

QUEENS MAGAZINE (Summer 2022)

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Alumni and Friends,

What an exciting time to be a Royal! I cannot wait to share with you the many new developments since our last issue of Queens Magazine—and to give credit where credit is due. From our committed Board of Trustees and corporate partners to our dedicated staff and faculty to our incredibly talented students—we are rising to new heights!

Earlier this spring, Queens held press conferences to announce several key initiatives that further our Strategic Framework. In April, we kicked off the Charlotte Talent Initiative, a bold new partnership that will change lives for deserving students while fueling Charlotte's economic future. Then, less than thirty days later, the Board made the unanimous decision to accept an invitation to join the ASUN Conference in NCAA Division I. You can read more about these exciting advancements in the pages that follow.

We also focus this issue on a topic deeply rooted in our history and culture: health, wellness, and the caring that fuels it. You will hear from alumni, faculty and students about the paradigm shift taking place in multiple areas of health and wellness—physical, emotional and social. You will see it in action, as many Royals stepped up to selflessly give back even in the most challenging of circumstances.

Tanya Blackmon, MBA '00 and this year's Charlotte BusinessWoman of the Year, led Novant Health to become a national leader in diversity, equity and inclusion. Lesa Kastanas '84 found strength in community when she and her husband fought to keep their businesses open when other restaurants were shutting down. And Conrad Ricamora '01 refused to give up even as he fought through multiple health challenges, including COVID-19.

Even those we've loved and lost provided heroic leadership on the importance of caring for and supporting one another. Trustee emerita Dr. Ophelia Garmon-Brown left behind an amazing legacy centered on the healing power of caring for others. Former Queens Chief of Police Johnnie Ravenell will long be remembered for his compassion, as he often recognized signs of withdrawal in students, staff, and faculty and worked with the health and wellness team to get them needed help.

Like the example set by those highlighted in these pages, the possibilities are endless if we remain true to our hearts and values and draw strength from our history of caring, both within the Queens community and within ourselves. The stats already show we are an engine for positive change. The notion that we can rise together is woven into the fabric of our DNA...not to be served but to serve. I hope you will join us as we continue this journey to new heights, knowing that we are better together.

Sincerely,

Daniel G. Lugo
President



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In response to Letter to the editor: *Transparency and nothing less*

Transparency and nothing less

A recent letter-writer questioned how Tourism Development Fees are being spent. We appreciate the opportunity to clear up what may be misconceptions. Readers who want detailed information can see the quarterly report of all TDF expenditures online at www.MyrtleBeachAreaMarketing.com. Building on this transparency, the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce shares research used to make advertising decisions, measurement metrics, committee meeting minutes and more.

Just to clear up an error of fact: The chamber did not underwrite the industry recruitment trip to China, though we do, in fact, applaud politicians who aggressively recruit new industry to our community.

To a related point, the businesses who are chamber members do contribute much. They invest millions of dollars annually to support the chamber and its advertising campaign. (Any public funds we receive are used only for promotion and publicity.)

Finally, is the TDF working? Absolutely! Since implementation, the Grand Strand tourism industry has enjoyed remarkable growth. For those who desire accuracy in reporting and crave accountability with transparency, we share your standards and will hold ourselves to nothing less.

Brad Dean
President and CEO
Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce

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For Nepal Earthquake:

The death toll after the devastating earthquake that struck Nepal on the morning of April 25 has now exceeded 7,000 and is expected to rise. Emergency efforts are underway to help the Nepalese people clear out from the rubble, but tensions are mounting as rescuers face incredible challenges in resources, logistics, and personal safety. Adding to the challenge, aid efforts haven't yet reached the more remote areas of this landlocked country.

Virginia Tech's relations in Nepal go back many years, and our ties have grown exponentially within the past 10 years. Teams of scientists, students, and staff have been on the ground in Nepal (some were there just days before the earthquake; all are safe) conducting agriculture research and workshops in partnership with USAID, as well as partner universities, to help the country avoid suffering millions of dollars in crop loss caused by farmland pests.

In the spirit of *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve), the Nepalese Student Organization, together with strong support from other student organizations at Virginia Tech, organized a fundraising effort to mobilize our community's response to the overwhelming needs of the people of Nepal. The need for humanitarian aid is immediate and urgent as millions of people face challenges of finding food and shelter and creating sanitary living conditions.

The greatest needs, according to relief agencies currently on the ground in Nepal, include fuel to keep generators running; measles vaccines, given the possibility of a measles outbreak; and body bags. Since most individuals or organizations cannot offer such support, donations of cash to reputable agencies are most helpful.

We encourage your generous participation in supporting this effort. As with previous drives – including Hokies Helping Haiti, Hurricane Katrina, and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami – the Nepalese Student Organization created a website to make it convenient for people to [give](#). Additionally, many organizations are accepting tax-deductible contributions.

Our commitment to the people of Nepal is to share our compassion and support during this difficult time and not allow our support to vanish once the dust settles. Our ties with Nepal will continue. In the next several weeks and months, we will build on the expertise and experiences in Nepal of our students, faculty, and staff to provide future help. But right now, the need for monetary support is critical.

In advance, we'd like to thank the university and the greater community for once again stepping up as the Hokie Nation to aid in this enormous relief effort at such a critical time.

Sincerely,

Timothy D. Sands
President, Virginia Tech

Guru Ghosh
Vice President, Outreach and International Affairs

ACT 72

*Keith Pierce
– June 2005*

Most Pennsylvanians are not quick to associate a quality education with the economic vitality of the state or their local community. There are 501 school districts in Pennsylvania. Each has the responsibility to provide the best possible education for our children. Their challenge is to do this as education costs rise and state funding declines, and while putting as little tax burden on you as possible. Finding a fair and equitable way to fund public education in Pennsylvania has not been easy. In fact, it has been an ongoing battle for nearly 25 years. More than 80% of Pennsylvania's children attend public schools, yet less than 20% of Pennsylvania citizens have school-aged children or children attending public schools. Despite this statistic, Pennsylvania has relied on the property taxes of all homeowners to fund public schools.

Last summer, in an effort to reduce the burden on homeowners and farmers, the governor and general assembly of Pennsylvania signed the Homeowner Tax Relief Act or Act 72, into law. Act 72 is intended to reduce property taxes by combining state gaming revenue (income from slot machines) with new or higher local income taxes. Act 72 also allows residents in participating school districts the right to say "yes" or "no" to future property tax increases above an annually predetermined index.

Participation in Act 72 is neither automatic nor required. School districts have until May 30, 2005 to decide whether or not to participate in Act 72. By opting in, school districts would agree to accept state gaming dollars along with the terms of the law which include raising your Earned Income Tax (EIT) or adding a Personal Income Tax (PIT). Since the mid-seventies the Pennsylvania government share of educational expenditures has declined from 55% to an average of only 35%. This means that for every dollar in a school district's checking account, the fifty-five cents that once came from the state has dropped to an average of only thirty-five cents, leaving school boards scrambling to find ways to make up the difference.

Not only have school districts had to rely on local taxes to make up for the decline in state support, but the rising cost of education has caused many districts severe financial despair. Traditionally, districts in communities and neighborhoods that can afford it, have found at least some ways to make up the difference – namely by raising property taxes. Needless to say however, not all communities have the means, (expanding local properties and thriving local businesses) to continue to support a growing tax. As the cost of education continues to rise and state funding continues to decline, even the wealthiest communities have limits to what they are willing to shell out in school taxes. The intent behind Act 72 is to begin the process of changing the way school districts are funded and lifting the burden off of local property owners. Though the provisions may appear to be adding funds to schools, **Act 72 is not a tax cut, but rather a tax shift. It does not eliminate property taxes; it simply reduces them by moving a set amount of tax burden from property owners to income earners.**

Commentary for Pennsylvania Secretary of Education

Some suggest that the glass is overflowing – the Governor’s education package puts serious money into pre-k, full day kindergarten and other proven educational programs. Others have said the glass is half full – the Governor’s education package was chopped in half! I agree with both.

As a former superintendent of a struggling urban school district, I had hoped that the legislature would have enacted higher levels of funding. There is an obvious and meaningful difference between the \$258 million in the final package and the \$560 million proposed by the Governor. But lets face it, \$258 million is a much bigger boost to public education than most anticipated would ever be passed in these tough economic times, in a state with a new Democratic Governor and a legislature controlled by the opposing party.

Sure the needs are great. More than 500,000 students in public schools are struggling to perform at grade level. I wish districts could have received the funds necessary to put at least a quarter of those students in tutoring programs. But, let us not lose sight of the fact that over 80,000 students can access tutoring this year. Now, Pennsylvania is on the map as the only state to have increased the level of core funding for public schools by **\$XX** and to have launched this far-reaching tutoring program to help more children succeed. We should all take great pride in the fact that our legislature targeted funds to the eighty two districts with the largest percentage of students failing our state assessments and made \$34 million available as of January 1st, 2004 to build state of the art tutoring programs to serve these students. And, the legislature has already committed a second year of funding to continue the tutoring program next year. I doubt any of us can remember a time when the legislature made such a strong commitment to a new program by guaranteeing a subsequent year of funding. As such, this continued funding commitment should not be taken lightly.

In addition, the legislature enacted the Governor’s education improvement program in the form of the Accountability Block Grant. With the first installment of \$250 million we can begin the work of building a successful early childhood education system and k-12 reforms that research proves can boost student skills. This first year of funds is likely to make it possible to many school districts to offer full-day kindergarten in at least one elementary school building. Or, a district may choose to start a pre-k program targeted to the poorer sections of its district so that those children enter kindergarten with more skills. Perhaps neither pre-k or full day kindergarten will be offered; instead the district will choose to focus the funding on shrinking first grade class size in one or two of its buildings or training its teachers in new strategies for improving student performance in reading, math or science. More resources are needed to continue to expand opportunity for students in this state. But all of these options are dramatic improvements over the status quo.

Most observers would say that as a first payment on a five to six year rollout, a quarter of a billion dollars is a respectable level of funding. But some are raising the specter of doubt over the longevity of these new resources by suggesting that the governor or legislature could cut them next year. Such a claim is unfounded. While annual increases may have been less than necessary, the legislature has never stepped back from prior year commitments. And it would be naïve to overlook the fact that the legislature passed a tax increase -- in part -- to fund the rollout of these proven programs. The legislature did not make this tax increase lightly nor did they make it temporary, just as they did not intend the

funding of these school improvements to be temporary. They may have begun the improvements needed in our education system with less funding than we wanted, but they began it in earnest and with a long-term commitment that deserves to be applauded.

On December 22, due to the perseverance of the Governor and strong partners in the legislature, Pennsylvania joined the ranks of states that are making substantial commitments to the next generation. It's a new year and a substantial down payment has been made on our schoolchildren's future. This progress, on behalf of our children deserves a toast – even if you think the glass is half full!

Dr. Vicki L. Phillips
Secretary of Education
Pennsylvania Department of Education