

The Hilltopper

*The Alumni Newsletter of
Virginia Highlands Community College*



Spring 2012

The VHCC Alumni Association Board is currently seeking nominations for two prestigious awards that were recently established to recognize former students with a compelling story to tell.

Eligible alumni must have at least 24 semester hours (36 quarter hours) from VHCC, have achieved career success, and have made significant contributions to the community and/or College. **The Distinguished Alumni Award** is the most prestigious honor award by the Association, while the **Rising Star** category is for those who completed their VHCC work within the past decade (2002 -2011) and are destined to accomplish great things. Award winners will be recognized during the VHCC Commencement Ceremony on Friday, May 11.



Nomination forms and criteria are currently available online at www.vhcc.edu/AlumniAwards. The nomination deadline is Friday, April 6.

For additional information about the awards program, please contact Anne Dunham, coordinator of Alumni Development, at (276) 739-2456 or adunham@vhcc.edu.



Designed by the Verdin Company, makers of the world's finest street clocks, the Virginia Highlands Community College Alumni Clock will be strategically positioned on the Campus Commons, just outside the Nursing Education Building. The clock itself will stand more than 16 feet tall and feature the college name, four backlighted dials, and a sophisticated sound system. Engraved plaques mounted on the clock and engraved bricks around the base will provide donor recognition opportunities.

In addition to being a visible timepiece, the clock will become a campus cornerstone and a fitting tribute to the thousands of alumni who have spent time on our campus over the past four decades. The total cost of the project is \$28,000, but more than half of that amount already has been pledged. Fund-raising efforts are now under way to collect the outstanding balance, with a proposed time line that calls for installation of the clock in June and a dedication ceremony during Fall Semester 2012.

To contribute or learn more, please visit our website at www.vhcc.edu/clock or contact the VHCC Foundation at (276) 739-2473.

W

illy changed Heather Barbrow's life.

You won't meet him in the faculty lounge or guidance office at Patrick Henry High School, in

the classroom at Virginia Highlands, or even at Coastal Carolina University – although Heather attended all three. Willy is the 9,000 pound star of "Free Willy," the 1993 movie that inspired Heather to chase a career that would keep her out of an office and close to the sea.

"That movie sparked my interest in whales," she said. "And I also had a family friend who was seven years older than me who went to Coastal Carolina University and now works at Sea World. So, seeing her pictures and hearing about her job was very interesting to me."

Immediately after graduating from high school, Heather enrolled at Virginia Highlands. And even though Abingdon is a long way from the ocean, she soon had an opportunity to begin studying marine life as a participant of the Coastal Ecology program spearheaded by Assistant Professor Kevin Hamed. The experience confirmed her career choice, she said, and made her anxious to continue her education at a college near the sea.

"It was awesome," she said of the VHCC Coastal Ecology Program, which gives students an opportunity to earn honors credit while spending Spring Break at the University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. "We had an opportunity to do a lot of hands-on stuff and to get experience being on a boat when conditions weren't that great. That definitely helped me."

Heather graduated from VHCC in 2005, then transferred to Coastal Carolina University. She earned a bachelor's degree in marine science with a minor in biology in 2008 and, soon after graduation, returned to Gulf Coast Research Laboratory - this time to complete an internship.

"I worked as a transportation interpreter," she said, explaining that her job was to provide an educational program for children regarding the impact that various modes of transportation have on the environment. "It was great experience."

Her next opportunity took her to Maine's Bar Harbor, where she was responsible for photographing humpback whales as part of a detailed research project. The photographs provide valuable clues about the migrating habits of humpbacks, she said, and the impact that humans have on them.

"Whales all have unique markings that helps us

identify them," she said, noting that researchers give them each names and track their return to Bar Harbor each summer. "We can also tell when they have been injured just by observing the markings and scars on their bodies."

The research is important, Heather said, because it has led to regulations that better protect the giant mammals. For instance, those fishing for lobster are now required to use non-buoyant line that is less likely to get tangled around the whales - a simple change that already is making a noticeable difference.

The next opportunity took her to Oregon, where her job was to keep track of the fish that were pulled from the ocean by fishermen. Prior to being assigned to a fishing boat, she underwent an intense training program so that she could quickly identify more than 150 species of fish. While fishermen concentrated on catching fish that could be sold, Heather took inventory of everything that was pulled from the sea.

"I was basically weighing dead fish," she said. "The conditions were harsh and there were no whales involved, but this job gave me some valuable training that helped me to land my current job."

She returned to Bar Harbor in summer 2011, this time to provide guest services for tourists visiting the area. A co-worker encouraged her to apply for a position as a protected species observer and, within a few weeks, she was offered the job.

And so she headed to Alaska, where she recently began working along side those doing seismic drilling for oil. Heather's job is to ensure there are no protected species - particularly beluga whales, sea lions or seals - in the area before the seismic waves are discharged.

"I am responsible for surveying the area before they begin to make sure no protected species are in the area," she said. "If one appears at anytime, they have to stop and wait until all the animals are gone. It's up to me to visually scan the water and watch out for them."

And while Heather may never form a personal friendship with a whale like Jesse and Willy did in the movie that first inspired her, she is delighted to be doing her part to save the animals.

"I'm excited to have the opportunity to work with whales again," she said. "I always knew this is what I wanted to do."



Heather Barbrow

Class of 2005

Class



Josh Jones

Class of 2005

*Glade Spring Town Manager
Adjunct Instructor of History at VHCC
VHCC Alumni Association Board Chair*

Josh Jones loves learning to learn.

"I didn't attend college to become rich," he explains. "I attended college to get the tools I need to enjoy life and to get knowledge. If I had it my way, I would be a student the rest of my life."

Josh grew up in Glade Spring, attended Patrick Henry High School, and eventually found his way to Virginia Highlands. He didn't have a career in mind when he enrolled but, rather, was intrigued by the idea that he could explore a variety of topics that were of interest to him.

"I took everything I could," he said, noting that he sometimes attended classes he hadn't enrolled in. "I eventually realized I couldn't just bounce around exploring every academic discipline there was, so I decided on general studies."

He earned an Associates of Arts & Sciences Degree from VHCC in 2005 before transferring to Virginia Intermont. He ultimately earned a bachelor's degree in history and political science from Virginia Intermont and a master's degree in history from East Tennessee State University.

Out in the real world, finding a job wasn't as easy as he had hoped.

"In 2009, I finished graduate school and it was a very bad time to be looking for a job," he said. "I applied for anything and everything. Nothing."

He eventually got a job with the Virginia Department of Corrections, working first as a corrections officer and later as a hearings officer within the state prison system. That job helped pay the bills, he said, while he returned to the classroom as an adjunct instructor of history at VHCC.

"It was kind of weird to be the instructor, but at the same time it was kind of nice" he said. "It was like I was new to an old environment."

Anxious to leave the prison system, he continued to look for a full-time job that would allow him to continue his teaching duties. While browsing the job listings in the local newspaper one day, Josh noticed that Glade Spring was looking for a new town manager.

"I just saw the ad, applied, and started going to every town meeting and every event I could," he said. "I had lived there my entire life, and I really know the

community."

Josh interviewed for the job and was hired in early April, 2011. He was just getting settled into the position, learning about his new responsibilities and all the things that were happening in town, when chaos erupted.

"I had literally been on the job about two weeks when a tornado hit Glade," he said. "It was a lot to deal with. Before I had been one of the few in town who didn't know what was going on, but I was suddenly one of many who didn't know what was going on."

The job has been challenging at times, he said, and it is allowing him to sharpen skills that be useful in future endeavors. It also allows him the flexibility he needs to continue his adjunct teaching duties at VHCC.

In addition to teaching U.S. History and World History, he has gotten involved in campus life. He serves as faculty advisor to the VHCC Republican Club and recently was named chair of the newly appointed VHCC Alumni Association Board.

And, he said, he is anxious to become a student once again. He is interested in studying economics, political science, international relations, and foreign policy.

"I like to teach, but I think my dream job would be if I could get involved with certain think tanks that I am ideologically aligned with. I love to do research, so maybe I could be a teacher, a researcher or a policy writer."

Regardless of where he ends up, Josh said he is grateful for his time on the VHCC campus. The opportunity to explore a variety of courses, to learn from those who are passionate about their work, and to receive guidance from those who wanted him to succeed.

"Being a student at VHCC gave me the opportunity to explore the higher education system," he said. "I had no idea at 18 what I wanted to do. It gave me the opportunity to dig around and explore things and really kind of find myself in the process."

He's gotten the same support as an employee, he said.

"(Dean) Alma Rowland has always been there for me - personally, as a student, and now as my boss," he said. "She definitely has been like a flashlight I could go to when I've gotten lost in the process."



INAUGURATION 2011

With his wife by his side and more than 300 friends and family members watching, Dr. Ron Proffitt on September 9 accepted the medallion symbolizing his official installation as Virginia Highlands Community College's fifth president.

The medallion is an official token of his new leadership position, said Chancellor Glenn DuBois of Virginia's Community Colleges, but Dr. Proffitt's heart, humor and hard work will be more valuable assets during his VHCC tenure. Already he has demonstrated that he is a "dynamic" leader, Dr. DuBois said, who is ready for the challenges that lie ahead.

The Inauguration Ceremony came one year after Dr. Proffitt was chosen to replace Dr. F. David Wilkin, who retired after 15 years as VHCC president. During his short tenure on the job, Dr. Proffitt said he has developed a keen appreciation for the important partnership that exists between the College and the community.

"In the early days, community leaders helped build our campus on 100 acres of scenic property that is still breathtakingly beautiful and strategically located

within our service region," he said during his inaugural Address. "Community members provided valuable input as we recruited faculty members with expert knowledge and a passion for our mission.

Business leaders within our community helped develop and shape our academic programs ... And throughout the years, community employers have hired our graduates, helping them build careers, raise their families, and remain right here – in our community."

Dr. Proffitt began his career as a radiography technician in a local hospital, and worked in that field for more than a decade before joining Southwest Virginia Community College as an instructor. While at Southwest, he returned to the classroom himself, earning advanced degrees and moving up the ranks to become Dean of Math, Science and Health Technology.

He was named Vice President of Instruction and Student Development at Wytheville Community College in 2007 and, last year, following a search that invited campus and community input, became VHCC's new president.



From the Archives

Given today's high-tech devices that allow us to upload, download, surf, tweet and connect from practically anywhere, the graphics tablet in this photo is almost comical. Is anyone out there old enough to remember this ancient contraption or how it helped VHCC students of year's gone by to achieve their academic goals? Who is this dedicated student and what's she up to these days? Send your thoughts, ideas, memories and information to adunham@vhcc.edu



UPcoming Events

VHCC Graduation Celebration

Members of the VHCC Class of 2012 and Alumni are invited to a Graduation Celebration on the Campus Commons at 5 p.m. on **Thursday, May 10**. The event features live music, food and children's games, and is a great way for alumni to welcome our new graduates into the VHCC Alumni Association. Check back for details.

VHCC Night with the Bristol White Sox

Enjoy an evening of minor league baseball fun as the Bristol White Sox take on the Danville Braves at Boyce Cox Field, 1501 Euclid Avenue, on **Friday, June 22**. VHCC Alumni and their families will be admitted free and receive coupons for the concession stand. VHCC door prizes will be awarded and the first pitch will be thrown out by campus representative! Game time TBA.

VHCC Night at the Saltville Wave Pool

Throw on your flip flops and head to Saltville for an evening of fun at the Hardy Roberts Memorial Wave Pool. Named for the first man from Saltville, Virginia, to be in World War II, the pool is 150 feet long and 60 feet wide. A children's area, a fountain, and mammoth waves make this pool a great place for family fun and an alumni party! The entire pool will be reserved for VHCC alumni, family and friends, and we'll provide hotdogs, soft drinks and door prizes. This event is typically held on a Friday night in July, so stay tuned for details.

There are so many exciting things happening at VHCC that there simply wasn't enough space for everything. You can get the news as it happens, by joining our social media tools, checking out our [alumni website](#) and updating the [alumni directory](#) with your latest information.



Where are they now?

Giles Hall - Class of 1972

Coach Hall earned an associates degree in education from VHCC in 1972 before transferring to the University of Virginia-Wise, where he earned a bachelor's degree in Business and Public Administration (concentration in economics and minors in history and political science). His 30+-year career as a teacher and football coach has taken him across the state of Virginia. In Goochland County, he was part of a coaching staff that led the 2006 to a state championship. He currently teaches U.S. and Virginia Government and is assistant varsity football coach at Stuarts Draft High School in Augusta County.

Jim Dixon - Class of 1971, 1973

Jim is currently preparing for retirement from the Shelby County Sheriff's Office in Alabama. He earned a certificate from VHCC in 1971 and an associates degree in 1973. He has been with the Shelby County department since 1990 and is currently holds the rank of sergeant.

Cloe (Johnson) Barker - Class of 1983

Cloe earned an associate's degree in Business Administration from VHCC in 1983 and later completed a bachelor's in Accounting from Emory & Henry College. She has spent the last 25 years working for the Bristol Virginia Commissioner of the Revenue and currently serves as Master Chief Deputy. She and her husband, Jack, have two daughters.