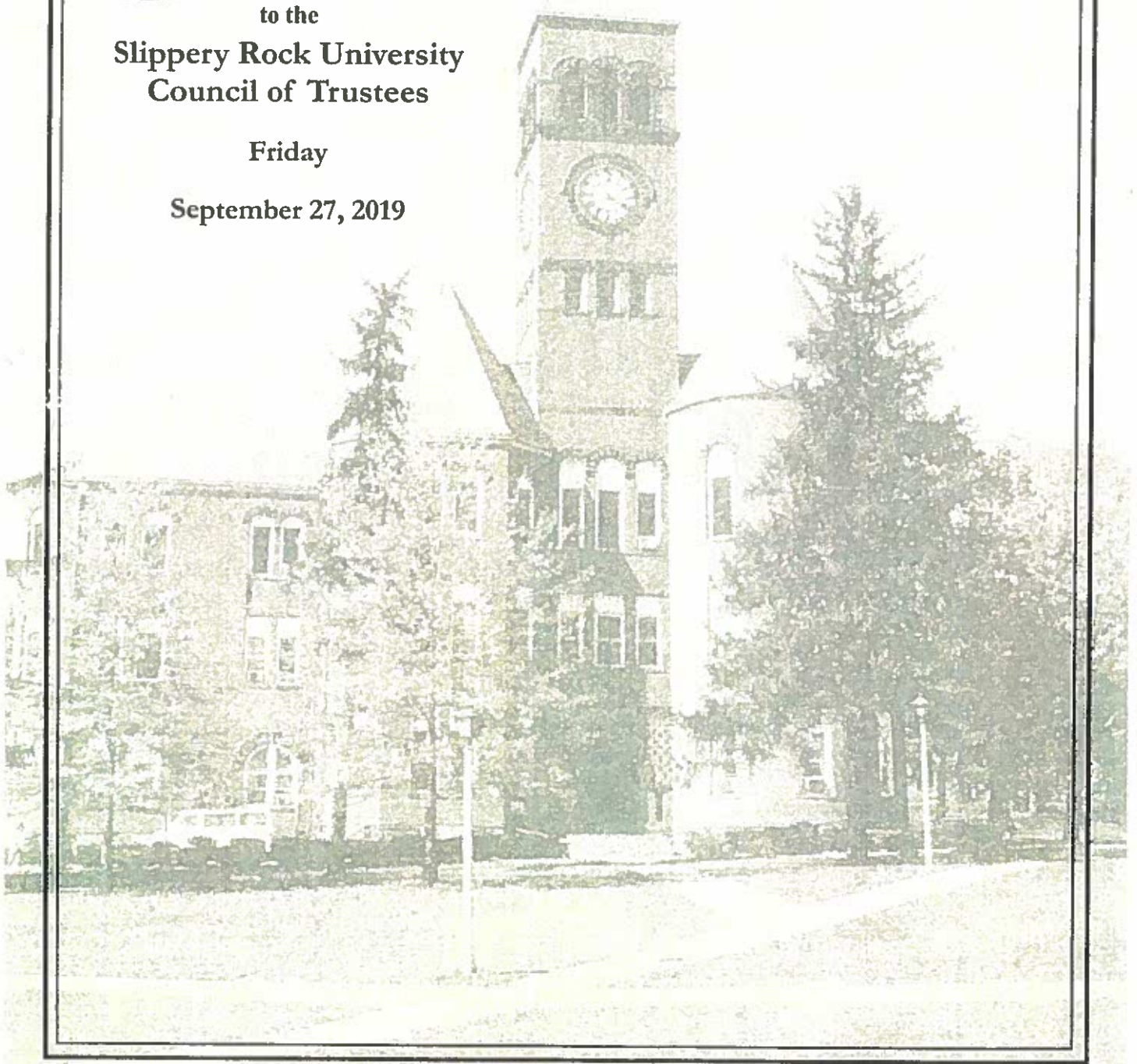


REPORT OF THE

President

to the
Slippery Rock University
Council of Trustees

Friday
September 27, 2019



Slippery Rock University

Council of Trustees

President Report Sept. 27, 2019

"I am responsible for everything I am, and everything I am not." - Ziggy

Last week I had the opportunity to address the University community at the Fall Assembly. This is an annual event that serves as a kickoff to our academic year and provides me with the opportunity to share information regarding challenges, opportunities and the year ahead. Today I would like to share highlights of that report.

If you read or listen to higher education news, the constant messages chronicling the dwindling numbers of high school graduates, escalating costs and declining state appropriations could be enough to put a damper on the excitement of a new academic year. Perhaps elsewhere, but not at Slippery Rock University. As I shared with the assembly, "SRU is in a strong position and we intend to keep it that way."

Our strength, both financially and from an enrollment standpoint, is the result of the hard, and smart, decisions we've made. To paraphrase our friend Ziggy, "We are responsible for everything we are, and everything we are not." We've stayed focused on our mission to deliver excellence in education. To maintain our position and thrive during this time of extraordinary demographic and economic challenges we can and must intensify our efforts to improve our financial resiliency.

That means that we must act now to avoid future financial challenges by controlling the things we can and not lamenting about those that we cannot. We can choose to shape what we can control and what our future will look like, so we will

As part of that choice, I dispelled the notion that the University is currently faced with having to cut academic programs, layoff people or initiate a hiring "freeze."

Rather, I'd say, at the moment we're in a hiring "slush." That means that before we hire someone, we're going to ask, 'Is the hire related to the health and safety of our campus? Is it related to business continuity?' There are hires we have to act on immediately and we will. Then there are those that are essential, but not critical, and if that is the case, and a department can wait a month or two following a departure or retirement before bringing on a new hire, those few months of salary and benefits savings, a few departments at a time, can add up quickly and help us recover and redirect those funds strategically.

As for academic programming, there is no truth to the rumor that I have a secret file in my desk that says we're going to close "Program 'X.'" Truth be told, there are some programs that don't perform as well as many others and that's okay because a university is supposed to offer an array of programs. What we have to ask ourselves is this, if we have an underperforming program, how do we tweak it and build its numbers so it's on more solid ground? Or, ask the tougher questions, can or should this program be saved?

In running any business, you have two major elements: revenues and expenses. People represent 76 percent of our budget, yet we have little control over those costs since they are negotiated outside of

this University. That's not good or bad, it just is. Most of our revenue also is determined by others. The board of governors set the tuition rate and the legislature determines our appropriation.

So, it is imperative that we focus attention on how we can improve our financial future by controlling those things we can . To that end, there are a variety of initiatives we are planning, including a capital campaign, restructuring tuition and financial aid strategies, improving retention and graduation rates, increasing out-of-state recruitment efforts and building new revenue streams.

One of the best things to happen since I've been here is the potential for us to set our own tuition structure. In light of the BOG's decision to freeze tuition this year, and the uncertainty of future actions, I believe it is imperative we restructure the University's pricing and financial aid strategies. Research shows that since we have the best brand in the west, we have some price elasticity and could charge a little more in the future. Should we choose to do that, we could then reinvest a percentage of revenues into need- and merit-based scholarships for students who are not enrolling or persisting because of financial aid issues.

And while we boast a strong 66% graduation rate, there is room for improvement. Yes, we do better than most of our peers, and we certainly need to celebrate that, but we also must ask how we can help that other 34% graduate. We can and will do better.

We are also exploring several options to build new revenue streams. These include looking to partner with corporations differently and embracing the potential for developing market-driven professional and/or degree and non-degree programs for industry. We'll look at opportunities to explore customization of master's degree programs that would benefit particular companies and their employees and actively seek out those potential revenue streams.

At the assembly, I also introduced the interactive glide path, which was shared with the Finance and Administrative Affairs Committee yesterday, to demonstrate the relationship between expenses and revenue. By changing key variables such as tuition revenue, appropriations, faculty and staff costs and improvements in retention and graduation rates, I was able to easily demonstrate how each action affected the intersection of when expenses exceeded revenues and vice versa. As the glidepath proves, we have to be very strategic about how and where we are investing our resources.

My goals in delivering this message were threefold:

- To be as transparent as possible;
- To reinforce the message that we are in a strong position but also need to proactively address the challenges we face to keep us there; and
- Acknowledge that our success will require heroic activity.

Fortunately, the Rock family is made up of heroes.

Speaking of heroes, since our last meeting several "super" things have happened at SRU.

We had a great opening, enrolling 7,468 undergraduates including 1,579 new freshman and a record 1,338 graduate students. University housing is at near capacity. And, our fall sports are off to a great start, especially football, which is currently ranked 10th in the national polls.

I was delighted to announce via Facebook that for the ninth time, **SRU was named as one of the nation's "Great Colleges to Work For" by The Chronicle of Higher Education**, a top trade publication for colleges and universities. To top that off, for the first time in the history of the program, **SRU was also named to the GCWF National Honor Roll**. Honor Roll status is reserved for those institutions that were cited most often across all recognition categories.

SRU was recognized in a record six categories:

- Collaborative Governance: Faculty members are appropriately involved in decisions related to academic programs.
- Compensation and Benefits: Pay is fair and benefits meet the needs of employees.
- Confidence in Senior Leadership: Leaders have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience for institutional success.
- Professional/Career Development Programs: Employees are given the opportunity to develop skills and understand requirements to advance in their careers.
- Teaching Environment: Faculty members say the institution recognizes innovative and high-quality teaching.
- Tenure Clarity and Process (four-year colleges only): Requirements for tenure are clear according to faculty.

The Chronicle's "2019 Great Colleges to Work For" survey is one of the largest and most respected workplace-recognition programs in the country. Now in its 12th year, it recognizes those institutions that get top ratings from their employees regarding workplace practices and policies.

This year, 236 institutions participated, including 152 four-year institutions and 84 two-year institutions. Of those, 85 were recognized as a Great College to Work For, including 60 four-year institutions and 25 two-year institutions. **SRU was one of only 42 institutions to earn Honor Roll recognition.**

Earning a spot among the elite 42 institutions named to the National Honor Roll is indeed a coveted reward earned by each and every one of our staff and faculty. As I told the Chronicle, SRU's people-centric culture is at the core of why this is a great place to work. People at every level come to work and stay at SRU because they believe in our mission and are empowered to make a difference. In fact, a consistent narrative among employees is that they came to SRU with the intent to stay for a short time and end up "staying a lifetime." Certainly, providing good wages and benefits add to the institution's attractiveness, but its real value is how people are respected and engaged in the life of the University.

Earlier in the month, SRU was named among the **2020 "Best Regional Universities - North"** by U.S. News & World Report. It is the 11th consecutive year that SRU has earned the accolade. SRU finished in a four-way tie for the 75th slot, alongside Carlow (PA) University, Salisbury (MD) University and Stevenson (MD) University. This year's rankings reflect a 15-position jump for SRU, having finished in a three-way tie for 90th last year.

SRU was also honored by USNWR as **one of only 43 "Top Public Schools - Regional Universities (North)."** The Rock came in at No. 19, up from the 25th spot last year. And, as a **"Best Value Schools - Regional Universities North"** list, coming in at No. 41, up from No. 54 one year ago.

Having been recognized by USNWR for more than a decade is a remarkable achievement for our University. It's an honor we all should embrace, celebrate and share with the world. Together, as a community, everyone continues to come together every day to push our University forward and make it better than it was the day before. That continued pursuit of excellence is reflected in the fact that we are consistently represented on this list and have earned multiple other national rankings.

Just last week, SRU was awarded 51 institutional and program specific badges of distinction, including nine in the top 5 percent nationally, from College Factual, a data-driven college choice resource.

SRU's "best of the best" institutional designations (top 5 percent) included: "Best for the Money" nationwide, in the mid-Atlantic region and in Pennsylvania.

College Factual awards badges to those universities that finish in the top one percent, five percent, 10 percent and 15 percent of each of the categories being evaluated.

SRU was in the top five percent in the overall categories of:

- "Best Value without aid" (nationwide and Middle Atlantic)
- "Best for the Money" (nationwide, Middle Atlantic and in Pennsylvania)
- "Best for the Money with Aid" (nationwide and Middle Atlantic)
- "Best for the Money without Aid" (Pennsylvania)

Additionally, seven fields of study and majors were recognized in the top five percent nationally, 13 fields of study and majors were recognized in the top 10 percent nationally; and 22 fields of study and majors were recognized in the top 15 percent nationally.

Finally, I'd like to mention that while we tout that our University provides a "Rock Solid education at an affordable price," we're not the only ones that think so. Recently, SRU was recognized by MONEY Magazine as one of the nation's best value universities, making the list of the publication's "Best Colleges for Your Money."

Our faculty and staff work incredibly hard to make a positive difference in the lives of our students in order to prepare them for wherever life may take them. That dedication to providing a high-quality education at a fair price is evidenced by our inclusion on this list among the country's best value institutions.

To round out the quarter, the University's commitment to excellence and effectiveness was recognized with a number of other honors and accolades.

Since June 2019, Slippery Rock University:

- Was named a 2019-20 national "College of Distinction" and a Pennsylvania "College of Distinction" by collegesofdistinction.com.
- Had its online master's in elementary education K-12 reading program ranked (No. 15) as one of the nation's 30 best by TheBestSchools.org.
- Was ranked one of the 50 best schools in the country (No. 13) for education majors by study.com.
- Was named one of Pennsylvania's top 10 (No. 9) online colleges 2019-2020 by OnlineColleges.com.
- Had its education program earn a Field of Study badge of distinction 2019-2020 for professional programming in education by Colleges of Distinction.
- Had its online doctoral degree in special education ranked in top 25 (No. 17) nationally in 2019 by CollegeValuesOnline.com.
- Had its business programs earn a Field of Study badge for professional programming by Colleges of Distinction.
- Had its nursing program earn a 2019-20 Field of Study badge by Colleges of Distinction.
- Was awarded a badge for its accomplishments in student career development by Colleges of Distinction.
- Had the nursing program ranked No. 1 In the state by registerednursing.org.
- Was named one of the Best Value College for 2019 by Kiplinger's.
- Was named one of the "Best Northeastern" colleges by Princeton Review.
- Was named a "Best Regional University-North" for 2019 by CollegeConsensus.com.

- Was recognized as one of the top 10 (No. 4) best-accredited online colleges in Pennsylvania by EDsmart.com.
- Named among the best national colleges and universities in 2020 by Wall Street Journal/Times Higher Education College Rankings.
- Was named among the nation's top 200 "Best Bang for the Buck" colleges in the Northeast by Washington Monthly.
- Was named among the top "Cool Schools" in North America by The Sierra Club.

Lest I be accused of too much institutional promotion, let me remind folks of Will Rogers six greatest words, "It ain't bragging if it's true."

Just as I've nudged people to look at both sides of our successes... a 66% graduation rate means 34% didn't make it; an 82% rate means 18% were lost... I also know that while pride and ego can stand in the way of future achievement, there is no reason why we shouldn't let people know when something wonderful has happened to us because of the actions we've taken.

So, in that spirit, and as is customary, I'll leave you with a sampling of other Good News being generated by our students, faculty, staff and alumni.

STUDENTS

- **Robert Bailey**, a senior accounting major from Mount Pleasant, completed a 67-day, 4,350-mile cross-country bicycle tour this summer to raise funds and awareness for The Ability Experience, the national philanthropy of the Pi Kappa Phi fraternity that supports people with disabilities. Bailey raised \$7,000. He was one of 88 cyclists on the Journey of Hope team that raised \$827,000.
- **Jacob Southwick**, an industrial and systems engineering major from Titusville, was awarded the Workplace Hero honor by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. As a summer intern for PennDOT, he and another intern helped free a man who had become trapped beneath a tractor.
- **Ethan Mooney**, a junior computing major from Zelienople, was elected to serve as the Northeast Region chief of the Order of the Arrow, the Boy Scouts of America's National Honor Society. As region chief, Mooney is one of six nationally elected Order of the Arrow officers and will provide leadership during his yearlong term.
- **Jacob Smith**, a graduate student majoring in park and resource management from Pittsburgh, and **Christa Oxley**, a freshman geography major from Pierpont, Ohio, attended the Citizens' Climate International Conference in Washington, D.C., an event hosted by the Citizens' Climate Lobby, a bipartisan group that advocates for national policies to address climate change. Smith and Oxley are student workers at the Macoskey Center for Sustainability Systems Education and Research.
- **Nathan Quince**, a senior marketing major from Imperial, and **Cody Neal**, a senior interdisciplinary program major from Evans City, both members of the Competitive Bass Fishing Club Team at SRU, qualified for the 2020 Fishing League Worldwide College Fishing National Championships after their third-place finish at the FLW Northern Conference event on the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland.
- Senior athletic training majors **Martin Doyle**, from Slippery Rock, **Jamie Muccioli**, from Star Junction, and **Alec Uttech**, from Medina, Ohio, received 2019 National Athletic Trainers' Association Research and Education Foundation Scholarships. Muccioli was also awarded the awarded the 2019 Eastern Athletic Trainers' Association Scholarship from the Eastern Athletic Trainers' Association and **Koki Kawaguchi**, a senior athletic training major from Kawachinagano, Japan, was awarded the 2019 Cecilia Yost Scholarship from the Pennsylvania Athletic Trainers' Society.

- **Tosca DiBella**, a senior English writing major from Washington, D.C., completed a summer internship for the Curatorial Department of the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum, where she researched a series of paintings by Tennessee artist Lloyd Branson that were commissioned by the U.S. Postal Service.
- **Dallas Kline**, a graduate student in student affairs in high education from Hanover and former president of the Slippery Rock Student Government Association, was selected to participate in the Hesselbein Global Academy, which is a four-day experience for student leaders hosted at the University of Pittsburgh. Delegates representing 15 countries received mentorship from government and business leaders in problem solving sessions and other interactive workshops.

FACULTY/STAFF

- **Sara Tours**, assistant professor of elementary education and early childhood, facilitated two workshops at the Aditya Birla Education Academy in Mumbai, India, through the India Higher Education Initiative, which supports Pennsylvania universities as a destination in the U.S. for student exchange, technology transfer and faculty development. Tours conducted a workshop for Indian educators about active and cooperative learning strategies and another on assessment.
- **Brian Crow**, professor of sport management, was the keynote speaker at the Steptoe & Johnson law firm's "Meeting Today's Challenges in Higher Education" seminar in Pittsburgh. Crow talked about hazing and hazing prevention in higher education for a group of professionals ranging from the industries of law, higher education, communications and cybersecurity.
- **Qi Chen**, assistant professor of chemistry, and **Alexander Smith**, a senior chemistry major from Abbottstown, presented a poster "3-Deaza and 3-Deaza-3-bromo L-Neplanocin Analogues: Synthesis and Antiviral Property" at the 32nd International Conference on Antiviral Research in Baltimore.
- **Joseph Robare**, associate professor of public health and social work, was awarded a \$200,000 Health Resources and Services Administration planning grant to develop a workforce plan for opioid response for the Pennsylvania Rural Health Association based on data collected from 50 counties in five states.
- **Boris Brimkov**, associate professor of mathematics and statistics, received an American Mathematical Society-Simons Foundation Travel grant to support research collaboration for an early-career mathematician. The \$4,000 grant is for two years to be used for research-related travel. SRU's Mathematics and Statistics Department also received \$800 to help enhance its research environment.
- **Betsy Kemeny**, assistant professor of parks, conservation and recreational therapy, was named a scientific adviser and to the board of directors for the Horses and Humans Research Foundation, a nonprofit, non-endowed foundation that serves as a catalyst to advance global knowledge of horse-human interactions and their impact on health and wellness. Kemeny was also named president-elect of the American Therapeutic Recreation Association, the only national association for recreational therapists. She will serve a three-year term as president-elect, present and past president.
- **Ben Robinson**, instructor of music, was named artistic director at Opera Ithaca, a professional opera company in Ithaca, New York, which has three programs schedule for the 2019-20 season, "La boheme," "Cendrillon" and "Le Nozze di Figaro."
- **Seth Jenny**, instructor of public health, was a keynote speaker at the 2019 American Medical Society for Sports Medicine Annual Conference, where he led a presentation titled "eSports and the Sports Medicine Physician," explaining how sports medicine professions can prepare to treat patients sustaining injuries from competitive video-gaming, which has increased in popularity in recent years, including colleges and universities sponsoring teams within their athletic departments.

- **Brett Barnett**, professor of communication, presented at the National Homeland Security Conference in Phoenix, Arizona. Barnett's presentation, "Understanding How U.S.-Based White Supremacists Communicate Online," was part of NHS's Targeted Violence Prevention program.
- **Doug Strahler**, assistant professor of communication, was a panelist at the Eastern Communication Association conference in Providence, Rhode Island, on social media and at the conference he accepted the role to be the ECA's social media director.
- **Nicholas Katsiadis**, instructor of English, was elected to the board of the Pennsylvania College English Association and will co-organize the PCEA's annual conference, which will be hosted by SRU in April. Katsiadis was also accepted to present his research of comic book pedagogy and the Romantic literary history of comics at three upcoming conferences: the 2019 Mid-Atlantic Popular and American Culture Association regional conference, Nov. 7-9 in Pittsburgh; the 2020 Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 25-28 in Milwaukee; and the 2020 Popular Culture Association National Conference, April 15-18 in Philadelphia.

ALUMNI

- **David Boucher**, '80, an SRU graduate with a degree in allied health, was hired as chief business transformation officer at Brumrungrad International Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand, one of the largest private hospitals in Southeast Asia, with 580 beds and more than 30 specialty centers. Boucher, a former president and chief operating officer at UCI Medical Affiliates and Companion Global, will lead transformational initiatives for BIH and direct the hospital's international insurance billing functions, appointment booking, marketing and public relations.
- **Robert Stevens**, '76, an SRU graduate with a degree in psychology, was named to the board of directors for T. Rowe Price Group, Inc., the global investment management organization with \$1.07 trillion in assets under management. Stevens is the retired chairman, president, and chief executive officer of Lockheed Martin Corporation.
- **Joey-Linn Ulrich**, '93, an SRU graduate with a degree in public administration, was hired as executive director of the Economic Development South, a multi-municipal, community development corporation in the South Hills of Pittsburgh that strengthens business and residential communities through partnerships.
- **Honey Stempka**, '98, an SRU graduate with a degree in exercise science, was hired as the director of the Erie County Department of Planning and Community Development, which oversees several county government operations, including transportation, grants and farmland preservation.
- **Heather Kearney**, '99, an SRU graduate with a degree in sport management, was named head women's basketball coach at Western Carolina, Division I program in North Carolina, after serving as an assistant coach at High Point University.
- **Thomas Zaucha**, '67, an SRU graduate with a degree in physical education, was inducted into the Indiana County Chamber of Commerce Business Hall of Fame. Zaucha, who previously developed Keystone Rehabilitation Systems, is the general partner of Zaucha Family LP, which owns and manages Walter Stanley Realty, a commercial real estate broker, and Crimson Hawk Rentals, a student housing agency.
- **Greg Burdick**, '93, an SRU graduate with a degree in secondary education-English, wrote a play, "Monessen Falls," that premiered Aug. 14 at the Good Luck Macbeth Theatre in Reno, Nevada.
- **Kimberly Miller**, '98, an SRU graduate with a degree in English, published her second novel, "Forgiving Tess," a contemporary Christian romance novel.
- **Tracy Grilli**, '79, an SRU graduate with a degree in health and physical education, was one of six women on a relay team that became the first relay team consisting of all women over the age of 60 to swim across the English Channel.
- **Jeff Herwig**, '15, an SRU graduate with a degree in music education, composed a musical piece titled "Freedom" to raise money for military soldiers and veterans affected by post-traumatic

stress disorder and the SRU Wind Ensemble, along with other groups apart of a consortium, will premiere the piece later this year.

- Triplet brothers **Gabriel Boyd**, '17 (safety management), **Lucas Boyd**, '17 (public health), and **Samuel Boyd**, '17 (public health and social work), were named to the Pittsburgh Business Times' 30 Under 30 Class of 2019. As students at SRU in 2016, the Boyd brothers co-founded Before It's Too Late, a safety, first-aid and health care company that has partnered with physical therapy organizations, as well as companies in the oil and gas industry, to provide safety training and consultations. B42L has also supported the American Red Cross with more than \$20,000 in donations, in addition to sponsoring two internships through SRU.
- **Calahan Young**, '17, an SRU graduate with a degree in recreational therapy, has qualified for 2020 Paralympic Games in Tokyo, Japan, as a member of the United States men's goalball national team. Goalball is a sport played by teams of three visually impaired athletes who throw a ball that makes a noise at an opposing team's goal.

In closing, I am sad to report that former SRU President **Robert Aebersold**, 83, died Aug. 12.

Aebersold joined then Slippery Rock State College in 1968 as an assistant professor in the Physical Education Department and assistant football and baseball coach. He was promoted to associate professor in 1969 and professor in 1972. Aebersold served as chair of the PE department from 1972 until 1978; interim vice president for academic affairs in 1979; and vice president of academic affairs in 1980 until his appointment as interim president July 1, 1984. He was named president effective July 1, 1985, serving in that capacity until his retirement in 1997. At the time of his retirement, he was the University's third-longest serving president following J. Lindwood Eisenberg (1917-1984) and Albert Maltby (1890-1916).

The council of trustees named the Aebersold Student Recreation Center in his honor December 1996; and at their March 3, 1997 meeting, named him president emeritus.

Two years after retiring from SRU, Aebersold served as Springfield College's interim president, followed by a stint as the interim chief academic officer for the Connecticut State University System (2001-2003). He also served as interim president at Central Connecticut State University (June 2004 to July 2005).

Aebersold also officiated high school and college football, including being a part of the crew that worked the 1980 Peach Bowl and the 1982 Liberty Bowl, the final game of coaching legend Bear Bryant's career.

He is survived by his wife, Nancy; daughters, Alicia (Lester) Burke and Amanda (Paul) Couture; and four grandchildren, Andrew Couture, Elliot Couture, Miranda Aebersold-Burke and Madeline Aebersold-Burke.

A celebration of his life is being planned for Nov. 2 in Slippery Rock. I hope your schedules allow you to participate.

Respectfully submitted,

William J. Behre
President