First building in Innovation Research Park opens May 16

Gov. Tim Kaine and President Roseann Runte will officially launch Innovation Research Park @ ODU, an $80 million economic development project, with the opening celebration for the park’s first building at 41st Street and Monarch Way May 16. The event begins at 4:30 p.m. with a formal program, followed by tours and demonstrations throughout the building. Norfolk City Councilman Barclay Winn and Wexford Science+Technology President James R. Berens will join in the ceremony. Located in the University Village, Innovation Research Park @ ODU is a unique public-private partnership designed to merge university intellectual capital, faculty and students with private-sector companies to pursue research, technology development and business creation opportunities.

Designed by UJNM architects of Philadelphia, the park’s first structure is a 100,000-square-foot, five-story Class “A” office/lab building. Wexford Science+Technology, a national real-estate investment firm headquartered in Towson, Md., is the project owner-developer for the building and QVA Advantis is the exclusive leasing agent and property manager. ODU offices occupy about 60 percent of the building, including the Office of Research, Research Foundation, Lean Manufacturer Institute, Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport, Computational Technology Development Center, and universities.

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The 7 p.m. performance on Kaufman Mall will include a piece by ODU’s Adolphus Hailstork, “Settlements 5,” written in honor of the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown. Music on the mall will return May 24 with a free concert by the Virginia Symphony Orchestra. Under the direction of New Assistant Conductor Matt Kraemer, the symphony will perform a concert at Kaufman Mall.

BY STEVE DANIEL

Whitehurst donates congressional diaries to library

Whitehurst’s nine terms as a congressman covered the period of the Vietnam War, Watergate scandal, ABSCAM scandal and the oil crises of the 1970s. He spent his congressional career as a member of the House Armed Services Committee, and also served a six-year term on the Select Committee on Intelligence, and two years on the Ethics Committee.

He donated the original copies of his personal diaries 20 years ago to the library at Washington and Lee University, where he received his bachelor’s degree in 1950.

At the April 26 ceremony, Whitehurst explained that he was prompted to donate the second set after some of his ODU students complained about having to drive all the way to W&L to read the journals for their research papers. “Last fall I got an attack of common sense,” he explained. “I should have gotten years ago,” Whitehurst admitted. “So I called W&L and asked to borrow the diaries to make copies. I wanted them to be available for this generation and future generations of scholars.”

The diaries, he noted, are unique in that he was the only congressman at the time who kept such a journal. Whitehurst’s wife, Jane, who worked in the ODU Student Affairs, donated a copy of his personal journals for their research papers. “Last fall I got an attack of common sense,” he explained. “I should have gotten years ago,” Whitehurst admitted. “So I called W&L and asked to borrow the diaries to make copies. I wanted them to be available for this generation and future generations of scholars.”

Grads advised to serve fellow man, to protect environment

Nearly 1,800 students received degrees and were given words of advice by speakers Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children’s Defense Fund, and R. Brooks Hanson, deputy editor for the physical sciences at Science magazine, at Old Dominion’s 106th commencement exercises May 5 at the Ted Constant Convocation Center.

Edelman, who spoke to more than 850 graduates of the colleges of Arts and Letters, Engineering and Technology and Health Sciences at the morning ceremony, received an honorary doctor of humane letters degree. She told graduates to ask “not how much can I get, but how much can I give. Service is the very purpose of life, not something you do in your spare time.”

Edelman also shared lessons from her book, “The Measure of Our Success: A Letter to My Children and Yours.” Among them: there is no free lunch, set goals, take risks and assign yourself. “If you see a need, don’t ask tells us that “we have a big change coming, and it’s going to profoundly shape your generation.”

For the past century, fossil fuels have been the basis of the global economy, Hanson noted. “But a change is required for two reasons. The first is simple: within the next 20 to 30 years or so, we will begin to run short of oil. The second reason is a bit more complicated, but it is now extremely well understood that the burning of those fossil fuels is warming our climate.”

Video of both ceremonies can be viewed online at www.lions.odu.edu/dept/ass/c/commencements/2007/spring.

Whitehurst speaks to friends and faculty who attended a reception at the library.

Photo by Chuck Thomas

Big smiles were the order of the day May 5 for members of the Class of 2007.

Photo by Chuck Thomas

News for Faculty, Staff, Students & Friends www.odu.edu/courier

May 11, 2007
News and Notes

Leading the way

University Marshal Gary R. Crossman leads the procession from Webb Center to the Constant Convocation Center for the morning commencement program on May 5.

New ODU center will aid urban, at-risk students in Newport News schools

In an effort to assist urban and “at-risk” students, Old Dominion formally launched the Center for Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership (CTQEL) and signed a partnership with Newport News Public Schools April 25 at the university’s Peninsula Higher Education Center.

Funded by the General Assembly, CTQEL will help teachers and school leaders mobilize community resources to meet such students’ academic and other educational needs. It is one aspect of ODU’s commitment to PK-20 partnerships that aim to improve student achievement, leadership and teacher quality.

Located at the Peninsula Higher Education Center, CTQEL is a community outreach organization of the Darden College of Education’s Program for Research and Development Inc., which will be developed collaboratively with school leadership, teacher quality improvement demonstration projects, administrators will engage in school improvement projects, such as “Bushwhacker,” the title punning on the name Bush, the blades of a hand-built clay lawn mower are embossed with casualty numbers.

Tresser is an associate professor of art at the University of Louisiana at Monroe. Weaver is a professor in the fine arts department at Bethany College in West Virginia.

The University Gallery is located at 350 W. 21st St., Norfolk. For more information call 683-2335.

ODU to start two degree programs in Martinsville

Old Dominion will partner with New College Institute to offer two degree programs in Martinsville beginning this fall. The announcement was made April 26 by President Roseann Runtu and NCI executive director Barry Dorsey.

The two programs, bachelor’s degrees in motor sports technology and industrial technology, are the eighth and ninth degree programs to be offered at NCI, a new educational institution established by the 2006 General Assembly.

NCI brings directly to Virginia’s Southside third- and fourth-year courses that enable students to complete bache- lor’s degrees without having to leave the area. The institution also offers master’s degrees. The programs are developed by public and private institutions.

“This area of the state is known for its motorsports activities,” Dorsey said. “We have an outstanding associate degree in motorsports already offered by Patrick Henry Community College. The bachelor’s degree builds on the PHCC program and makes it possible for a stu- dent to stay in this area to complete a four-year degree and be even better prepared to work in the growing motor- sports industry.”

He added, “The industrial technology degree should be of great benefit to busi- nesses in our region. This degree also is a natural one for many community college graduates with associate degrees in tech- nology to complete.”

VTCHS sponsors annual Institute on College Teaching

The Virginia Tidewater Consortium for Higher Education’s 29th annual Summer Institute on College Teaching will be held June 3-7 at the College of William and Mary.

Institute faculty will include consult- ants with expertise in testing, lecturing, cooperative learning, teaching evalua- tion and other areas. The program is designed to allow faculty members the opportunity to discuss college teaching and learning in-depth with their col- leagues in a non-threatening, pleasant environ- ment.

For details contact the consortium at 683-3183 or ldogtololo@asul.com.

Scholarship will send student to Amman in June

Melodie Barnes, a doctoral student in international studies, was selected to receive a U.S. Department of State Critical Language Scholarship for partici- pation in the Arabic program in Amman, Jordan, from June 13 to Aug. 21. She was one of 150 students chosen from among more than 3,300 applicants.

The scholarships are part of the National Security Language Initiative, a coordinated federal effort designed to increase dramatically the number of Americans learning and teaching critical-need foreign languages.

New SGA president a native of Virginia

Kojo Asamoah-Caesar, a junior communica- tion major, was elected recently as president of the ODU Student Government Association for 2007-08.

A native of Alexandria who grew up in Ghana, Asamoah-Caesar ran for office to combine and further his leadership experiences while serving fellow students.

Adventures program offers surfing, kayaking day trips

The recreational sports department’s Outdoor Adventure Program offers Learn to Surf outings on May 19 and June 9, and a kayak trip June 2. The cost for each is $10 for faculty and staff and $5 for students. The fee includes trans- portation, instruction, use of surfboard and kayak, and lunch.

To register or for more information call 683-3384.

CLT institute begins May 21

Reservations are still being taken for the Center for Learning Technologies’ Summer Institute, scheduled for May 21-23. It will focus on the pedagogical and technical dimensions of podcasting. For details visit www.clt.odu.edu/si/si07.

News and Notes
Grant funds targeted course in cultural competency training for Navy personnel

BY STEVE DANIEL

On May 11, approximately 30 officers and enlisted personnel from Navy Expeditionary Combat Command (NECC) at Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek completed a one-week, intensive cultural competency training course at Old Dominion designed to help them better understand and work in foreign environments.

The NECC, which is commanded by Rear Adm. Donald Ballard, deploys teams to foreign countries to work with their militaries in such areas as port security and local security," said David Chase, director of military distance learning programs at ODU and the university's liaison with ITA. "This will provide these sailors with some cultural competencies that will allow them to interface with the local militaries in carrying out their missions."

He added: "This project is one that supports the military and leverages the existing partnerships and expertise of the university. This is a good example of an area where we are well-equipped to help meet the Navy's needs, and one in which we can indirectly make a national and international impact. The faculty are very enthusiastic about this project."

With the recent increased scrutiny of the federal student loan system and relationships colleges and universities have with lending institutions, Veronica Finch, director of the Office of Student Financial Aid, wants to assure students and parents that Old Dominion has no preferred lenders and does not financially, or otherwise, gain from the issuance of student loans.

Unlike some other schools, ODU is a direct-lending institution, which means the university works directly with the U.S. Department of Education to secure loans for students who apply, Finch noted. "Our mission is to act as a pathfinder, assisting in understanding and navigating the federal student loan system and related aid, as well as acting as a trusted third party for the student and his or her family," she said.

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Faculty Awards and Retirement Dinner

Michael T. Zugelder, associate professor of finance, has been a member of the Old Dominion University faculty since 1992. The business law professor for the College of Business and Public Administration, he maintains an active research agenda, publishing one or two articles each year. His students describe him as an enthusiastic and knowledgeable teacher.

He is a past winner of the college’s teaching award as well as a recipient of the Outstanding Faculty Award from the Office of Student Activities and Leadership.

Zugelder serves on the business college’s Ethics Curriculum Task Force, serves as faculty secretary and chairs the Nominations, Elections and Awards Committee.

The Tonelson Award, which includes a $2,000 prize and a 12-month reserved parking space, is named for one of Old Dominion’s first students, the late Alan Rufus Tonelson ’33, who went on to serve as a professor and administrator of the university.

University Professors

Ravindra P. Joshi, professor of electrical and computer engineering, joined ODU in 1989. He received a bachelor’s degree in technology (1983) and a master’s in electrical engineering (1985) from the Indian Institute of Technology, and a doctorate in electrical engineering from Arizona State University. He is a co-recipient of the Martin Black Prize from the Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine (2005) and recipient of the A. Rufus Tonelson Award (2004). In addition he earned the Outstanding Teaching Award from the Frank Batten College of Engineering and Technology (2006) and the Outstanding Teaching Award from the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering (2003).

Sheri A. Reynolds, associate professor of English and the Ruth and Perry Morgan Endowed Professor of Southern Literature, joined ODU in 1997. She received a bachelor’s degree in English from Davidson College in 1989 and an M.F.A. in creative writing from Virginia Commonwealth University in 1992. She is the 2003 recipient of the Virginia Outstanding Faculty Award in the Rising Star category, and she was featured in April 1997 on the Oprah Winfrey Show during its monthly book club feature. A well-known novelist and playwright, Reynolds is a popular faculty member and currently serves as graduate program director for the M.F.A. program in creative writing.

Lawrence B. Weinstein, professor of physics, joined ODU in 1992. He received a bachelor’s degree in physics (1981) from Yale University and a doctorate in physics (1988) from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was inducted as a Fellow of the American Physical Society in 2003. He received the College of Sciences Faculty Excellence Award in 2005 and the College of Sciences Distinguished Teaching Award in 2006. Weinstein has been described as an innovative and engaging professor.

Michael T. Zugelder, associate professor of finance, joined ODU in 1995. He received a bachelor’s degree in psychology (1974), an M.B.A. (1976) from Indiana University and a juris doctor degree (1980) from the University of Toledo. He is the recipient of the Outstanding Faculty Award (2001) from the College of Business and Public Administration and the Outstanding University Faculty Award (1997) from the Office of Student Activities and Leadership. He consistently receives high praise from his students whether he teaches in the distance learning format or in the traditional classroom.

A. Rufus Tonelson Faculty Award

Michael T. Zugelder

Michael T. Zugelder, associate professor of finance, has been a member of the Old Dominion University faculty since 1992. The business law professor for the College of Business and Public Administration, he maintains an active research agenda, publishing one or two articles each year. His students describe him as an enthusiastic and knowledgeable teacher.

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Retiring faculty, administrators honored

Provoost Tom Isenhour, above, congratulates ODU’s retiring faculty. Pictured are, left to right: John P. Broderick, English; Jae Chong, management and international business; Terry Dickinson, psychology; Gilbert Hoy, physics; Thomas Royer, ocean, earth and atmospheric sciences; Deborah Meltsner, communication and theatre arts; Nancy Wade, biological sciences; David Johnson, art; Ronald Johnson, ocean, earth and atmospheric sciences; John Kuehl, history; and Philip Raisor, English. Retiring faculty and administrators not pictured include: Colin Box, James Calliotte, Charlie Cooke, Frederick Freeman, Justin Friberg, Cynthia Ghaemmaghami, Paula Justice, Richard Keplar, Christopher Lovell, Linda Morrison, Roger Richman, Don Ramyon, Robert Safford, Stanley Weinstein and George Wong.

PHOTOS BY CHUCK THOMAS
Instructional Technology Teaching Award

Donald H. Smith and Lawrence B. Weinstein

Donald H. Smith, associate professor of sociology and criminal justice, joined ODU in 1974. He received his bachelor's (1967) and master's (1968) degrees from California State University at Long Beach. He earned a doctorate from Emory University in 1972. Smith has taught several TELETECHNET courses, and he is responsible for launching the criminal justice online program. Students have benefitted greatly from his innovation and expertise, not only in his subject area but also in his application of technology.

Lawrence B. Weinstein, professor of physics, joined ODU in 1992. He received a bachelor's degree in physics (1981) from Yale University and a doctorate in physics (1988) from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was inducted as a Fellow of the American Physical Society in 2005. He received the College of Sciences Faculty Excellence Award in 2005 and the College of Sciences Distinguished Teaching Award in 2006. Weinstein has engaged in activities inside and outside the classroom that promote, integrate and implement high-tech and low-tech technologies in both formal and informal education.

J. Worth Pickering Administrator of the Year Award

Nancy A. Bagranoff

Nancy A. Bagranoff became dean of the College of Business and Public Administration in 2003. Shortly after her arrival, she instituted the Constant Hall Partners program, which serves as an example of her advocacy for faculty and students as well as her ability to connect with the Hampton Roads community.

Since its inception, the CHP program has grown to 18 members and provides funds each year to support faculty and student development, including enabling graduate students to attend professional conferences to present research.

She is currently vice president for education for the American Accounting Association. Additionally, she is a member of several advisory boards and boards of directors in Hampton Roads.

University Service Awards

40 Years
Robert L. Ash, Aerospace Engineering; Jim Jarrett, Athletics

35 Years
Dana D. Burnett, Educational Leadership and Counseling; Lawrence G. Dotolo, Virginia Tidewater Consortium; Wayne K. Talley, Economics

30 Years
James A. Calliotte, University College; Edward J. Fraim, Development; Jane Hager, Educational Curriculum and Instruction; David E. Johnson, Social Sciences and Criminal Justice; G. Steven Rhiel, Information Technology and Decision Sciences; John M. Ritz, Occupational and Technical Studies

25 Years
A. Osman Akan, Dean’s Office, Engineering and Technology; Deborah B. Baum, Dental Hygiene; Oktay Baysal, Dean’s Office, Engineering and Technology; Janet M. Bing, English; Judith M. Bowman, Academic Affairs and University College; Kenneth G. Brown, Chemistry and Biochemistry; Narasinga Rao Chaganti, Mathematics and Statistics; Gregory A. Cutter, Ocean, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences; Don D. Davis, Psychology; Terry L. Dickinson, Psychology; Jacqueline E. Hines, Student Support Services; James W. Kosnik, Music; George C. Maihafer, Physical Therapy; Zia Razzaq, Civil and Environmental Engineering; Allen Sandler, Early Childhood, Speech-Language Pathology and Special Education; Alan Savitzky, Biological Sciences; Marek Wermus, Information Technology and Decision Sciences

20 Years
Elizabeth R. Anders, Athletics; Christopher B. Colburn, Economics; Jennifer J. Foss, Student Health Services; Mieko Ishibashi, Foreign Languages and Literatures; Drew Landman, Aerospace Engineering; Wendy S. Larry, Athletics; Marilyn E. Marloff, Communication and Theatre Arts; Pamela D. Morgan, Library Collections and Bibliographic Services; Ravi Mukkamala, Computer Science; Mohammad Najand, Business Administration/Finance; Gary Schafman, Civil and Environmental Engineering; Scott R. Sechrist, Medical Laboratory and Radiation Sciences; Rest Ural, Engineering Management and Systems Engineering; G. William Whitehurst, History; Mohammad Zubair, Computer Science
Kaufman Prize winner Anshita Kumar and top scholars honored at banquet

Anshita Kumar of Kiteve, Zambia, a senior finance major, was honored May 3 as Old Dominion’s Kaufman Prize winner at the Student Honors and Awards banquet. Six other graduates were recognized as outstanding scholars.

Kumar, who maintained a 3.5 GPA, was a resident assistant and served in various roles in student government. She recently served as student representative to the State Council of Higher Education.

Kumar cited Don Stansberry, director of student activities and leadership, as her most inspiring member of the faculty and staff, expressing confidence in her abilities.

The following students were presented trophies as recipients of the Alumni Association Outstanding Scholar Awards, given to graduating seniors with the highest GPAs from each college. Faculty and administrators who most inspired the award recipients were also honored.

Leadership and service.

The Lenten Lecture Series at Old Dominion Baptist Church in Virginia Beach.

CAREER ADVISING, visiting assistant professor of early childhood, speech pathology and special education, “Creating an Assistive Technology Toolkit for Young Children” at the TEATMD National Conference in San Diego. Also at the conference, with Kathy Puckett of Arizona State University as lead presenter, “Incorporating Content Area Literacy and Assistive Technology: Implementation Strategies.”

FREDERICK LÜHRICH, chair of foreign languages and literatures, “Kleiner Revival in Contemporary Germany” at the Hebrew Academy of Tones.

Published works

TAMI AL-HAZZA, assistant professor, and ROBERT LUCKING, professor, educational curricular and instruction, “Celebrating Diversity Through Explorations of Arab Children’s Literature” in vol. 83, no. 3 of Childhood Education.

ROB CURRY, director of advising for distance learning at PHYLIS BARRHAM, chair of Academic Advising in the School of Nursing, “Academic Advising in Degree Programs” in “Handbook of Distance Education.”


An emotional semester

The campus community experienced and expressed a range of emotions over the final weeks of the spring semester, which included a prideful celebration and sharing of Asian Indian culture at “Taste of India” and culminated in the pomp and circumstance surrounding the May 5 commencement exercises. Weeks earlier, however, students, faculty and staff came together to mourn the victims of the massacre at Virginia Tech and to honor members of the armed services who lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Whitehurst donates congressional diaries to Perry Library

(Continued from Page 1)
his office as an unofficial and non-salaried aide, did most of the typing.
His entries span the serious business of government service to the personal side of politics. In one 1980 entry, he recounts the poignant story of a woman from Portsmouth who had lost her son in Vietnam and years later appealed to Whitehurst to intervene when her sickly husband, a World War II veteran, was denied admittance to a veterans hospital because they were only accepting those with war-related injuries. Following a persuasive call from Whitehurst, who made it clear that the family had “paid the ultimate price for this country,” the man was quickly admitted.

The diaries also offer rare, and sometimes humorous, behind-the-scenes looks at Washington, such as what transpired at the “gym feast,” an annual event where members of the House of Representatives gathered to dine, socialize and hand out awards to those who used the congressional gym. Whitehurst described the dinner as “like something out of ‘Animal House.’”

At the Perry Library reception, he spoke about one particular gym feast he attended, when George H.W. Bush, then a congressman who was running for a Senate seat, was named runner-up for the award of “person who had cheated the most at paddle ball,” a popular game at the time. “Bush said, ‘I’m leaving this place,’ and the Democrats said, ‘Get the hell out’ and threw wet napkins at him. Two hours ago, these fellows were in solemn debate in the House and were now acting like fraternity guys.”

Whitehurst later recalled making his final diary entry. “It felt like losing a child when I finished the last volume,” he said. “The damn thing had just possessed me so.”

Prior to his first congressional race, Whitehurst taught history at the Norfolk Division, ODU’s forerunner, and Old Dominion College from 1950 to 1968, and served as dean of student affairs from 1963-68.

He hold’s a master’s degree in history from the University of Virginia and a doctorate in American diplomatic history from West Virginia University. A World War II veteran, he served in the U.S. Navy as a combat aircrewman.

Former Congressman Bill Whitehurst donates a set of his personal diaries to university librarian Virginia O’Herron during an April 26 reception at Perry Library. The event was attended by faculty and friends of Whitehurst, ODU’s Kaufman Lecturer in Public Affairs.

PHOTO BY CHUCK THOMAS

An emotional semester

Whitehurst donates congressional diaries to Perry Library
From preacher to teacher: Confessions of a career switcher

By David R. Denny

Back-to-school day was always big in my churches. As minister, I would stand in the pulpit and salute the brave educators celebrating (dreaded?) the beginning of a new year. Holding my hands high in Mosaic fashion, I would call for all the hallowed teachers to stand. Encouraging applause by my congregants, I sanctified them for another year of memorable service to mankind.

Little did I know then that I would one day be one of the sacrificial lambs led to the well, I won’t say slaughter, that sounds so permanent. And so, Confession No. 1 is this: I never thought I would be a teacher. Never. Never. Never!

How this sligt-of-hand occurred in my life is a magician’s trick too bothersome to tell. All I can say is that after nearly 25 years standing in front of octogenarians in fashionable Sunday hats smiling up at me with southern gentility, I made the leap from the sacred to the secular. One day I was parsing Greek verbs in Matthew 11:23 preparing for a Sunday sermon, and the next day I was sitting with a roomful of bemused and somewhat confused middle-aged adults all in mid-lead – changing careers.

Summer Training

I will never forget that first day at Old Dominion University, holding a thick packet of information under one arm and taking a seat in the lecture hall. I did not know anyone there. A thousand doubts tore at my sensibilities. Was I doing the right thing? Could I actually be a teacher? Did I really want to be a teacher?

Nestled in between airline pilots, lawyers, nurses and other career professionals, I heard Ted Forte, our professor, begin with this solemn yet prophetic utterance: “It will take you five years to learn this craft. Some of you will make it. Some of you won’t.” I twitched. He continued: “But if you will make it. Some of you won’t.”

I remember vividly, during my final lecture on “Developing Interesting Characters,” thinking how delightful teaching was. I just knew that I had made the right decision. My lesson complete, I bowed with supreme accomplishment as I returned to my seat blushing complete, I bowed with supreme accomplishment as I returned to my seat blushing.

And this leads me to my third Confession: I didn’t have a clue what to do with either group. In all honesty, they all looked about the same to me – jeans, T-shirts, long hair, ennui. Career Switchers had done an admirable job of teaching me instructional basics. But it was all theoretical until this nailing moment.

Over the years, my impression of teenagers has changed dramatically. I have come to see each child as unique. Each student, I have found, has a distinct personality, a surprising way of challenging the teacher, a mood stamped with the originality of snowflakes. And here I must make a fourth Confession: I love this aspect of teaching. Every day, every class, every moment in the daily lesson leads to unexplored adventures as I walk hand-in-hand with kids on the brink of adulthood.

Quitting Time?

The first month of teaching nearly swamped me. Each night I pored over the thick curriculum guide. For the uninitiated, this is like a huge recipe book without an index or pretty pictures of steaming soups and chocolate cakes. The more I flipped through this book, the more the recipes merged and morphed into complex carbohydrates, Delphic formulas with keyless locks. I couldn’t figure it out. And the more I couldn’t figure it out, the more the panic swelled in my chest. On my second night as a teacher, I broke out in a cold sweat while pacing back and forth in my bedroom at 3 a.m.

This leads me to my fifth Confession: I nearly quit before the month was out. Honestly, I didn’t think I could handle the heart palpitations, the rivulets of anguish endured each payday, the feelings of failure that cooked my mind and tore at my self-esteem.

But somehow I slowly figured out what to do and slowly gained confidence and peace. As the years passed, I learned to acknowledge my weaknesses and insufficiencies. At the same time, I learned to utilize my strengths and natural talents. And I discovered something all teachers share – an innovative resilience that says if this won’t work, try this or that or this.

Final Thoughts

Five years have passed since I first stood in that little room with two windows, a sink, a tiny television mounted in the corner and 30 kids waiting for me to say hello. I think I can honestly say now, I am a teacher. Maybe not the best or the most talented or the most likely to succeed. But I have touched many lives – about 500 to date. And that’s a congregation! Whish brings me to my final Confession: I love teaching.

Recently, one of the girls in my first class (now a senior in high school) came back and visited me. She sat beside my desk and told me all about her progression through the upper grades. While she talked I couldn’t help but see her as she was five years earlier. She told me I was her favorite teacher of all and that I had influenced her career choice. She wanted to be a writer like me. I didn’t let her see my cough and turned for a minute. But as she left I hugged her and knew then that something real and lasting was happening in my classrooms. I was shaping lives. One at a time.

David Denny served as pastor of Craddock Baptist Church in Portsmouth from 1992 to 2001. He received his endorsement in middle school social studies and language arts and one-year eligibility license from ODU’s Career Switcher program in 2002. Denny, who plans to return to Lynnhaven Middle School next fall, has two sons who are students at Old Dominion and his wife is a graduate of the university. Versions of his commentary are scheduled to run in the May issue of Teachers, the June edition of Virginia Journal of Education and the September issue of NEA Today. The Darden College of Education offers the Career Switcher program as an alternative pathway to teaching. Since 2000, the nonprofit Virginia Department of Education Alternative Teacher Preparation program at Old Dominion has trained more than 800 adults who have gone on to become valued educators in school districts statewide.