Randolph-Macon College gets national attention, continues building

Contributed Report

Thanks to the November election, 2014 was no ordinary year at Randolph-Macon College. The school was thrust into the national spotlight in June when economics professor Dave Brat defeated incumbent Eric Cantor in the 2014 Republican primary for Virginia’s 7th District Congressional seat. One day earlier, R-MC sociology professor Jack Trammell had announced his candidacy as a Democrat in the same race.

National and international media were instantly drawn to the story and descended on R-MC’s campus. Randolph-Macon became a household name and the Town of Ashland, known as “The Center of the Universe,” was dubbed the “Center of the Political Universe.”

In the months that followed, the media continued its coverage of the impact this “living civics lesson” was having on students and the R-MC community. The campus community became engaged in lively, civil discourse about the pending election and professors held political leadership seminars and brought government leaders to campus, including U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., and U.S. Rep. Randy Forbes, R-4, a R-MC graduate. This opportunity allowed R-MC to highlight its longstanding history of political and civic engagement and connections to Richmond and Washington, D.C.

On Oct. 28, Brat and Trammell engaged in a standing room only debate on campus. R-MC President Robert R. Lindgren and Heather Sullivan, a television news anchor, co-moderated the debate. The debate was streamed live on the R-MC website as well as on those of several local media organizations.

C-SPAN also carried the debate live on its website and aired the event multiple times. Debate watch parties were held throughout campus for alumni and the R-MC community.

After the debate, R-MC political science professors Richard Meagher and Elliott Fullmer, along with guest moderator and local television news anchor Juan Conde, facilitated a post-debate Town Hall. This event was sponsored by the R-MC Young Democrats, Young Republicans and the Political Science Student Association.

On Election Day, political science professors Lauren Bell and Fullmer organized more than 70 students to conduct exit polls and collect surveys at all precincts in Hanover County.

To read more about the election, and to watch videos, including the full debate, visit the college’s website at www.rmc.edu and find the section called Randolph-Macon College: The Center of the Political Universe.

Growth, construction
Since Lindgren’s arrival, the college has experienced growth in all areas, including recruitment and enrollment.

In 2014, the college broke records both in freshmen and overall enrollment. R-MC welcomed 425 incoming freshmen for fall 2014, with an overall enrollment of 1,400. This was the third consecutive year that enrollment exceeded 1,300.

Randolph-Macon’s Building Extraordinary Campaign, a $100 million initiative, has raised $103,500 million to date. Those funds have been applied to the college’s endowment, academic program and capital projects. In May, the R-MC Board of Trustees approved an increase of the campaign goal to $115 million. These funds will, in part, support a new science building that will complete phase one of the college’s physical transformation.

The college has invested over $60 million toward improving campus facilities. In addition to renovations of several buildings, the college constructed a number of new facilities, including several new residence halls. Tuition proceeds were not used toward the construction.

Andrews Hall is a freshmen residence hall named in honor of R-MC graduate Ira L. Andrews III, professor emeritus of religious studies and former dean of students. Andrews Hall is a 108-bed, suite-style facility that borders the football field. It includes a 1,500-square-foot common room for academic and student organization use, study areas, a gaming/TV room, a laundry facility, a staff apartment and a community porch area. Opened in 2011, the Hall is across the street from the Freshmen Village.

Birdsong Hall, opened in 2014, is a three-story facility for senior students that includes 30 suite-style residences, each with four single bedrooms, two bathrooms and a common kitchen/living area.

Birdsong Hall overlooks Day Field, the college’s football and lacrosse field. Residents of Birdsong can watch games directly from their balconies. The building is named for alumnus Thomas H. Birdsong III and The Birdsong Corporation in recognition of a $2.1 million that helped fund construction.

Brock Commons, a new student center, is next to the Frank E. Brown Fountain Plaza. The all-brick Brock Commons features arched windows, keystones and columns. Designed to complement R-MC’s other buildings, the first floor includes a two-story atrium and a game room. The second floor includes office space, meeting rooms and a conference room for the Student Government Association and staff offices. Construction of the 26,000-square-foot building was made possible through a $5 million gift from Joan and Macon F. Brock Jr., a 1964 graduate, as well the support of the Birdsong family and other donors.
The John B. Werner Pavilion, located in the McGraw-Page Library, offers two spaces for faculty and student use. The first floor, named in honor of 1939 R-MC alumnus Hardaway Abernathy, is open 24/7 for student study and houses a small café. Tables, seating and a large table with a flat-screen computer provide a range of study spaces. The second floor includes a high-tech classroom named in honor of professor emeritus and R-MC graduate George Brown Oliver. Construction of the Pavilion was made possible by a lead gift from the Cabell Foundation.

The college also constructed new athletic facilities, including the Hugh Stephens Field at Estes Park for baseball/softball, Day Field for football and lacrosse, and the Banks Tennis Facility.

In addition, R-MC opened a new alumni facility, the Dalton House, for Yellow Jackets to use for a variety of college events. The Dalton Alumni House was made possible by gift from alumni Beverley and Doug Dalton, both of whom served many years on the Board of Trustees.

Last fiscal year, 38 percent of alumni made a gift to the college, which ranks R-MC’s alumni participation among the top 30 of all colleges and universities, private and public in the country.

Preparing students for careers

The college added five new majors in the past several years to its curriculum: Communication Studies, Engineering Physics, Asian Studies, Archaeology and Behavioral Neuroscience. Recently, the college added a separate Business major.

R-MC’s pre-health program has grown through partnerships. Pre-med agreements as part of R-MC’s include the BS/MD Joint Degree Agreement with Eastern Virginia Medical School; the Early Selection Partnership with George Washington University (GWU) School of Medicine and Health Sciences; and the Preferred Applicant Track Agreement with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Pre-nursing agreements include the Guaranteed Admission Agreement with the VCU School of Nursing’s Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing program and the Guaranteed Admission Agreement with the Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (ABSN) program at GWU. Students interested in a career as a physician assistant (PA) can pursue the Early Assurance agreement with the Eastern Virginia Medical School Physician Assistant program.

R-MC’s internships and networking events for students have doubled over the past year. College officials attribute this to to The Edge, R-MC’s intensive four-year career program that prepares students for a competitive
advantage when applying for jobs or graduate school, and to a strong network of engaged alumni and business leaders.

R-MC also has forged new partnerships with J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College and Richard Bland Community College to provide qualified students the opportunity for a seamless transfer to R-MC.

Community participation

Members of the Randolph-Macon community are actively involved with the Town of Ashland and community organizations. Faculty and staff have participated in the Ashland Main Street Association and other groups, and R-MC continues to host the Strawberry Faire on campus each year.

Members of the college are working with the Ashland Police Department to host the first annual Policemen’s Ball in the R-MC Brock Recreation Center, with proceeds going to the Ashland Police Association Foundation.

Community service has long been a part of the R-MC experience. In 2013-2014, R-MC students collectively amassed more than 25,250 volunteer hours and donated $71,072 to various causes. Students in fraternity and sorority life contributed more than 13,600 hours of collective service to the community and donated $39,022 to numerous organizations and philanthropies. In addition, $25,637 was raised and donated to the American Cancer Society from the annual Relay for Life and $5,338 was raised for Stop Hunger Now. The Students Engaged in Responsible Volunteer Experiences (SERVE) program, in the Office of Student Life, is an integral part of life at Randolph-Macon College.

Promoting the college

In June 2014, Lindgren unveiled a new logo and tagline as part of the college’s new brand.

The college’s new logo includes a cupola, a recognizable architectural feature that adorns many campus buildings, including the new student center, Brock Commons, and was prominent on R-MC’s original building in Boydton. The new tagline, Building Extraordinary Futures, supports the college’s strategic goal and represents what R-MC prides itself on: preparing its students for success after graduation.

R-MC also launched a new website in 2014. This undertaking was a year-long, campus-wide process that involved redesigning the site and streamlining its content. Through a process called Responsive Web Design, www.rmc.edu is now mobile friendly. The web is a primary communication and recruiting tool for the college. It serves as a major portal for prospective students and their families and is often their first point of contact.
Photo courtesy of Randolph-Macon College

Brock Commons is an example of the continuing growth on the campus of at Randolph-Macon College.