

THE Rock

Fall/Winter 2025 | Slippery Rock University Magazine

Heart of Health Care

Nurturing Leaders Who Support
the Medical Needs of Our Region

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Health Care Collaborators

SRU is shaping the future of health care in the region by educating the next generation of professionals and building strong partnerships with local hospitals. Through advisory boards within its five academic departments, the College of Health Professions collaborates with leaders from regional health care providers to ensure that SRU stays at the forefront of health care education.

These partnerships give students hands-on experience through internships, mentorship and real-world training, often leading to job offers after graduation. Many SRU alumni are now working at partner hospitals, proving the success of these connections and the University's commitment to workforce readiness.

SRU celebrated this collaboration when Christopher Clark (pictured above), president and CEO of Allegheny Health Network Saint Vincent, Grove City and Westfield Memorial Hospitals, served as a commencement speaker last spring. His presence highlighted the University's role in preparing skilled, confident health care professionals ready to serve their communities.

See page 8 for more about these collaborations, including a success story about an '25 SRU alumnus working in the field.



ON THE COVER

SRU alumnus Sean Kalmeyer, '20, '22M, is a physician assistant at Allegheny Health Network's Wexford Hospital where he works in the cardiovascular testing center using equipment that includes a nuclear camera that provides images of the heart to assess blood supply, identify blockages in arteries and evaluate other heart functions.

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Message from the President



Greetings,

There are many words that I could use to describe Slippery Rock University, but if I had to capture the general atmosphere with one word it would be “momentum.” There’s an unmistakable energy on our campus — a shared belief that we are not just preparing students for the future but actively shaping it.

This past year marked the first full year of our new strategic plan, entitled “Slippery Rock University: The First Choice,” and already we are seeing extraordinary results. Our goal was to increase first-to-second-year student retention by just half a percentage point each year. Instead, we achieved another record-breaking 2.6% increase, raising our retention rate to 86.4%, far above the national average. That number tells a powerful story of what happens when a community believes in its students and supports them. Every success coach, professor, and staff member has played a part in helping our students not just to stay here but to thrive.

We are also redefining what it means to serve our region. From our partnerships with local hospital systems, to new academic programs in electrical engineering, construction management, and nursing, SRU is ensuring that students gain real-world skills that meet the needs of today’s workforce. Initiatives that work closely with employers and provide degree pathways for students help us fulfill our mission to prepare graduates for success while also strengthening the communities where they will live and lead.

If you have been to campus lately, you’ll see that we are investing in spaces because we are committed to facilitating the growth of the people who learn and work at SRU. New athletic fields, renovated labs, and upgraded facilities reflect our commitment to excellence and equity. When young visitors step onto campus for a tournament or camp and say, “I want to go to college here,” we know we’re inspiring the next generation of SRU students.

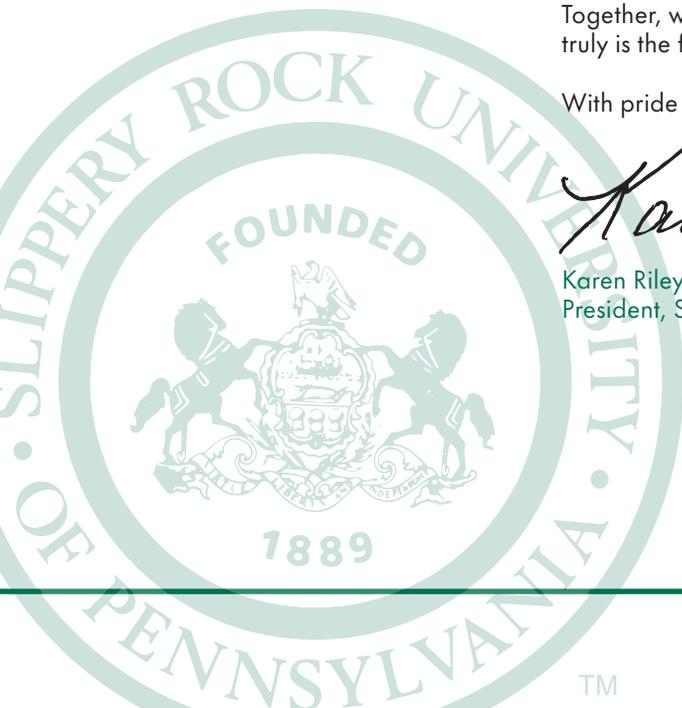
Looking ahead, our vision is bold and deeply human. Through new pathways like teacher apprenticeships and professional certificates, we are opening doors for learners at every stage of life. Whether your family has a collegebound high school student, you’re a returning adult learner, or you’re an alum shaping your own community, SRU is here to help you keep moving forward with the positive momentum that we all sense across campus.

SRU has always been a place where determination meets opportunity. Together, with our alumni leading by example, we are proving that The Rock truly is the first choice for those who believe education can change lives.

With pride and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Riley". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Karen Riley
President, Slippery Rock University



Rock-Solid Reputation

Slippery Rock University stands proudly among the nation's top institutions, earning recognition that reflects its unwavering commitment to excellence and student success.

Here are just a few of the designations and rankings that the University has recently earned:

#20 Top Public Schools (North)

– U.S. News & World Report

#55 in Regional Universities (North)

– U.S. News & World Report

"Best Bang for the Buck"

– Washington Monthly

Top 12% Best Master's Universities

– Washington Monthly

Top 22% Best Colleges

– Washington Monthly

"Best Mid-Atlantic"

– The Princeton Review

"America's Best Colleges"

– Wall Street Journal

"Professions-focused Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Medium"

– designation by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education

"Best for Families"

– Pittsburgh Parent magazine

#41 Best College Dorms in America

– Niche.com

Record-Breaking Success

SRU is a first-choice destination for students, as indicated by enrollment data for the Fall 2025 semester.

8,625

Total Enrollment

+2.75%

Increase Since Last Fall

SRU's largest single-year increase since 2016.

AN SRU RECORD!

1,549

First-Year Undergraduates

Largest such cohort at SRU since 2019.

86.4%

Retention Rate

Percentage of first-year students from last fall who returned this year, which is the University's highest on record.

(Rate as of Sept. 18, 2025.)

57%

Four-Year Graduation Rate

Highest rate in the last five years.





Opportunities for Teachers

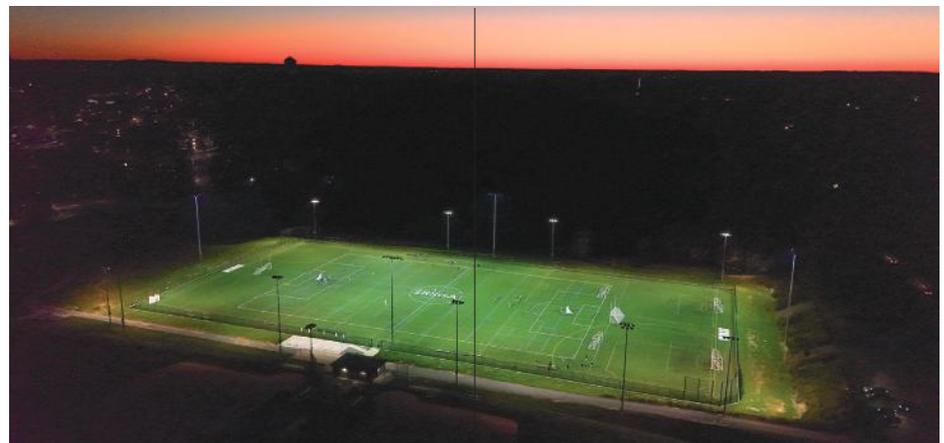
Thanks to a transformative \$600,000 state grant, SRU has spearheaded a first-of-its-kind teacher apprenticeship program to address the state’s critical teacher shortage. SRU’s new two-year apprenticeship program will pave the way for professionals working at five local school districts (Butler, Grove City, Slippery Rock, Hampton and Franklin Regional) with personal support and \$15,000 in tuition to help them earn full teacher certification and a master’s degree.

Tailored for individuals with bachelor’s degrees who are working as long-term substitutes, emergency-certified teachers or paraprofessionals, the program provides a fast-track to success in hard-to-fill positions that require certifications in grades 7-12 science, grades 7-12 mathematics, and kindergarten to grade 12 special education.



Leader in Cybersecurity

SRU is at the forefront of preparing professionals to enter the highly skilled cybersecurity workforce. The National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cybersecurity, a program housed in the National Security Agency, has awarded SRU its NCAE-C Cyber Defense designation, CAE-CD, for its Bachelor of Science in cybersecurity degree program. Since the cybersecurity program was launched in 2019, it has undergone continuous evaluation and this designation by a government agency validates its success and growth.



Turf Get Going

Intramural and club sports at SRU now have access to Campus Recreation’s newest facility feature: the McFarland Recreational Sports Complex now includes an outdoor, multi-sport turf field. The intramural soccer and football fields at The Mac were recently converted from grass to artificial turf to allow for greater use for more sports and groups, as well as rentals to leagues and organizations in the community. The Slippery Rock Student Government Association, which funded \$2.5 million for the project, hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony Sept. 30 at the fields.

(Pictured above, SRSGA executive board members Jaeda Johnston and Connor Pavlicko.)

Internship Ready

Hundreds of SRU students are gaining hands-on experience, building connections, and turning classroom lessons into real-world impact through internships and field experiences.

Here are a few examples:



Brianna Forrest, in the stator of a generator at Westinghouse, learned how to keep nuclear power plants secure.

Securing a Future

A Slippery Rock University student is more secure in her career planning thanks to her summer internship. Brianna Forrest, an SRU junior corporate security and homeland security dual major from Shippenville, spent the summer as an intern at Westinghouse Electric in Cranberry Township, where she focused on plant layout for security purposes.

During her time at Westinghouse, Forrest was among the first people to use new software that models threats, as well as software that allowed Westinghouse to model security response times in the event of threats. When she wasn't working with the software, Forrest sat in intern sessions, learning about nuclear issues and workplace conduct for high-security environments. Particular attention was given to disaster prevention and how modern nuclear facilities can learn from incidents at plants in the past.

"My internship exposed me to a lot that students are not normally exposed to," Forrest said. "I worried that my knowledge in these topics just wasn't there. This experience showed me that it really was thanks to my preparation at SRU." ■

Passion into a Career

What began as a summer internship turned into a career path for Michael Powell, a Slippery Rock University chemistry major who will graduate next year with a job offer waiting for him in his dream career field.

A senior from Mt. Joy, Powell will join Metso as a laboratory operations technician upon graduating in the spring after completing a summer internship as a lab technician. Metso is a Finnish industrial company that provides sustainable technologies for aggregates, mining, recycling and metals refining.

Throughout his three-month-long role in Metso's test center in York, Powell worked on projects ranging from sample preparation and laboratory inventory, to integrating standard protocols for chemical reactions.

Powell's work introduced him to collaborative global experiences, working with labs in Texas, California and even as far as a Finland and Brazil.

"I learned the administrative work of a laboratory, something you can't get without experience, and I also learned how to be extremely analytical," Powell said. "I learned industrial instrumentation, which was a huge bonus, versus research instrumentation that most college labs have."

After showing his chemistry expertise and refining his skills, Powell was offered a temporary, year-long role at the York lab, where he will focus on elemental analysis, inventory, and communication between labs.

"Chemistry has always been my passion, but I often thought about if I would be able to create a career out of it," he said. "What this opportunity showed me was that science isn't dead."

Powell said he was able to use his experience at SRU to achieve his new position. He attributes his experience as the president of the Chemistry Club at SRU, research with faculty and professional guidance by SRU professors Qi Chen and Thaddeus Boron, to his success in securing his job with Metso. ■



Michael Powell already has a job offer as a lab technician at Metso for after he graduates.

Power Play with the Penguins

For Slippery Rock University senior Bailey Kuhn, a lifelong passion for the Pittsburgh Penguins turned into a career-defining opportunity behind the cameras of one of the NHL's most successful franchises.

Kuhn, a strategic communication and media major from Volant, worked as an onsite video producer and editor intern for the Penguins last summer. She recorded and edited practices, press conferences and community events while gaining insight into the daily operations at PPG Paints Arena.

"What stood out to me most were their values and culture," Kuhn said. "Even though I was 'just an intern,' I truly felt like I had a place within the organization. I had my own workspace, received helpful feedback and got to see a lot of things the average fan doesn't."

A typical day included setting up player interviews, filming drills, capturing press conferences and logging footage for the team's social media and broadcast channels. Kuhn gained hands-on experience with professional Sony FS7 cameras and even met Penguins legends Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin.

"This experience really challenged me," Kuhn said. "It gave me the chance to work with high-definition cameras and gain experience in a professional environment. I met so many people, including the players, and took every opportunity to make new connections."

Although her internship ended in August, Kuhn has been invited back for future opportunities, including game-day control room work.



Bailey Kuhn produced and edited video while working with the Penguins.

Kuhn was able to leverage classroom experience and faculty mentorship from SRU to secure her spot in the internship.

"Video Production with Dr. Brett Barnett helped me the most with Adobe Premiere and basic editing skills," Kuhn said. "Message Preparation with Dr. Franklyn Charles helped with interviewing. It was awesome to apply what I learned with the players."

"This experience made me realize that sports media is definitely the career path I want to pursue." ■

Teaching with a Growth Mindset

When Elsie Eason transferred into Slippery Rock University, she knew that she wanted to teach.

A nursing major at her previous school, Eason had a close friend at SRU who

pushed for her to come to The Rock to study education.

"I wanted to become a teacher for a lot of reasons," Eason said. "I see children as so impressionable, and we need

more kind, well-rounded people, so I think teaching young kids allows you to make a difference in how people think and view the world for the rest of their lives."

A program that Eason found particularly impactful for her experience at SRU was RockTEACH, a program that offers prospective teachers a glimpse into what being an educator looks like. RockTEACH forges partnerships with local high schools and connects students to education faculty and SRU education majors. For Eason, this provided her an opportunity to connect with and invest in students from underrepresented groups by helping to ensure that their education is relevant to their lives and that they are valued in the educational environment. As a woman of color in education, this work was important to Eason.

Now, Eason is a senior special education major with a focus on autistic support. While fulfilling her student-teaching requirement, Eason is working at

Brookline Elementary School in Pittsburgh in a classroom with third and fourth graders who are on the autism spectrum. Through her student teaching, Eason gained experiences that wouldn't have been possible in a college classroom setting.

"In my classes, we talk a lot about the range of behaviors that special needs students can present," Eason said. "It was nice to be able to connect those conversations from the classroom to my students."

Even when the classroom environment is stressful, Eason knows this is where she is meant to be.

"I like seeing my students grow," Eason said. "There have been a few times where I'll teach a lesson and they're just not getting it that day. Then I'll come in next time and they'll nail everything and that's when you know that they're really progressing." ■



Elsie Eason worked closely with Gina Murphy, her cooperating teacher at Brookline Elementary.





Vintage Homecoming to Remember

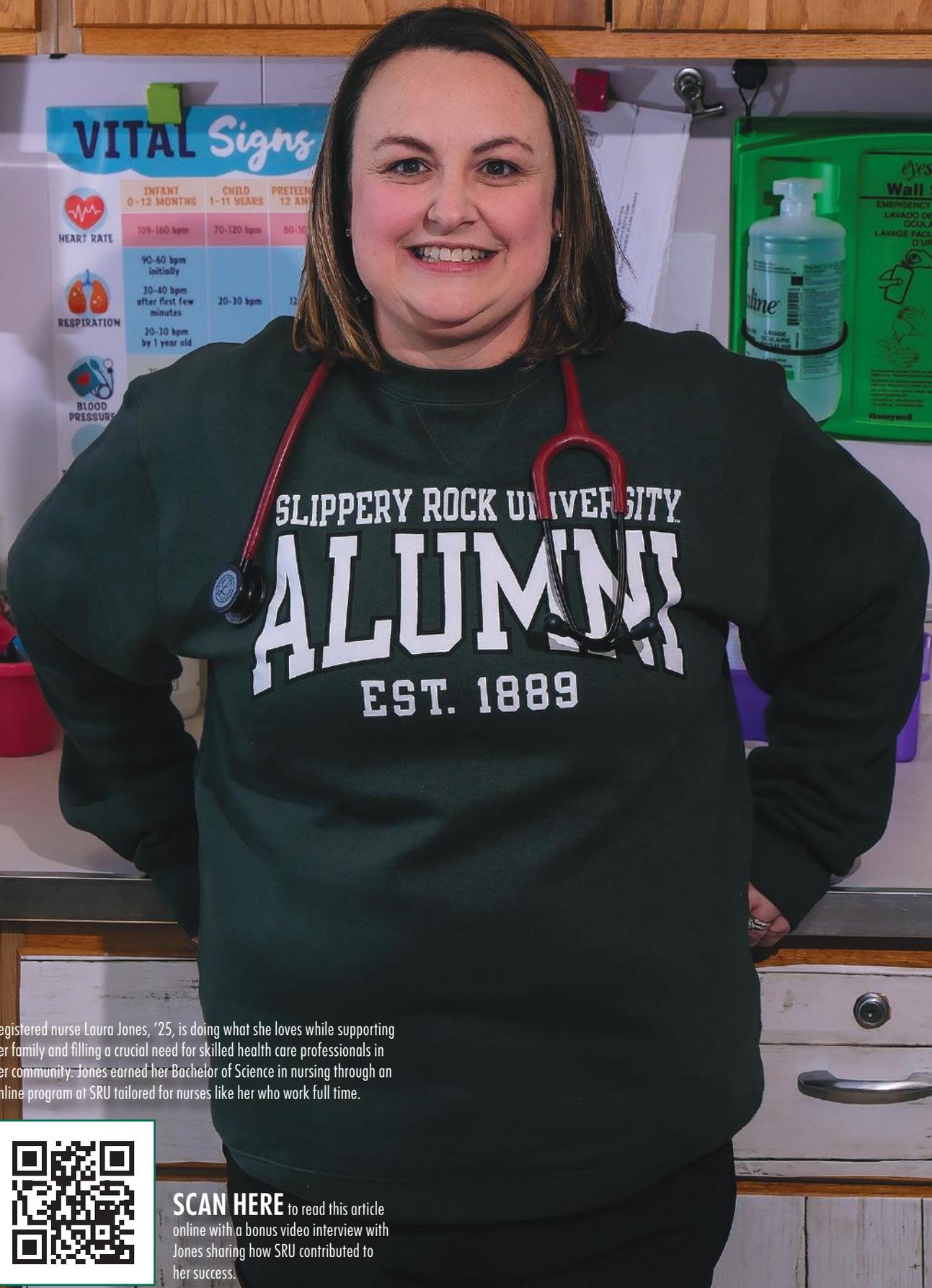
SRU's campus was alive with energy, pride and celebrations during Homecoming weekend, Oct. 16-18. The entire community came together for this tradition, and, keeping with this year's vintage theme, the event was indeed one to remember.

Highlights included the pep rally, the annual parade down Main Street in Slippery Rock, the crowning of the Homecoming royalty, and, of course, the alumni tailgating parties preceding the football team's comeback, 30-27 win over rival IUP.



Scan here to watch a video recap of the Homecoming weekend.





VITAL Signs			
	INFANT 0-12 MONTHS	CHILD 1-11 YEARS	PRETEEN 12 AND OLDER
 HEART RATE	109-160 bpm	70-120 bpm	60-100 bpm
 RESPIRATION	90-60 bpm initially 30-40 bpm after first few minutes 20-30 bpm by 1 year old	20-30 bpm	12-20 bpm
 BLOOD PRESSURE			



Registered nurse Laura Jones, '25, is doing what she loves while supporting her family and filling a crucial need for skilled health care professionals in her community. Jones earned her Bachelor of Science in nursing through an online program at SRU tailored for nurses like her who work full time.



SCAN HERE to read this article online with a bonus video interview with Jones sharing how SRU contributed to her success.

Prepared to Care

SRU empowers health professionals to care deeply, grow continually and serve where they're needed most

The nurse's office at Fannett-Metal Elementary School in tiny Willow Hill, Pennsylvania, could be any clinic or doctor's office in a small town. It's where health care is practiced and lived every day by people like Laura Jones, '25, a Slippery Rock University graduate with a Bachelor of Science in nursing.

Jones epitomizes the values of health care workers, what it takes to persist and thrive in the field and the personalized attention that they provide for people in their communities.

"I like caring for others," Jones said. "I like seeing people get better and seeing them get what they need, but also helping people when it is their darkest day, holding their hand and getting them through it. It's being able to help a mom have a baby for the first time. It's being with that patient after they've had a heart attack and helping them understand what happened and what we need to do."

There is a great need for many different health care professionals, but the need for nurses is particularly acute. Pennsylvania is facing a critical shortage of nurses, with recent reported vacancy rates of 30% for registered nurses who provide direct care, and an anticipated shortfall of more than 20,000 RNs in the state by 2026. These statistics are among the highest in the nation.

"There are vast opportunities in health care — people are living longer, but there are more chances of them being sicker — and we really need people for these jobs," Jones said. "We all hope to be in the best health, but someday everyone is going to need others to step up."

Jones has worked as a nurse her entire adult life and recently became a school nurse. The work can be routine, like applying a Band-Aid on a knee



SRU helped me to grow in my career. Having that degree on my wall at work, that is something that I show my kids that I've really worked hard for."

- Laura Jones, '25

skinned during recess, but the work of school nurses also includes tasks that are consequential to early success, like understanding a child with special needs and their individualized education program (IEP), and providing appropriate care and medications. It can also be as serious as cancer, like when Jones noticed a kindergartner limping slightly and notified his parents to look into it before they discovered he had leukemia. Luckily, it was detected early enough for the boy to receive successful treatment.

The Nurse's Call

Jones, 41, always wanted to become a nurse, and she did despite dropping out of community college and later putting her career on hold to have the first of four children with her husband,

Now that Jones has her bachelor's degree, she qualified to become a certified school nurse in the Fannett-Metal School District. She has about 25 visits per day and is responsible for the care of 180 children in grades K-5, including two of her four children.

Michael. She first worked as a certified nursing assistant and became a licensed practical nurse, working at Chambersburg Hospital for 10 years, doing everything from cardiac care to case management. While there, she became a registered nurse through the hospital's online partnership with Excelsior College.

When her youngest child started kindergarten in 2022, Jones decided it was time to return to her professional career, this time as a substitute school nurse at her children's school, Fannett-Metal, and eventually full time — but her career growth was limited.

Although Jones is a registered nurse, she needed a bachelor's degree to become a certified school nurse. Fannett-Metal has one on staff and Jones was able to work there on the condition that she pursue her BSN, which can be challenging for a working mother of four. Two colleagues recommended SRU's online RN-to-BSN program, which is designed to meet the needs of registered nurses like Jones who are looking to build on their associate degree or diploma education and earn their BSN while working in the field.

"SRU was a good choice for me because it allowed me to take classes at home, and to still manage a home and a family while working full time," Jones said. "It made it really easy with the support of professors who understand a working professional."

"The difference that we have at Slippery Rock is we get it — we provide great support for students because we understand where they are," said Christina Silva, associate professor of nursing, who, like Jones, earned her degree while working as a nurse earlier in her career. "I bend over backward to help our students, because I am their best resource."

Jones benefited from the curriculum that is focused on skills such as teambuilding and communication, which are sought after by potential employers.

"SRU helped me to grow in my career because I was able to collaborate with other nursing professionals, improve my assessment and research skills and better manage my time," Jones said.

PA who Communicates

The strength of the nursing program at SRU is an example of a larger emphasis on communication across all health professions departments at the University. Because the health care industry is constantly evolving, the needs of employers and the skills and talent they desire are changing.

Christine Karshin, dean of the College of Health Professions at SRU, meets regularly with hospital executives and nursing administrators. Each health professions department has its own advisory board of health care professionals who collaborate with faculty as strategic partners to achieve mutual success for graduates and employers.

"We're hearing what the industry is telling us," Karshin said. "Yes, they need more people in different disciplines, but it's also about how we can better prepare our students to become the next generation of health care providers."

According to Karshin, a recurring need is having professionals who possess the soft skills to relate to patients and families and the ability to communicate across differences. This includes generational gaps, such as talking to older adults or children and their parents, much like

Jones experienced with the kindergartner with leukemia. It also includes people with varying developmental disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder.

An example of this is the physician assistant studies program at SRU, which requires students to complete a rotation focused on providing care to special populations.

When Sean Kalmeyer, '20, '22M, was in SRU's PA program, his field experience was in a neurocritical intensive care unit in rural West Virginia.

"Slippery Rock does a very good job at fostering a type of environment where you become aware of different cultures and develop a deeper understanding of differences in needs or even different opinions, beliefs and values," Kalmeyer said. "Your approach to care can be different (depending on the patient's background), but the goal is always giving the best guidelines based on recommendations. That's why effective communication skills are so important. SRU prepares students for good, evidence-based decision making, but also good, shared decision making."

Kalmeyer is now a physician assistant for Allegheny Health Network in Wexford, specializing in cardiovascular medicine. He maintains long-term relationships with patients in an outpatient clinic twice a week, as well as inpatient work diagnosing and managing care for patients with a range of cardiovascular conditions, including arrhythmias, heart failure, hypertension, hyperlipidemia and other heart-related diseases.

He remains involved with the SRU PA program, assisting in precepting students and giving lectures.



Physician assistants like Sean Kalmeyer, '20, '22M, perform stress tests and check the blood pressure of patients on treadmills, but they are also trained to be effective communicators, understanding the diverse needs, cultures, and values of their patients for shared decision making.

OT who Collaborates

Another emerging need in the health care industry is interprofessional collaboration. Health care providers are required to be resourceful and identify needs for their patients, which means they must be educated about other professions. Each year, more than 300 SRU students from different health-professions majors participate in an interdisciplinary case presentation where a family shares their unique experience needing health care, and students discuss how they can provide solutions as a "health care team," learning about available resources in the process.

SRU graduates like Gina Novario, '17, '21 DOT, know this well. She is a practicing occupational therapist who is now working as a research scientist at the University of Pittsburgh, where she is researching ways smart home

technologies can be used as assistive technologies for persons with disabilities to promote independence and participation in daily tasks. She works with not only occupational and physical therapists but software and rehabilitation engineers.

"I have to lean on my team to solve problems, but even in my clinical job, I'm working with all different therapists, nurses, and case managers, so it's incredibly important to maintain an open line of communication," Novario said. "This is the best way, not only to support yourself in your career, but then also to support your patient to make sure they have the best outcomes."

"It's about personalized care, not generalizing problems and solutions," Karshin said. "It just takes one person with the knowledge and the ability to make connections — the type of person who's capable of seeing something in their patients and can do something about it. We have a whole college of people that we are preparing to be just those kinds of people."

Prepared for the Future

Laura Jones, Sean Kalmeyer and Gina Novario are now those people, thanks to their SRU education.

Jones not only has developed the skills to be a better nurse, but she now has the credentials to back it up. She is positioned to become the certified school nurse at Fannett-Metal or to advance in other areas of the nursing field. Because nurses are needed in hospitals, clinics, schools and even on cruise ships, Jones could take her skills anywhere.

"SRU helped me to grow in my career," Jones said. "Having that degree on my wall at work, that is something that I show my kids that I've really worked hard for, and they saw that I worked hard for it."

"I was told at one point that I would never be a successful nurse," Jones added while unsuccessfully holding back a smile. "I would think at this point that I am quite successful." ■

As a research scientist in the University of Pittsburgh's Rehabilitation Science and Technology Department, SRU alumnus Gina Novario, '17, '21 DOT (right), works with clients who are a part of a smart home service delivery study, using verbal instruction on smartphone to support engagement with the mainstream smart technologies.



Nursing at SRU

SRU celebrated the 50th anniversary of its nursing program in 2025.

The current RN-to-BSN online program has produced 763 graduates in the last 10 years.

The program is nationally accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education through 2034.

SRU introduced a 1+2+1 nursing program in Fall 2025 where students:

- ➕ Take general education classes at SRU in their first year,
- ➕ Earn their RN at a partner institution in the second and third years, and
- ➕ Complete their Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree at SRU or online by the end of their fourth year.

SRU has articulation agreements for this pathway with two institutions: Community College of Beaver County and the Allegheny Health Network Schools of Nursing.

Scholarships to support the next generation of nursing professionals are available thanks to a transformative \$500,000 gift from Art Williams, '64, in memory of his late wife, Louise Williams: The Louise and Art Williams Scholarship.

SAVE THE DATE!

The nursing program at SRU will celebrate its 50th anniversary with a reception on campus April 30, 2025.





Economics in Action

Xintong Wang's Partnership Brings Data-Driven Impact to Local Nonprofits

By Hayden Schultz, '25

When local families dial PA 211 for help with food, housing or utilities, Slippery Rock University students are behind the scenes using data to help community agencies respond faster and smarter.

This vision was developed by Xintong Wang, associate professor of economics, who transformed her econometrics course into a real-world impact project. Through a partnership with a local software company, Wang connects students with nonprofit clients, giving them opportunities to apply classroom learning to solve local community challenges.

Building the bridge for community impact

Leading up to SRU's 2025 spring semester, Wang began exploring ways to bring real data into her Introduction to Econometrics course to provide students with meaningful, hands-on

experience. She reached out to John Golden, managing director of SRU's Sustainable Enterprise Accelerator, who connected her with MAPS Technologies, a Franklin-based company that provides customer relationship management software to nonprofits.

Wang, who specializes in public program evaluation and health economics, saw the partnership with MAPS as a perfect opportunity to involve students in high-impact work. It also complemented her teaching philosophy centered around real-world experiences, benefiting students by placing them in scenarios to deepen their learning beyond a textbook and into their future career roles. With MAPS specializing in information infrastructure to support its clients, they lacked analysis resources, leaving an opportunity for Wang's econometric students to get involved.

"MAPS mostly helps organize and store the data for their clients through information systems," Wang said.

Xintong Wang guides students in her econometrics class at SRU, helping them provide business analytics solutions for local clients such as PA 211.



"When their clients asked for business analytics, they didn't have that service. I then thought, 'That's exactly what my students could provide while they learn in the classroom.'"

The collaboration quickly took shape in the spring with Wang's econometrics class assisting eight nonprofit clients, including food pantries, a youth hockey league and mental health organizations.

Each organization provided datasets and research questions for SRU students to solve throughout the semester. Students then used their recently learned econometric techniques and Python computer programming to explore trends, build regression models that predict how one thing changes based on another and presented their findings through data visualization to match the structure of professional consulting services.

For Annalee Moorhead, a senior dual finance and economics major from Kittanning, the experience was transformative for her career prospects in financial advising.

"It wasn't just another group project that is forgotten about after it's finished; it made a real impact and it was something I could put on my résumé or talk about in an interview," Moorhead said. "I had no coding experience going in, but we built a full regression model. It was challenging, but very rewarding."

Analyzing real needs through PA 211

After the spring semester, Wang refined her classroom vision by shifting the partnership with MAPS to a single high-impact client for the 2025 fall semester. Wang said this was to deepen the experience for students while maximizing impact on the local community.

The econometrics class partnered with PA 211 Northwest for the 2025 fall semester, Pennsylvania's 24/7 referral service connecting residents in need of food, housing, utilities and other

critical services. PA 211 Northwest serves thousands of residents across several counties in Pennsylvania, including counties neighboring Butler such as Clarion and Venango. The resource center historically serves as the primary lifeline for people in Pennsylvania navigating emergency needs.

Although the organization is rich in data archives, PA 211 Northwest has limited in-house analytic capacity. This is where Wang's econometrics students stepped in. Through data analysis, the SRU class is helping PA 211 Northwest and its partner agencies allocate resources more effectively to people across northwestern Pennsylvania.

"This project focuses on populations typically under the poverty line with needs like food and shelter," Wang said. "By identifying patterns and unmet needs, PA 211 can better serve communities and help shape policy through the insights we find."

With similar strategies to those used last spring, students are cleaning and merging datasets, specifying and interpreting regression models and communicating their findings to nontechnical audiences via data visualization. Students are also analyzing caller data – including demographics such as age, gender, race and ethnicity and ZIP code – service requests, referrals and final service outcomes. Analyzing the data sets will then allow the SRU group to identify patterns of unmet needs and map them geographically.

Strengthening community partnerships

For Wang, the collaboration between SRU and the local communities is a win-win scenario: Students gain real-world experience in the classroom, allowing them to see the impact of their work and where they can take their careers, and



Wang, an associate professor of economics, integrates real-world applications into her teaching using computer programming and data visualization that matches the structure of professional consulting services.

the nonprofits gain insights to better serve local communities. It also provides a framework for how additional SRU classrooms can replicate the impactful partnership in other disciplines.

"I hope what I learn and teach in the classroom can make a real improvement to my surroundings," Wang said. "If we can make a positive impact on the community directly, it doesn't just raise the University's status, it consistently brings community needs into our curriculum and helps solve them."

The partnership with MAPS also showcases SRU's experiential learning mission, forging sustainable partnerships between academic experts and community partners. Wang believes this is just the beginning of how she can advance SRU's continued initiative for regional collaboration and impact.

"Bringing western Pennsylvania's needs into our curriculum means what students learn is directly applicable in the real world," Wang said. "It allows students to see how their work now, and in the future, can impact their communities and surroundings."

As Wang continues to evolve her classroom partnership with MAPS and local nonprofits, the project reflects a model of turning academic expertise into meaningful action. Wang is not only providing an interactive learning experience by embedding real-world scenarios into SRU classrooms, but is reshaping how students see the impact of their work on real people and communities. ■

Hayden Schultz is a student writer in SRU's University Marketing and Communication Office. He is a strategic communication and media major from Zelienople.

SRU students are using customer relationships management software from MAPS Technologies, a local company that has partnered with the University to use their tools to help local nonprofit organizations.



Staying out of a Pickle

Duo from SRU develops innovative training program to help pickleball players

Michael Holmstrup, a Slippery Rock University professor of exercise science, is pioneering training regimens for one of America's fastest-growing sports: pickleball. Partnering with retired SRU employee and pickleball pro Gino Cicconi, he created an exercise science-backed fitness program titled FITTER Pickleball.



From left, Gino Cicconi, a pickleball pro and retired SRU employee, and Michael Holmstrup, a professor of exercise science, are the co-authors of FITTER Pickleball.

Bridging Cultures Through Dance

Teodoro brings Colombian culture to U.S. through research and performance

A Slippery Rock University dance faculty member is bringing knowledge and understanding of Colombian culture to a brand-new stage. Melissa Teodoro, a professor of dance, conducted dance ethnography research in Colombia on the banks of the Magdalena River, yielding exciting new creative projects and scholarly works that she is sharing at SRU and in the dance community throughout western Pennsylvania.

"I've been fascinated with Colombian dance and music for over 30 years," said Teodoro. "Colombia was my go-to when I was doing my research, but the river has

really captured my attention over the last few years."

Teodoro was able to expand her research after she earned the prestigious Fulbright U.S. Scholar award for the 2024-25 academic year.

During her 2025 spring sabbatical, Teodoro traveled down the Magdalena River, spanning the length of the country, documenting aspects of the cultural lives of communities living on the banks. Her journey down the river gave her an understanding of its importance in Colombian culture with Teodoro developing the impression that the river itself carries the history of the nation.

"I was immersed in life on and around the river, so that allowed me to talk to fishermen and ladies who wash their clothes and cook on the river as well as historians and dancers and architects," said Teodoro. "Those interactions helped me to see how dance is connected to the river."

After conducting her field research, Teodoro authored her paper "Rio: Dancing Down the Magdalena," explaining the various dances and festivals that were associated with different areas of the river.

Teodoro presented her research at the SRU Faculty Research Symposium. The paper then informed the upcoming dance concert, "Yuma," a performance featuring SRU dance students that Teodoro will be choreographing. "Yuma" will be performed at the August Wilson African American Cultural Center in Pittsburgh this March.

"Yuma" is inspired by the same path that Teodoro took when she sailed the river, starting at its widest, northernmost

The program is designed to boost performance and, most importantly, keep players injury free.

The goal is simple: equip players, especially older adults, with proper strength and conditioning so they can stay on the court with confidence. Drawing from Holmstrup's exercise science expertise and Cicconi's professional-level experience, the duo developed exercises that mirror dynamic pickleball movements.

"We knew if we started a program, the goal would be to keep people healthy and able to play pickleball with their friends," Holmstrup said. "Being on a resistance program is a bonus for longevity, but the social and community aspects are important too."

Cicconi worked in SRU's Information and Administrative Technology Services department for 35 years before retiring in 2018. A competitive player



with a 5.0 rating, the sport's professional threshold, he earned a bronze medal at the 2024 USA Pickleball National Championships.

"Michael specifically designed this program to keep players injury-free," Cicconi said. "All the exercises build on movements we do in every match and especially help older players stay safe."

The idea for FITTER Pickleball started when Holmstrup observed his wife playing and crafted a personal training regimen. Over the last two years, Cicconi became his first test subject. Now 63, Cicconi plays and coaches weekly without injury, and in 2025 alone he captured five additional gold medals at national tournaments.

"Gino's our model for how your game can improve and you

Cicconi, 63, secured a bronze medal in his age group at the 2024 USA Pickleball National Championships.

can stay healthy," Holmstrup said. "He feels more comfortable going for the ball because he's trained these movements off the court."

SRU students are involved in the program's development, producing more than 125 instructional videos included with each spiral-bound or digital book. Holmstrup sees it as both an educational and entrepreneurial opportunity for students. Additionally, the duo aims to donate at least 10% of earnings from FITTER Pickleball to local charities.

"This became a way to look into the exercise marketing side and involve students as much as we can," he said. "I didn't start this to strike it rich. The wider this goes, the better it will be for the pickleball community." ■



Popular among older adults as a less strenuous alternative to tennis, pickleball is played competitively at SRU year round.

point and culminating at the narrow southernmost extremity, framing this movement as the birth, life and death of the river. It will feature pieces choreographed in the styles that Teodoro found in her travels.

The performers in "Yuma" are comprised of members of "Palenque," the touring Afro-Colombian dance ensemble at SRU for which Teodoro serves as artistic director.

"Palenque was founded about 13 years ago, and at that point my research was very separate from my teaching, but a few dance majors expressed interest in my research," Teodoro said. "Then some more students became interested and it organically evolved into a touring company."

The core of Teodoro's scholarly and creative work is to expose people to cultures that they may not have previously known about, and in Teodoro's view, there is no better way to understand culture than through dance. According to Teodoro, one can truly see the embodiment of a culture through dance. ■

Melissa Teodoro, an SRU professor of dance and 2025 Fulbright Scholar, conducted dance ethnography research in Colombia on the banks of the Magdalena River during her sabbatical in spring 2025.





The SRU Jazz Ensemble toured the Soviet Union in 1991 under the direction of Terry Steele.



Three visionary directors who shaped five decades of SRU jazz: from left, Stephen Hawk (1997-2011), Jason Kush (2011-present), and founding director Terry Steele (1975-97).



Your gift helps fund scholarships that keep SRU student musicians learning, performing and sharing their passion for jazz. Because of you, the next generation of artists can continue to make The Rock swing.

To learn more about making a gift to celebrate 50 years of jazz at SRU, scan this QR code.

50 years of SRU Jazz marked by music and tradition

By Chloe Kemp, '26

The SRU Jazz Ensemble turned 50 this fall, and generations of performers and faculty came together to celebrate the legacy of the band at the 50th anniversary concert on Oct. 18.

Of the more than 300 attendees, at least 200 were alumni of the SRU Music Department. The concert served to honor those alum, but more importantly, it was a tribute to Stephen Hawk, former director of SRU Jazz, and Terry Steele, the ensemble's founder.

"The alumni were grateful for the event," said Jason Kush, '04, current director of SRU Jazz and professor of music. "We've all found our college years to be so formative, and we made memories that last a lifetime. To be able to go back to the place where these memories were made with a purpose was special."

At the concert, alumni Rodger Hicks, '82, '87M, and Patrick Kennedy, '04, testified to the support, character and friendship of both Steele and Hawk. Hicks traveled from his home in Germany to attend and speak on his time at the University.

Steele's leadership has shown through those whom he has passed the torch to, including Kush, a former student under Steele.

"Terry Steele is a life-changing figure for me," Kush said. "He not only taught music, he's one of those people who taught music through being a good person."

Steele was hired at SRU with a mission of cultivating the University's budding big band jazz ensemble. In the fall of 1975, SRU Jazz was born.

Steele's inaugural iteration of the band started the progress that led it to its first European tour in 1991—a 10-day, seven-concert run in the Soviet Union, with many of the students having never flown on an airplane before.

Steele founded the jazz combos, a small group endeavor often featuring a six-piece ensemble.

"Big band music is for dancing," Steele said. "A large ensemble experience is crucial, but combos place an emphasis on improvisation."

By the early 2000s, SRU jazz combos were on a rotating gig schedule at North Country Brewing Co., performing in exchange for a free meal.

In 2007, Steele retired to pursue performance opportunities, but his ties to SRU remained intact.

"I'm really proud of how Slippery Rock has supported the Jazz Ensemble," Steele said. "Hawk and Kush have kept the momentum going, and it's better now than it was when we started. He's got a band now that is just fabulous. The progress doesn't stand still; it just keeps getting better."

Steele's perspective at the 50-year mark is one of pride and hope for the band's current players.

"The students now are at that place where they're young and learning like I was, and they'll fall in love with it," Steele said. "That's why they become teachers and professional players."

Steele emphasized this lifelong connection with music.

"Music is something you can't outgrow," he said. "I'm 78 years old and I still play my sax for an hour every day. It's a love—music is in my blood. It makes me feel grounded."

Kush acknowledged the significance of the concert for current students with the alumni in attendance.

"The students could see Jazz Ensemble is more than a class—it's the relationships and memories you make," Kush said. "Music has a unique power that bonds us together, and that was on display."

Steele echoed this sentiment: "Music is the love of my life, so it's easy to talk about it." ■



Chloe Kemp is a student writer in SRU's University Marketing and Communication Office. She is a strategic communication and media major from Crescent.



First Impressions of The Rock on Move-In Day

By Nina Sgro, '26M

Move-in day is a community affair. It's all hands on deck, with students and staff pitching in to welcome families, the marching band serenading arriving students, and Rocky the mascot on the prowl all over campus. Additionally, it is organized, quick, and above all, positive.

"The students who helped unload were very nice and friendly and they knew everything that they had to do," said Kelly Violanti, mother of first-year student Louis Violanti of Lackawanna, New York.

In the first hour of their arrival on campus, the Violanti family was able to witness the spirit of togetherness that makes SRU a special place.



Shelby Misencik, '98, moved her daughter Shayah into SRU, as she followed her mother's footsteps.



New students feel the supportive environment at SRU from the moment they arrive on move-in day with hundreds of volunteers carrying their luggage and welcoming them to The Rock community.

While moving in her daughter, Shayah, alumna Shelby Misencik, '98, of Green Tree spoke of the close relationships that she was able to build with faculty in her time at SRU.

"Everybody knew who I was," Misencik says. "Even when I'd see them after I had graduated, they would remember me. That doesn't happen at other universities."

Melanie Alexander of Chesterfield, Virginia, echoed Violanti and Misencik's sentiments about the connectedness of the campus community, offering particular praise for its diversity.

Alexander's son, Mirco, discovered SRU on YouTube. He decided that SRU was a place that he simply had to learn more about, and after two visits, he and his family were sold. "I feel like Slippery Rock chose him," Alexander said.

Alumnus Bryan Saeler, '04, spoke to the distinctive academic programs offered here, saying that the University's safety management

major was a significant factor in his son Tristen's choice to attend SRU. Even when Tristen decided to change his intended major from safety to construction management, the University had a strong academic program to offer him.

Other families spoke of the high reputation of the theatre, education and criminal justice programs, to name a few, calling them unique and rigorous, especially when compared to other schools in the region and price range.

While reflecting on her son's arrival on campus, Melanie Alexander spoke of the optimism and pride she felt regarding Mirco's choice to attend the University.

"I'm just so excited for him," she said, "and I know he's gonna do well."

These parents and families have brought their children this far, and they have graciously trusted SRU to guide their children into adulthood, the next phase of their intellectual and personal lives, and into professional life. Unique and career focused academics, an inviting and fulfilling social life, and the safety and beauty of the campus all compound to create an environment where a parent can feel secure in imagining a bright future for their student. ■



Tristen Saeler accompanied by his parents, Samantha, '02, and Bryan Saeler, '04, on move-in day.

Nina Sgro is a graduate assistant of editorial strategy in SRU's University Marketing and Communication Office. She is secondary education-English master's student from New Castle.

Hall of Fame Class of 2025

The Slippery Rock University Athletics Hall of Fame Committee inducted the seven-member class of 2025 at the annual Rock Athletics Hall of Fame Banquet, Sept. 12, along with a Special Recognition Award honoree. These athletes represent years of dedication and excellence at SRU, as well as a commitment to sportsmanship and discipline.

The 1995 women's water polo team was recognized for the 30th anniversary of its national championship. The squad went on a dominant run to claim the 1995 U.S. National Championship, becoming the first team from outside the state of California to win a women's national title.

The addition of the seven-person Class of 2025 increases the number of former SRU student-athletes, coaches and contributors inducted into the Hall of Fame to 285 since the inaugural class was inducted in 1984.



Members of the SRU Athletics Hall of Fame Class of 2025, from left, Rick Magulick, '99, football; Casey (Quinn) Jacoby, '12, women's lacrosse; representing the late Lynn (Portzer) Kime, '78, women's gymnastics, her husband, Scott Kime; Will Kengor, '16, baseball; Allison (Smith) Keck, '10, women's track and field; Kevin Jewel, '14, men's track and field; and Bret Geishauser, '98, football.

#2 in the Nation in Academics

SRU had 288 student-athletes receive 2025 Division II Athletic Directors Association (D2ADA) Academic Achievement Awards, the second most in the nation. This award recognizes student-athletes with cumulative GPA of 3.50 or higher.

New Sports

SRU will add women's flag football and men's wrestling as varsity sports to begin competing in the 2027-28 academic years. Fundraising campaigns are underway.

Learn more by scanning this QR code.



Brayden Long, Division II Male Scholar-Athlete of the Year

Top of their Class

Former football standout Brayden Long, '25, and track and cross country star Anna Igims, '24, were not only the best scholars in their sports but the top students across all athletic teams in the region and, in Long's case, the nation.

Long was named the 2024-25 Division II Male Scholar-Athlete of the Year by the Division II Conference Commissioners Association, and Long and Igims were the D2CCA's Atlantic Region Male and Female Scholar-Athletes of the Year, respectively.

Long is a record-setting quarterback who led The Rock to the national quarterfinals in 2023 and the national semifinals in 2024 before graduating with a degree in sport management and a perfect 4.0 GPA.

Igims won 14 individual conference titles, set three school records and finished as high as seventh at nationals in the steeplechase after leading SRU to team titles in cross country, indoor and outdoor track and field. She graduated with a 3.98 GPA and a degree in school wellness education. She completed a full year of graduate work in 2025 with a perfect 4.0 GPA in the applied behavioral analysis program.



Anna Igims, Atlantic Region Female Scholar-Athlete of the Year

World of Possibilities

Jewart family business built on Rock Solid foundation and nurturing environment

T here are many ways to define and measure success. If you're an athlete, such as a gymnast or a rock climber, it could depend on results: did the judge score your routine with a 10 or did you make it to the top? If you're a business owner, you could count revenue, clients served or years of service.

If you walk through Jewart's Gymnastics in Allison Park, success is observed all around the 9-acre grounds and 30,000-square-foot facilities that make up the family-run business that was established in 1969. More than 1,300 youths learn and develop each week at Jewart's, which houses recreational and competitive gymnastics, trampoline and tumbling, indoor rock climbing, summer camps and even a "forest kindergarten," which is preschool education for children that is conducted exclusively outdoors.

"We do what is good ... what is right ... and what is fun," said Elaine Jewart, pausing to emphasize each word.

That's how success is defined and measured at Jewart's Gymnastics.

As the 81-year-old matriarch of this enterprise, Elaine continues to manage and operate Jewart's Gymnastics, which she founded with her husband, Tom, both of whom are Slippery Rock University graduates from the class of 1966. A former gymnastics instructor who "retired" from coaching in 2004 to exclusively run the business, Elaine is known simply as "Mrs. J" around the gym, although she is technically the owner and CEO.

The mission for the more than 100 employees on staff is simple.

"We're preparing kids for a world of possibilities in a nurturing environment that provides fun and confidence," Elaine said. "That's what we're all about. That's what we've been about the whole time."



After growing up in Sharon, Pennsylvania, and attending dance school, Elaine enrolled at SRU to become a teacher. She taught dance privately while at SRU and was a member of The Rock's gymnastics team. After meeting Thomas at SRU and graduating, the Jewarts moved to California to teach physical education for a few years with intentions of returning to western Pennsylvania to raise a family.

Once they did, Tom became an English teacher, basketball coach and athletic director in the Hampton Township School District and Elaine taught dance to neighborhood kids from their home's basement in the North Hills of Pittsburgh. Elaine began teaching gymnastics before moving the business out of their home to a 1,400-square-foot "gym" in 1972, adding a second location in 1978. In 1980, they built a 7,000-square-foot gym at their current site in Allison Park, before adding on to the facility in 1984. Along the way, they were joined by her brothers Paul, '72, Nick, '77, and Brian, '83, Fabish, all of whom are SRU graduates who have served as coaches at Jewart's Gymnastics.

The business flourished with each Olympic year, garnering more interest from youngsters wanting to become the next Olga Korbut, Nadia Comăneci, Mary Lou Retton, Shannon Miller, or, even today, with Simone Biles.

"I always wanted this to grow," Elaine said. "Everything I do is based on what my teachers taught me. It should be fun and it should be up to them whether they want to win or not or if they want to work



Elaine Jewart, '66, is the owner and CEO of Jewart's Gymnastics, which has nurtured thousands of youths for the past 56 years on the family philosophy that prioritizes personal development.



From left, Lainy (Jewart) Carslaw, Elaine and Tom Jewart, and Katie (Jewart) Hilko are among the family members who have made the Jewart's Gymnastics one of the Pittsburgh region's most successful gyms for the last five decades.

harder or just play. We've kept treating kids the right way and when you train them the right way and don't ruin them, the kids won't quit. They stay all summer. They keep working. I love that."

Families bringing all their children to Jewart's and inviting friends helped grow the demand for space, new sports and teachers, many of whom came from within the Jewart family.

Elaine's daughters Lainy Carslaw and Katie Hilko coach the Pittsburgh Northstars girls gymnastics team, with Lainy serving as team manager and head coach and Katie as head coach for the Level 8-10 team. Nick Fabish also coaches the girls Northstars team. Her two sons, Ben and Alex, opened their own gyms in Wilsonville, Oregon, and nearby Gibsonia, respectively.

Katie's husband, Patrick, is the director and co-lead teacher for the Wildwood Forest Kindergarten and the Jewart's facility chairperson, and Nick's daughter, Annie, works with Wildwood. Lainy's son Pax and the Hilko's son Jayce are also active with the Climb North rock climbing team.

Jewart's philosophy is passed down to her family, but also to the staff and "adopted families" — those who, like the Jewart's, have multiple members who work there. They all emphasize development over competition.

"I don't care if they win; they're not here to win," Elaine said. "It's about learning to love it, perform it and share it. Some of them go into a different sport, some come back to help us coach and some of them bring their kids here."

The unconventional approach to teaching might seem like a departure from where her path started at SRU, a school rooted in excellence in health and physical education, which dates to the early 20th century when the Pennsylvania Department of Education designated SRU's focus for preparing physical education teachers. Elaine chose to apply her ethos as a teacher outside of the classroom and school system. While women in the 1970s were mostly teachers, coaches and choreographers, Elaine was owning and building her own gym. She innovated further by creating the forest kindergarten program, inspired by methods she picked up in California.

Children enrolled in the program spend their time entirely outdoors, immersed in nature without a lesson plan. This allows them to create, explore and develop on their own terms, which research has shown to benefit children cognitively, socially and emotionally, as well as physically.

"It's totally based around the child and what they're feeling that day that they want to do," Elaine said.

There's a 4:1 student-to-teacher ratio in the program, and typically children attend for two and a half hours, four days per week.

Jewart's also innovates in the climbing space as well. Built in 1993, their indoor climbing wall is among the oldest walls of its kind in the country. They continue to operate a 16-foot wall, a climbing cave, and three, 22-foot auto-belay climbing walls that were used as a model for the climbing was that was installed in SRU's Aebersold Recreation Center.



Children from the community come to Jewart's for more than gymnastics. They learn and develop through other activities, including rock-climbing and outdoor education, all emphasizing social, emotion and physical wellbeing.

Whether it's expanding the physical structures or opportunities for learning, the Jewart's philosophy knows no limits.

"I wanted to be a teacher, but I was able to create this and grow and grow and grow," Elaine said. "That's how it started."

There's no telling how it will finish when you consider the thousands of lives she's touched and the world of possibilities she opened for people over the last 56 years. ■



Cottrell flew 65 combat missions during World War II as a P-47 Thunderbolt fighter pilot.

For his 100th birthday, Ed Cottrell, '43, performed a tandem skydive with Mike Elliott of All Veteran Group, Nov. 8, 2021, in North Carolina (photo courtesy of All Veteran Group). Cottrell passed away in 2025 at the age of 103.



Soaring Legacy

Remembering World War II fighter pilot and lifelong educator Edwin Cottrell, '43

Alumni can share all they can about their lives after attending Slippery Rock University, but few could match the legacy of Edwin Cottrell, '43. His story is rare on longevity alone. He lived 103 years — 82 years after he graduated — before passing away March 25, 2025.

What made Cottrell extraordinary was what he did in the sky in the immediate years after leaving Slippery Rock and in the final years of his life. That's not to say he didn't live a life of meaning, service and purpose in between, but people take notice if you're among the last living veterans of World War II, having flown 65 combat missions over Germany as a P-47 Thunderbolt fighter pilot. Then, to honor his fallen WWII roommates, Cottrell performed tandem parachute jumps while celebrating his 90th and 100th birthdays.

Born in Oklahoma City, Cottrell moved to Slippery Rock in 1922 when his father, Elmer, began teaching in the Health and Physical Education Department. Cottrell attended SRU and played varsity football, basketball and tennis, as well as club baseball. Athletics were in his blood, as Elmer coached swimming, tennis, golf, basketball and football at SRU.

Cottrell earned his pilot's license when he was an SRU student through a government program and he met his wife, the former Millie Weed, at SRU when they were freshmen. The couple was engaged before Cottrell left for the war during his senior year. Millie, who also graduated in 1943, passed away in 2020.

After the war, Cottrell returned home to begin raising two daughters, but he continued serving in the Air Force Reserves for 28 years.

Cottrell followed in his father's footsteps, becoming a college coach and health and physical education professor, spending most of his career at West Chester University, from 1954-80, including 20 years as WCU's golf coach. During retirement, he worked for the National Golf Foundation, promoting golf in schools around the U.S.

His roots at SRU were something Cottrell would never forget. In 2004, Cottrell and his sister established a scholarship at SRU in their father's name. Cottrell, who lived in Hendersonville, North Carolina, where he would live until his death, returned to campus on several occasions.

Cottrell earned many honors and awards for not only his military service but his commitment to education and golf. Most recently, he received the French Legion of Honor Medal in 2024.

Since his passing, there have been several celebratory events coordinated by multiple veterans support organizations, including a missing man formation flyover, a fighting tribute to a man whose legacy started at the Rock before taking flight. ■



1960s

Thomas Priester, '62, became the first New York State track official to officiate for 50 years.

1970s

Jan Crossen, '73, released her latest book "Colors of the Sky: A Memoir" in September 2025. This is Crossen's story of self-discovery — hiding her true self as she struggled to live authentically in a disapproving world. She wrote this memoir with the hope of making connections, enlightening minds, opening hearts, and ultimately saving lives.

Doris (Shaub) Mason, '75, and her husband, Tom, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in May with a private family dinner and a card shower. They are proud parents of three children, Tom (**Kristen (Bachman) Mason, '03**), **Carrie (Mason) Lanza, '05 (Chris Lanza, '06)**, and Jon (**Liz (Kerr) Mason, '10**). Tom and Doris also have four grandchildren.



Doris and Tom Mason

is the secretary of the Duneland Exchange Club, a civic service organization. Bachuchin (center) is pictured with her husband, **Mike, '76**, (left) accepting the IHSAA Award.

1980s

Chris Truxell, '89, published a book "A National Park Love Story." The book is about two middle-aged divorcees who connect online, sharing a passion for adventure and a heartfelt mission to visit all 63 national parks in the United States. Part travelogue, part love story, this memoir captures the beauty of second chances and the healing power of nature, one park at a time.

1990s

Margie Lenhart, '92, received the Excellence in Media Award from the Youngstown (Ohio) Press Club. Lenhart has worked in radio for nearly 30 years.

Celeste Sundo, '97, was promoted to the superintendent of Sugar Creek Charter School in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Tina (Book) Duffy, '99, was awarded the Ideagen Most Valuable Player Award at the software company's 2025 Gemmy Awards in Nottingham, England, in recognition of her contributions as head of product for environmental health and safety.

2000s

Andrew Cozad, '01, was added to the board of directors of the Robert Henri Museum and Art Gallery in Cozad, Nebraska. As a relative of American painter Robert Henri, Cozad and his wife **Missy (Wacht) Cozad, '02**, have loaned several Henri paintings and sketches to the gallery. Cozad has also written a children's book about Henri titled "Robert Henri: The Boy Who Painted Life."



Andrew Cozad

Brandy Niccolai-Belfi, '04, was appointed dean of arts and humanities at the Tarrant County College Southeast Campus.

Abby Horvath, '05, served eight years active duty, worked in manufacturing for 11 years and recently moved to St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, working as a full-time SCUBA instructor. A customer came in, **Tracy (Ewing) Benjamin, '01**, and they discovered they were both SRU graduates and bonded over their love for The Rock!



Horvath and Benjamin



Terrence Factor, '74, back row, (third from left) and his wife, **Rebecca (Smith) Factor, '74**, (second from left) celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in Istanbul, Turkey, with their family.

Maria (DeMarino) Bachuchin, '76, was inducted into the Indiana Gymnastics Hall of Fame and received the 2024-25 IHSAA Outstanding Official Award for the sport of Gymnastics. Bachuchin was also named the Indiana Exchange Club Secretary of the Year at their state convention. Bachuchin



Bachuchin, '76 (center) and her husband Mike, '76, (left)

Cari Jubb, '05, '07M, was awarded the 2024 School Counselor of the Year from the West Virginia School Counselor Association (WVSCA). The WVSCA School Counselor of the Year Awards honor school counselors who exemplify excellence in the profession and set the standard for comprehensive school counseling programs.

Tanya Pell, '05, in a two-book deal, released her Gothic horror novel "Her Wicked Roots" through Simon & Schuster in October 2025. The same month, her story with New York Times bestselling author Christopher Golden was also released in the horror anthology "Fever Dreams."



Rochelle Coleman

Rochelle Coleman, '06, is the founder and financial coach of Second Stage Finance, a financial coaching company helping people at all stages of their financial journey. Services include financial literacy courses, one-on-one financial coaching sessions and employee financial wellness programs.

Susan Kelley, '07, authored an article "How to Write with GenAI: A Framework for Using Generative AI to Automate Writing Tasks in Technical Communication,"

published in The Journal of Technical Writing and Communication. This article explores how to effectively use Generative AI in technical writing tasks with Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) verification.

2010s

Mike Crum, '11, received his doctorate in social work from Capella University. Crum has built a career working for the military in suicide prevention, military resilience and primary prevention to prevent abuse/neglect, suicide, domestic violence, sexual assault and other risk factors.



Chelsea Campbell, '12, was named the director of safety for North America at Avery Dennison in Mentor, Ohio.

Tara (Bly) Hackwelder, '12, rang the opening bell for the New York Stock Exchange Aug. 29, representing the ZTTK Foundation. Hackwelder founded the organization for advocacy and research of ZTTK Syndrome. Her daughter, Elizabeth, was among the first five patients in the world diagnosed with ZTTK Syndrome in 2015.

Adam Katchmarchi, '12, has joined The Pool & Hot Tub Alliance as vice president of educational development. Katchmarchi will collaborate closely with PHTA staff, partners

and industry professionals to enhance and expand educational programming with primary responsibilities to include developing innovative courses and trainings, elevating the quality and accessibility of educational content, and fostering strategic partnerships aimed at enriching industry-wide professional development.

Michael Thornhill, '12, released his debut book, "The First, The Few, and The Only," a genre-expanding memoir, manifesto and survival toolkit for BIPOC students and professionals navigating systems not built for them. It became a No. 1 new release on Amazon for Hispanic biographies within 48 hours.

Carly Bacha, '14, '18M, was featured in the Fabulous People, Fab Teachers: Arizona 2025 section of the website fabulousarizona.com.

Claire Fauzey, '16M, '24D, joined the faculty at Westminster College as an assistant professor of education.

Spencer Hasenkopf, '16, joined LeChase Construction Services, LLC, as a senior safety manager based in the Southeast region. Hasenkopf ensures compliance with site safety plans and applicable regulatory standards, conducts safety training and inspections, and acts as liaison to clients and subcontractors on matters related to health, safety and the environment.

Billie Burke, '19, joined South Coast Internal Medicine caring for patients in Middletown.

Thomas "TJ" Wiesen, '19, was honored with the Rising Safety Star Award by The National Safety Council who recognizes professionals age 40 or younger committed to improving safety within their organization through impactful initiatives.

2020s

Tamer Fahmy, '20, received Erie's 40 Under 40 award. Fahmy is an IT systems administrator at Erie Insurance and has his own independent IT consulting and web developing service. Fahmy is also an active volunteer and disc jockey.

Ally Gilmore, '22, and Devin Parkinson, '22, had their journal article published from research done while students in the Journal of Undergraduate Research and Scholarly Excellence. Their article is titled "Reading for change: Exploring the impact of participation in an anti-racist book club on undergraduate students' perspectives and actions." Their mentor professor at SRU was Elizabeth LaGamba, associate professor of curriculum, instruction and educational leadership, and they worked with SRU Honors College to facilitate the book club the study was founded on.



Gilmore and Parkinson

Nate Oxman, '23, published his first novel, "The Philly Phenoms," in June 2025. It is a middle-grade sports fiction story and has received several awards including an American Fiction Award (Sports category).

Weddings

Lauren Amos, '21, and Nicolas Martin, '22, were married June 2. The couple met her junior year and his sophomore year.



Madalyn Bestine, '20, '24M, and Justin Svetz, '22, were married Aug. 23 in Erie.



Births

Ryan Beilstein, '09, and Rachel (Hunkele) Beilstein, '10, welcomed their third daughter, Reese Anne, Aug. 1, 2024. The Beilstein's reside in Slippery Rock where Ryan is employed by SRU Federal Credit Union.



Megan (Kloos) DeFazio, '16, '18M, and Jesse DeFazio, '15, '18M, welcomed their first daughter, Cecilia Lynn, April 28.



Send Class Notes or updates to contact information to alumni@sru.edu or by using the online form at rockalumni.com.

Katie (Grant) Johnston, '19, '20M, and her husband, Johnny, welcomed their second child, Jake, June 14. Jake joins big brother Jack.



Jennifer (Szurek) Layne, '05, welcomed daughter, Cheyenne Reagan, Feb. 19. She joins siblings Logan, 12, and Adelaide, 8.



Jay Williams, '06, and Kelly (Hynal) Williams, '05, '07M, welcomed their baby boy, Joseph Lyell, March 13, 2024.



In Memory

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Hazel K. Vukmir (Kistler) '49 | Lynn J. Bausher (Shafer) '76 |
| Melvin L. Klein '49 | Wayne M. Koble '76 |
| Marjorie A. Raymond (Ackerman) '53 | Michael E. Witkowski '77 |
| Margaret J. Strickel (Sickle) '55 | Mary J. Timmerman '77 |
| Donald F. Walter Jr. '57 | Douglas D. Dodds '78 |
| Ruth N. Clarke (Bachtell) '57 | Holly F. Rogerson (Rich) '78 |
| Barbara A. Armel (Helfrich) '59 | Barb Ryan '78 |
| J. C. Magnus '59 | Chris M. Uhrinek '78 |
| Richard O. Walker '59 | Pamela K. Amann (Karasack) '78 |
| Victor P. Eyth '60 | David J. Andrews '79 |
| Robert N. Goss '61 | Bruno D. Zuccala '79 |
| Donald L. Shirey '61 | Clarissa Clair '80 |
| Donna J. Cooper (Hunt) '61 | Ruth A. Cook '81 |
| Bruno A. Raso '61 | Thleatha B. Price '81 |
| Salvatore P. Catalfamo '62 | Vivas M. Macoskey '81 |
| John L. Phillips '63 | Dianne M. Courtwright (Ciallella) '82 |
| Raymond W. Bitar '63 | Mary A. Hogg (Depalma) '83 |
| Byron C. Welker '63 | Chester M. Czyz '84 |
| Irene M. Perman (Kapurik) '64 | James F. Agnew '85 |
| Margaret R. Grimm (Templeton) '64 | David M. Grabosky '85 |
| Alice D. Dickie (Donnelly) '65 | Paul A. Lombardi '86 |
| Judith B. Hoffman (Bodine) '65 | John L. Sabo '86 |
| Robert P. Basl II '68 | Ilona J. Daniels (Griggs) '87 |
| Gerald Trimble '68 | Thomas A. Naviglia '87 |
| Peter J. Gabriel '69 | Sharyn L. Gates (Heffner) '88 |
| Marianne Archer (Rad) '70 | Jeffrey J. Bester '88 |
| Deborah Simpson (Gibboney) '70 | David Gengarella '89 |
| Mary A. Susko (Johnston) '71 | Elizabeth A. Snodgrass (Pache) '90 |
| Delores E. Litke (Saltis) '71 | Gordon P. Cavalero '90 |
| Robert L. McHattie '71 | Carl E. Miller '90, |
| Dennis Riegelneegg '72 | Administrator Emeritus |
| Georgia Carr '73 | Barbara Eckels '91 |
| James S. McBride '73 | Daniel R. Snyder '91 |
| Bernard Rodgers '73 | Marie M. Sarver (Sullivan) '92 |
| John T. O'Neill '73 | Janet L. Robinson '92 |
| Mary L. Pannell (Easley) '73 | Linda C. Hays (Paul) '92 |
| Susan G. Frankenstein '73 | Veronica A. Gibbs '93 |
| Darla A. McPaul (Simmons) '73 | Kenneth Ballon '94 |
| David J. Parry '73 | Jamie A. Nevel '07 |
| Marjorie L. Fleming (Badger) '74 | Caitlin A. Amprim (Voke) '09 |
| Joseph V. Deramo '74 | Nicole L. Rudd (Morocco) '09 |
| Jeffrey Bolea '74 | Jayne Ragan '10 |
| Frederick R. Schneeman '75 | Jeff R. Merulli '11 |
| Sandra K. Diorio '75 | Stephen P. Glinsky Jr., Professor Emeritus |
| Clare M. Brown (Sellers) '75 | Henry Lenz, Professor Emeritus |
| Lisa E. Beggs (Mallory) '75 | Doran J. Keeley, Retired Staff |
| Blair Caracci '75 | Donald W. Keeley, Retired Staff |

SRU Alumni Association

Executive Committee:

- President, Rajeev Karmacharya '95
- President Elect, Mike Zody '88
- Treasurer, Don Huddart '87
- Secretary, Justina Cerra '13
- Immediate Past President, Melissa Visco '04

Board Members:

- Angela Beeman '06
- Lee Bowers '98
- Hollie Carlson '14
- Joe Coudriet '23
- Joe Dropp '03
- Jack Dugan Jr. '87

- Bruce Ferguson '94
- Claudia Hartmann '18
- Lisa McCullough Holmes '88, '01
- Jamaur Law '13
- Jeff Milliner '04
- Karen Taylor Perry '79, '80
- Greg Sfera '78

- Chris Thrasher '23
- Matt Vannoy '09
- Holly Vogt '97
- Dave Wolfe '13
- Sam Zyroll '78

From the Archives: Retro Rocky



Before there was Rocky the lion, there was Rocky the rock.

With vintage back in style — and the theme of SRU's 2025 Homecoming celebration (see page 6) — here's a glimpse back to the 1980s when SRU's mascot was an anthropomorphic rock, created and first worn by Bob Jones, '83, in 1978.

Do you have a photo with Rocky the rock from way back when?

Send it to alumni@sru.edu.



Why Slippery Rock?

The story of how SRU
was founded in 1889

For more than 135 years, Slippery Rock University has provided accessible and affordable higher education that has enhanced the quality of life for learners in western Pennsylvania and beyond. But why is there a public university in the small town of Slippery Rock?

Tens of thousands of students have come to know the community in northern Butler County with a peculiar name as a place to prepare for careers and develop as people, citizens and leaders. Although enrollment at SRU is more than 8,300 students, Slippery Rock's population has never exceeded 5,000, and there are many larger communities in the region that could be home to a state-owned university.

The Pennsylvania Normal School Act of 1857 designated Butler, Beaver and Allegheny counties as one of 12 districts in the state where institutions could be created for training teachers, but no charter was issued until 1889 when a group from Centreville, which was and later officially became known as Slippery Rock, raised the money to establish a school.

"The answer to 'Why Slippery Rock?' was the people," said Robert Watson, a retired SRU administrator whose great grandfather was one of the original stockholders of the Slippery Rock State Normal School Association. "The people here wanted something more for their sons and daughters. They were frugal people whose priorities were faith, family and this sense of freedom in America that gave them new life and opportunity. We just had a collection of people in and around the Slippery Rock area who had a great deal of conviction and commitment that they were doing something of value."

Watson graduated from SRU in 1970 and worked at the University for 36 years before retiring as vice president for student affairs in 2006. He began researching the history of SRU as part of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh in the 1970s, and in 2011 he published a book, "Slippery Rock University: The Legend Behind the Name."

According to Watson, the Normal School Act had provisions intended to improve the quality of education for teachers, and by extension the children they educated, to impact people in rural areas. But community members were tasked with raising money.

The Slippery Rock State Normal School Association collected funds using a subscription plan that, by May 1888, totaled \$17,325. As Watson noted, that was an impressively large sum of money pledged by local citizens for a school whose future was not certain.

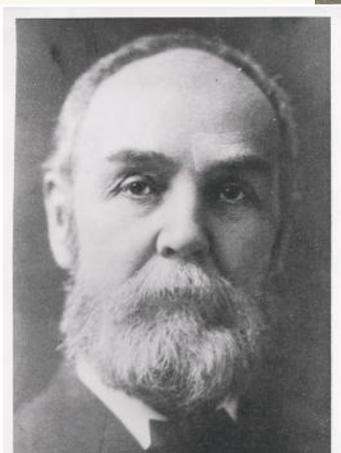
Construction of three campus buildings was already underway in spring 1888 as stockholders meticulously prepared for an inspection by a committee appointed by then Pennsylvania Gov. James Beaver. Local stockholders visited other approved state normal schools, including one that opened a year earlier in Clarion, and on Feb. 1, 1889, inspection committee members consisting of school superintendents in western Pennsylvania visited Slippery Rock and indicated that they would recommend the site for a state normal school.

Just 54 days later, on March 26, Slippery Rock State Normal School conducted its first classes, enrolling 168 students including 94 women. More than two-thirds of the students were from Butler County, with the rest coming from Mercer, Lawrence, Allegheny, Beaver and Armstrong counties.

Tuition was \$14 per term, \$32 for room and board and 25 cents for transportation from the train station three and a half miles away.

In the announcement of the first term, the "special advantages" listed by President James Morrow included "Healthfulness; convenience; noted honesty, hospitality, and religious character of community; new, commodious buildings, thoroughly warmed and ventilated."

There were two dormitories, North Hall and South Hall, with steam heat and natural gas light. Classes, in the Chapel, included psychology, geometry, physics, Caesar, general history and methods. Activities included lawn tennis, croquet, baseball and two-hour socials one



Above: Old Main, pictured here during its construction in 1892, is the oldest remaining structure on SRU's campus after the school first opened with the three buildings in 1889. (Photo courtesy of Robert Watson's collection).

Left: James Morrow, SRU's first president.



night each week. Old Main, which was built in 1892, is the oldest remaining structure on campus, after North Hall burned down and was rebuilt in 1937.

Based on its normal school heritage, SRU produced thousands of teachers for western Pennsylvania. Like most normal schools of the era, the school evolved to offer degree programs in other disciplines to meet the demands of the local workforce.

The school was renamed Slippery Rock State Teachers College in 1927 and Slippery Rock State College in 1960, before becoming Slippery Rock University in 1983 when the State System of Higher Education was established.

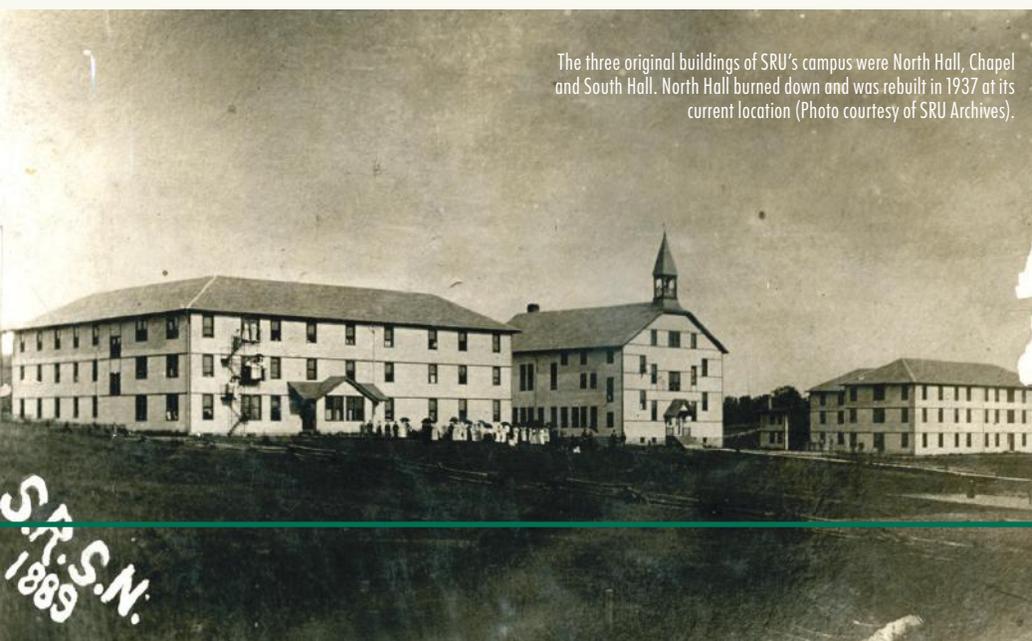
Today, SRU offers more than 150 profession-focused and industry-aligned undergraduate, master's and doctoral programs on its vibrant campus that stretches across 660 acres within Slippery Rock borough and township.

SRU's mission has stood the test of time thanks to investment by the people in the 1880s who recognized the value of higher education for generations to come.

"The residents who invested all that money asked if they were getting any interest paid on their money," Watson said. "The abrupt response was 'no,' but they all came away with the understanding that the interest that they earned was the opportunity for their children and grandchildren to gain a higher education. That was the interest that continues to be paid today." ■

This article by Slippery Rock University first appeared in the Butler Eagle newspaper as part of its "America250: A Journey Through Time" series in 2025.

The three original buildings of SRU's campus were North Hall, Chapel and South Hall. North Hall burned down and was rebuilt in 1937 at its current location (Photo courtesy of SRU Archives).



S.R.U. 1889

Art of the Sail

A unique floating art exhibition set sail thanks to SRU Art Professor Heather Hertel and her students. SRU artists displayed their work at the Erie Yacht Club, Aug. 14, for an exhibit that wasn't confined to frames or boxed off behind velvet ropes. Instead, these artworks were painted directly onto sail cloths, attached to working yachts, and sailed out on Presque Isle Bay in Erie as a floating art exhibit. Read more about Hertel's story by scanning the QR code.





SlipperyRock
University

1 Morrow Way
Slippery Rock, PA 16057

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