

## Staying True to the Mission; Facing the Coronavirus Pandemic

By Mary Price

“VMI is no stranger to adversity.”

With those words, Gen. J.H. Binford Peay III '62, superintendent, began a March 23 letter to the VMI community—one in which he laid out a blueprint for the Institute going forward in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic that, by early April, had killed more Americans than the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and caused the Institute to move to a distance learning model for the first time in its 181-year history.

Early meetings about the coronavirus and its possible impacts on the VMI community were held in late January and early February. Those meetings focused on study abroad cadets, recalled Brig. Gen. Dallas Clark '99, deputy superintendent of finance, administration, and support, but as time went by, the focus began to shift.



Cadets pack their belongings for spring furlough March 12, not knowing this would be the last time they would be on post together for the semester.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

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## A Global Connection

By Mary Price

As the coronavirus pandemic spread around the globe in March, with new waves of both infections and closures being announced daily, the two-person staff—Col. Dave Hall, director, and Patricia Hardin, assistant director—of VMI’s Office of International Programs found themselves responding. They had a front-row seat to the dramatic changes in regulations outside of Lexington.

This spring, 35 cadets were on study-abroad programs when the pandemic hit. By March 23, all had safely returned to the

United States. At first, it wasn’t clear that they were going to have to leave their host country—and many didn’t want to leave until they absolutely had to.

On March 19, the U.S. Department of State issued a Level 4 travel advisory for the entire globe in response to the coronavirus pandemic, stating: “In countries where commercial departure options remain available, U.S. citizens who live in the

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“All of a sudden, our focus started to change to what was going to happen on post,” said Clark.

On March 3, the VMI Coronavirus Task Force held its first official meeting. “It wasn’t too long after that that we began to meet every day,” said Col. James “Jamie” Inman ’86, chief of staff. Inman added that the Institute being affected by a fast-spreading illness was not an entirely unforeseen event: seven to eight years ago, VMI had developed a pandemic plan.

“We had measures in place, but of course you don’t know how well a plan is going to work until the event happens,” he commented.

On Thursday, March 12, cadets left post for spring furlough. At the time, plans still called for them to return to VMI on Monday, March 23, but in light of the rapidly developing public health crisis, they were asked to take their books and laptop computers with them just in case.

The next day, an email to the entire VMI community announced that instruction would be moved online through April 17—a date that was eventually extended to include the remainder of the spring semester as the number of those infected with the coronavirus across the United States began to climb exponentially.

By March 23, Peay and other members of the senior leadership team had decided to move to virtual ROTC commissioning ceremonies traditionally held on May 15. The Institute’s May 16 graduation ceremony was tentatively rescheduled for Dec. 19, 2020, in Cameron Hall, with members of the Class of 2020 unable to attend that ceremony welcome to participate in May 2021 commencement exercises.

“Our primary focus has been the health and safety of the entire VMI community, and how to best focus on VMI’s mission,” said Inman.

With that mission in mind, the intangibles of the VMI experience, ranging from physical training to the Honor Code, were entrusted to cadets in Peay’s March 23 letter.

“Cadets will continue to abide by their cadet oath, maintain a daily physical fitness regimen, and live a lifestyle of honor and integrity expected of every VMI cadet and alumnus,” wrote Peay. “I encourage you to be a leader within your local community, volunteer to help those who cannot help themselves, set the example for your peers by adhering to government health and safety guidelines, and remain flexible as you adapt to change and adversity.”

For those who remained on post, there were challenges aplenty. By March 20, staff members who could do so were asked to work from home, and the state had made public health emergency leave available to those unable to perform their job duties remotely. Most employees, including those in payroll, were able to complete most of their job duties from home, although some had to come to post to perform some tasks.

To protect employees whose jobs routinely expose them to lots of people, the human resources office was closed to visitors. Clark explained that not only does the human resources office support current employees, but retirees and their spouses often visit to ask questions about benefits or sign paperwork.

One office with a special challenge thanks to the pandemic has been that of Col. Jeff Lawhorne, treasurer, as he and Lt. Col. Kevin Ryan ’01, comptroller, work to issue refunds for room and board

for cadets. It’s an incredibly complex task, as each cadet’s education is funded from a mix of different sources, including scholarships, loans, and family contributions.

“Every cadet has a different financial profile,” explained Clark, “so we decided to give a refund commensurate with their financial profile.”

For nearly everyone in the VMI community, the latter half of March was spent acclimating to a new normal. By early April, with the number of confirmed cases of the virus nearing the 1 million mark worldwide, and Gov. Ralph Northam ’81 having issued a stay-at-home order for all Virginians through June 10, it was clear that the situation would not ease according to anyone’s timetable.

Originally, Institute leaders had planned to allow cadets to return to barracks in April and May to remove personal items from their barracks rooms and turn in their uniforms and military gear. For 1<sup>st</sup> Class cadets planning to commission into the armed services, the plan was to have them retrieve their items, turn in their gear, and commission on an individual basis during one visit to Lexington.

On April 3, though, an email from Inman announced that this plan would no longer be feasible.

“In keeping with the stay-at-home order in place in Virginia and many other states around the nation, we will delay the barracks clearing process for the time being,” wrote Inman. On April 7, staff from the commandant’s office and auxiliary services began going through cadet rooms to collect VMI-owned items, such as uniforms and military gear, for cleaning and sanitation in preparation for re-use next year.

On Thursday, April 9, Peay sent an email announcing a new, tentative plan to have members of the Corps return to Lexington from June 12-20 to clean out their barracks rooms.

For VMI leaders, responding to a situation that’s been changing daily for weeks on end has been the greatest challenge. Plans can be made, of course, but they also have to be unmade and remade with regularity.

“There’s so much uncertainty in how this is going to unfold,” said Inman. “How far in the future is this going to affect us?”

It’s a question, of course, that even the nation’s brightest minds cannot answer, as epidemiological models offer different predictions of when the pandemic will peak and then subside. With that in mind, Peay laid out tentative plans in his April 9 email for an extended Cadre Week, beginning as early as Aug. 2, so new cadet leaders will have more time to prepare for their roles.

Aware that all members of the VMI community are wondering about the long term, Peay also addressed the issue of the fall semester as he wrote, “We are assessing all options for the possibility of a truncated fall semester, whether it be truncated on the front end or the back.”

Throughout his communications, Peay has stressed the importance of VMI’s mission of preparing citizen-soldiers—a mission that has endured through past epidemics, the Civil War, both World Wars, and a multitude of other conflicts and obstacles.

“We will stay true to that mission but we must and will find ways to achieve it without compromising our principles,” wrote Peay on April 9. “Together, we will do just that.” ✪

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## Spring and Summer 2020 Events

The following is a partial listing of spring and summer 2020 events that have been canceled or postponed. All dates below are tentative and subject to change. ✪

Event	Status
Environment Virginia Symposium	Canceled
Retirement Parade	Postponed—TBD
Change of Command Parade	Assumption of Command Ceremony—fall, TBD
New Market Ceremony	Parade—Canceled Ceremony—Online
Joint ROTC Commissioning	Canceled; Individual ceremonies online
Graduation*	December 2020 / May 2021
Employee Breakfast	Postponed to fall semester
VMI Theatre 50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary	Postponed to fall semester
Board of Visitors	June 10—tentative
Summer Session I	Online only
Summer Session II	Online only
Summer Transition Program	Canceled
Cadre return	Aug. 2—tentative

\* Members of the Class of 2020 are invited to participate in either the Dec. 19, 2020, or May 16, 2021 graduation ceremonies, to be held in Cameron Hall.

**For more stories on the coronavirus impact and event updates, please visit [www.vmi.edu](http://www.vmi.edu).**

We will miss seeing those rising firsts fully take on their new positions, and the challenges that come with each, and we will miss seeing those fresh faces of the new rising [2<sup>nd</sup> Class cadets], excited and nervous as they are about to take on one of the hardest but most rewarding positions at the school. For us, it feels like a job unfinished, and I think that is the hardest part.—  
*Skyler Birdie '20, Honor Court President.*



# 'Focus on What is Best for Cadets'

## Faculty Adapt to Distance Learning Environment

By Mary Price

When cadets returned to post from Christmas furlough in mid-January, no one could have anticipated that in just eight short weeks, the Corps would be away from post for the longest time since the Civil War, and the Institute would be holding classes exclusively online for the first time in history.

Taking a lead role in managing the transition to distance learning has been Brig. Gen. Robert "Bob" Moreschi, deputy superintendent for academics and dean of the faculty.

"About a week and a half ago, we had to figure out how to deliver the rest of the semester in a rigorous way," said Moreschi on March 26. Immediately, he knew he'd need to prepare faculty to teach in an entirely new way.

"The vast majority had never taught in a distance learning environment," he commented.

Knowing that cadets not coming back to post after the spring furlough was a very real possibility, Moreschi asked department heads on March 11 to prepare for a possible transition to online learning and report back by March 20 how they would do so. He stressed, though, that faculty were given much flexibility in their methodology.

"You have the freedom to figure out how to deliver the course material" was central to the message that went out from the dean's office. In support of this initiative, Moreschi authorized the purchase of webcams and internet hotspots for faculty that needed them.

"Those things are as hard to find as toilet paper and paper towels," he said of the hotspots.

While some colleges and universities have elected to make their classes pass/fail for this semester, VMI deliberately chose not to take this option. Moreschi and others made this decision with awareness that some graduate schools, especially medical schools, won't give credit for a pass/fail class.

"We had collectively decided not to do that," said Moreschi. "It goes against what VMI is. ... We were more comfortable staying with the letter grades."

Faculty, meanwhile, have adapted well to the challenges and opportunities that distance learning provides. Given the choice to teach either synchronously—in real time—or asynchronously,

I am sad that I will not get to work in the chemistry lab for the rest of the semester. Learning from the textbook isn't the same as from the chemistry department. My home desk just isn't the same as Maury-Brooke where I can talk to some of my closest friends and study buddies. VMI is a living organism with each cadet making a different organ system run smoothly. I miss the Institute.—Genevieve Petrassi '22, *Chemistry Major*.



Col. Tinni Sen, professor of economics and business, meets with her 9:25 a.m. intermediate macroeconomics class online.—Photo courtesy of Col. Tinni Sen.

with professors recording lectures that can be watched later—most faculty members chose to teach asynchronously.

"Most of us in engineering realized that we would have to provide most of our materials asynchronously," said Col. Charles "Chuck" Newhouse, professor of civil and environmental engineering. "But we did see the value of meeting face to face with cadets. This has

started a tremendous Ford-Chevy debate between two meeting programs, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. I've been able to use both of them, and there are, like Fords and Chevys, pros and cons of each."

Not surprisingly, Newhouse and his colleagues have had to work hard to figure out ways to move lab courses online. "For the labs, it is also best for the cadets to actually experience doing the lab assignments," said Newhouse. "Sometimes the most important thing that they learn is when the experiment doesn't go as planned."

But since that's not possible this spring, civil engineering professors have been performing the labs and uploading them for the cadets to watch. Then, the

cadets write up lab reports just as they would if they'd done the labs themselves.

Like Newhouse, Maj. Kevin Braun, assistant professor of chemistry, is trying to adapt hands-on classes to a virtual environment. This semester, he's teaching three classes, all of which have a laboratory focus.

"Lab is such a unique space," Braun commented. "Lab allows us to bridge the gap between theory and practice."

To make the most of the distance learning situation, Braun is teaching via "dry labs." To do a dry lab, students are given the raw

data they would have acquired if they'd done the lab themselves, and then they use that data to write a lab report. And while Braun can't be in the same room with his cadets, he's tried to draw them together via the meetings function in Microsoft Teams.

"They find it useful to have that visual connection," he said. "That interface has been really nice."

Economics, of course, has seemingly little in common with either civil engineering or chemistry—but in all three disciplines, being able to see what you're doing is vital. Col. Tinni Sen, professor of economics and business, has chosen to teach her three sections of intermediate macroeconomics in real time. She explained that the class, which is heavily based on graphing economic variables, works best when cadets can see her as she's teaching. "It has to be very interactive," she commented.

But Sen doesn't have to worry about attendance, even when the class is virtual. "This is VMI. They'll come to class. Our cadets are really good kids."

But because she's teaching synchronously, Sen has had to make some adjustments. On the first day of class, Sen noticed a cadet in her 9 a.m. section who looked less than alert. When she asked him



Cassidy Dufour '23 studies from her home in New Hampshire for distance learning.—Photo courtesy of Cassidy Dufour '23.

what was wrong, he replied, "Colonel Sen, it's 6 a.m. here." Sen very quickly told the cadet, a resident of California, that he would be welcome to join her 1 p.m. class.

Having taught online before, Maj. Michelle Iten, assistant professor of English, rhetoric, and humanistic studies, is well aware that what looks clear from her point of view isn't necessarily so for someone else.

"Probably the most challenging thing is trying to keep in mind how cadets will navigate the course, to imagine how the pacing and engagement will go from their perspective," said Iten a few days after online classes began March 25. "I've been trying to anticipate places of potential confusion and get ahead of them, but I'll only know how I did as we go forward."

Col. Howard Sanborn, professor of international studies, also observed a focus on meeting cadet needs during the transition to distance learning.

"What has come across to me, in working with several professors across multiple disciplines, is that we have a tremendous faculty that is working hard to attend to the intellectual and physical well-being of our cadets," he stated. "It turns out, when you focus on what is best for cadets, a lot of hard decisions become much easier to make."

Moreschi agreed that in a time of crisis, the faculty have risen to the occasion.

"It's really the faculty that have been the creative energy," the dean stated. "People have taken a can-do attitude." ❁

## ROTC Commissioning Goes Virtual

One of VMI's most anticipated spring events, the joint ROTC commissioning ceremony, will take place almost entirely online this year.

Traditionally held on May 15 in Cameron Hall, the event brings together commissioning cadets from all four branches of the service: Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force. This year, because of the coronavirus pandemic, the commissioning ceremonies will be online, with the exception of the Air Force, which is allowing six cadets to come to post and commission in Jackson Memorial Hall. In keeping with tradition, most of the online ceremonies will take place May 15.

Cadets commissioning into the Air Force this spring will first hear remarks from Lt. Gen. Scott Howell, commander of the Joint Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Then, most of them will commission online. The six who are coming to post will

undergo health screenings by nurses before being allowed into JM Hall for their 15-minute commissioning ceremonies.

The Army and Naval ROTCs will commission their new officers entirely online.

The virtual ceremony "will allow commissionees to be with parents and loved ones at dispersed locations to commission on time, don their rank, and celebrate their accomplishment," wrote Col. Michael Wawrzyniak, commander of Army ROTC, in an email. Wawrzyniak added that when commissioning cadets return to VMI to pick up their personal items—an event that is yet to be scheduled—they will have a chance to have photos taken in their uniforms on post.

Army ROTC commissionees will hear pre-recorded remarks from Lt. Gen. Charles A. Flynn, Army deputy chief of staff—the same officer who would have come to post had the joint commissioning ceremony been held

as scheduled. They will then take their oaths from Wawrzyniak.

Naval ROTC is following a similar plan for a virtual ceremony, but also offering cadets an option. "We are also offering to conduct smaller individual commissioning ceremonies by Skype/FaceTime/etc. for those who would rather have a more private experience," wrote Col. Craig Streeter '91, commander of Naval ROTC, in an email.

Providing remarks and administering the oath for cadets commissioning into the Navy will be Rear Adm. William J. Galinis, who currently serves as the Navy's program executive officer, ships. In this role, he is responsible for overseeing the Navy's ship-building efforts. Performing these roles for cadets commissioning into the Marine Corps will be Maj. Gen. James W. Bierman Jr. '88, head of the Marine Corps Recruiting Command.

— Mary Price

# Support Services Continue Despite Empty Barracks

By Mary Price

Cadets, along with many faculty and staff members, are now away from post for an extended period of time, but the support services that help them are still available, typically just a phone call or a mouse click away. On the academic side, resources such as the

Mathematics Resource Education Center (MERC), the Writing Center, and the Office of Career Services are providing their services online. The following is a partial list of other on-post services that are also supporting cadets and faculty while they are away from post.

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## Infirmary/Wellness

Overall, it's been a quiet spring at the VMI Infirmary. But behind the scenes, Dr. David Copeland, Institute physician, has been busy with two tasks: helping cadets get refills on their medications, and looking over the medical records of incoming cadets to make sure they're medically qualified for VMI's intense physical training. That's a task he undertakes every year. In addition to these duties, Copeland has been monitoring the spread of the coronavirus and serving as a member of the VMI Coronavirus Task Force.

In mid-March, Copeland was needed when approximately 14 international cadets returned to barracks after the spring furlough. He asked the cadets questions about where they had been and took their temperatures before admitting them to barracks.

International cadets are a group "uniformly easy to take care of," Copeland noted, but he and Jenny Crance, nurse practitioner, were available in the infirmary each day if needed.

VMI's employee wellness program, meanwhile, has gone online with recorded workouts for yoga, cross training, high intensity interval training (HIIT), and more. Employees are also receiving email newsletters about health-related topics from CommonHealth, the state employee wellness program, and nutrition from Parkhurst Dining, VMI's food service partner.

Also ongoing through the wellness program is WW@Work, formerly known as Weight Watchers. That group is holding virtual meetings each week through Zoom and also has a private Facebook group.

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## Bookstore

Like nearly all other operations on post, the VMI Bookstore has had its normal way of doing business upended by the coronavirus pandemic.

This time of year, the bookstore would normally be doing a brisk business with the final admissions open house of the year and spring alumni reunions, both bringing visitors to post. This spring, though, with the bookstore closed since mid-March, those sales have evaporated.

"We've lost sales through the month of April. Admissions open house, that's gone. Then there's graduation, too," said Dalton Briley, who manages the bookstore for Follett, a Westchester, Illinois-based company that manages thousands of college bookstores nationwide.

Briley is currently the only bookstore employee still working—and he's only coming in on Mondays and Fridays to manage online orders, the volume of which Briley described as "steady."

VMI-themed merchandise like t-shirts, hats, keychains, and drinkware remains available for those looking for gifts or for their own collection.

With typical bookstore operations suspended, an email was sent out to cadets in late March, letting them know that if they need to sell books at the end of the semester or return rental textbooks, there are two options: either going online to print a return address label or waiting until they're allowed to return to post to sell or return their books in person. This year, there will be no late fees for tardy return of rental textbooks.

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## Information Technology

Staff in the Information Technology department had to work hard from mid-March on to prepare cadets, faculty, and staff for the transition to distance learning and working from home.

Thankfully, IT had already scheduled a firewall upgrade for spring furlough, which brought with it higher bandwidth and more licenses for use of VMI's virtual private network (VPN), which allows employees to access the Institute's servers when they are away from post.

"Before this crisis, we only had a handful of people using a VPN," said Col. Wes Robinson, director of information technology. Robinson added that members of his staff had to create "quite a few" training documents on how to use not only a VPN, but also Microsoft

Teams, which allows a group of people to collaborate on a project from multiple locations. Help desk staff also shifted their hours, working from 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. so they could better accommodate cadet and employee schedules.

Like many people across post, Robinson can see future good coming from the coronavirus pandemic. "It will expand the use of several technologies that we use," he commented. Both he and Brig. Gen. Robert "Bob" Moreschi, deputy superintendent for academics and dean of the faculty, noted that prior to the pandemic, approximately 30 percent of the faculty didn't use Canvas, which is VMI's learning management software system. Now, nearly all faculty are using it.

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## Preston Library

Preston Library closed its doors Wednesday, March 18, and it is unknown when the library will reopen. Cadets and faculty can still access the library's holdings, though, via the distance learning portal. Among the distance learning portal's options are setting up

a Zoom chat with a reference librarian, accessing databases from off post, and requesting a scan of the relevant section of an interlibrary loan item, since it's no longer possible to request physical copies of books and other publications.



The VMI Archives, which contains many resources relating to VMI history and Civil War history, among other topics, is also available online, and archives staff are available by phone and email. They, too, can provide scans of documents needed by researchers.

## Center for Leadership & Ethics

The Center for Leadership & Ethics (CLE) was forced to cancel the Environment Virginia Symposium, a 30-plus-year tradition at VMI, as the global pandemic worsened in March. Also scrubbed from the calendar were a number of other events, among them the superintendent's annual leadership dinner, future activities involving this year's Leader in Residence, Gen. Richard "Butch" Neal, and the Ethics Team's participation in the Navy's annual military ethics competition.

This spring, Col. Dave Gray, director of the CLE, and his staff are busy planning for next year. The annual Leadership & Ethics

The library's ongoing renovation, scheduled to be completed later this year, has been unaffected by the coronavirus pandemic. "Library construction continues to follow the phased sequence established at the outset," said Col. Diane Jacob, library director. "The main (5<sup>th</sup>) floor is on schedule to be complete in late June."

Conference is scheduled to be held during the upcoming spring semester, but the STEM education conference traditionally held in early October will be postponed until the 2021-22 academic year. Workshops planned for the 2020 Environment Virginia Symposium will be held at the 2021 symposium.

Earlier this year, the CLE launched a podcast called *The VMI Leader Journey*. It includes interviews with cadets, alumni, and speakers the Center has hosted at VMI. New episodes are released approximately every two weeks. The podcasts can be found on the Center's website at [www.vmi.edu/cle](http://www.vmi.edu/cle) and on Podbean as *The VMI Leader Journey*. ❀

# Admissions, Financial Aid Impacts

By Mary Price

While much of the world at large and many activities on post have come to a halt as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, staff in the admissions and financial aid offices have stayed busy doing largely what they do every spring.

Notification letters to applicants went out by April 1 as they typically do, said Col. Neil Whitmore '90, associate director of admissions. Meanwhile, Dr. David Copeland, Institute physician, has been reviewing medical records from admitted applicants to make sure they are medically qualified to participate in physical training at VMI. It's a task he undertakes every year.

The admissions office, though, has had to make some adjustments to the usual way of doing things. This year, interviews for Institute Scholar candidates were held via Skype rather than in person. Admissions has also enhanced its online document delivery platforms so future members of the Class of 2024 can pay their deposit online and submit their statements of decision electronically.

The deadline for medical paperwork has remained May 1, but Whitmore said admissions staff would work with those unable to get their medical screenings done by that date.

As of the end of March, Whitmore was still expecting an incoming class of slightly more than 500 cadets. "We don't want to go to more than 510 at the most," he said. "Five

hundred and ten is really stretching it."

Asked if the cancellation of the last spring open house would affect potential cadets, Whitmore replied, "It's going to impact some of them a little bit."

This event, typically held near the end of March, mostly attracts high school juniors.

Whitmore said some can't attend the fall open houses because they play fall sports.

Like Whitmore, Lt. Col. David Sigler, director of financial aid, said that he's seen mostly minimal impacts from the coronavirus pandemic. As is the case with admissions, the financial aid office follows a yearly cycle of activity, and this time of year, staff in financial aid are busy putting together

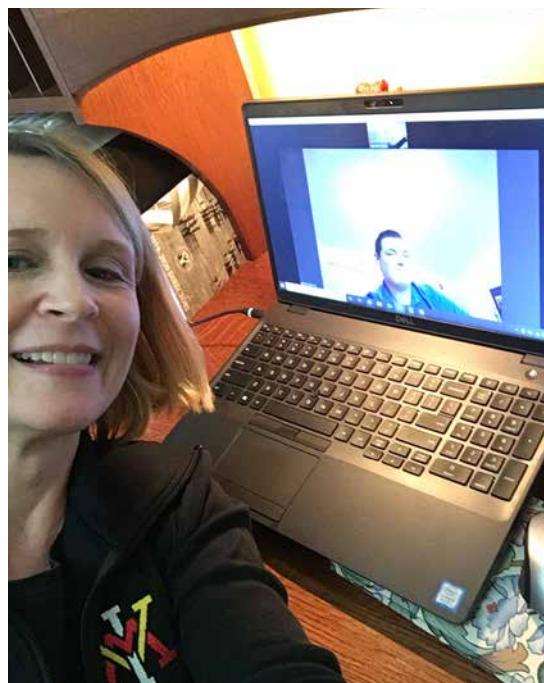
aid packages for the incoming class.

Sigler noted that he and his staff have had "a couple families reach out" for information about additional financial assistance since the crisis hit, but not many. He thinks, though, that number will rise going forward.

"I think we're going to feel the effects later," said Sigler in late March. "People are just right now figuring out how bad it is."

And while the work of his office continues on its usual track, Sigler is feeling the absence of face-to-face contact with incoming cadets and their parents. He mentioned that helping first-generation college students make higher education affordable is one of the most rewarding parts of his job.

"We really miss the personal contact with families and students," he stated. ❀



Lt. Col. Jessica Hyde, associate director of admissions, interviews Christian Walker online.—Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Jessica Hyde.

# Coronavirus Cuts Spring Visits at VMI Museums

By Mary Price

During what's typically one of their busiest visitation seasons, the VMI museums are eerily devoid of visitors, having closed March 16 due to the rapidly worsening coronavirus pandemic.

The three museums, which are the VMI Museum, the Stonewall Jackson House, and the New Market Battlefield State Historical Park approximately 80 miles to the north of Lexington, typically attract a large chunk of their annual visitors in the spring, said Col. Keith Gibson '77, executive director.

At first, 2020 was off to a good start, as January and February, which are typically slow months, ended with increased year-over-year visitation at the VMI Museum and at the New Market battlefield. The Stonewall Jackson House, which closes for the winter each year, reopened March 1 with a new entrance and a greatly expanded museum store, to an enthusiastic reception from visitors.

"We doubled the revenue from museum store sales from the previous year and also the visitation numbers increased," said Gibson. "We were looking forward to that continuing for the rest of the year."

It even seemed possible that the VMI Museum System could better its 2019 numbers for the March-May time period, when approximately 23,000 visitors came, generating \$165,000 in revenue.

Then, just as the museum season was hitting its stride, the coronavirus intervened. "Around March 9, people just stopped coming," Gibson stated. "Attendance just plummeted."

By the end of that week, Gibson had made a recommendation that the museums close, and most of the 30 employees of the VMI Museum System began taking public health emergency leave shortly thereafter. Each site now has one essential staff member



The Stonewall Jackson House briefly opened its new gift shop area in the Davidson Tucker House before having to close.—VMI Photo by Mary Price.

coming in to check on the property and exhibits.

Around the same time that the museums closed, a decision was made to cancel the annual reenactment of the Battle of New Market, the longest continual reenactment held on the original battlefield property. It was only the second time since 1914 that the entire event had been canceled.

Prior to this year, the only full cancellation had been in the early 1990s due to torrential rainfall, and in 2004, the Sunday reenactment was canceled due to rain.

"We felt that [canceling] was the right thing to do for the safety of our spectators and reenactors," said Lt. Col. Troy Marshall, site director at the battlefield, speaking before Gov. Ralph Northam '81 issued a stay-at-home order for all Virginians through June 10.

While aware that the battlefield would suffer a financial loss from not holding the event, Marshall said he was grateful that many reenactors had asked that their registration fees be donated to the battlefield rather than refunded to them.

"We know you're taking a shellacking from this," was the message Marshall said he'd received from reenactors.

For his part, Gibson is looking forward to a time when visitors can see the stuffed and mounted hide of Little Sorrel, Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's horse; visit the only home Jackson ever owned; and walk the same ground that cadets did during the May 15, 1864, Battle of New Market.

"We should resume normalcy when the time is right," he said. "For the benefit of the staff, I hope that is sooner rather than later."

Marshall echoed his comments, saying, "Tourism is going to explode when people come out of their houses. We're going to have some short-term losses but long-term gains."

While not technically a VMI museum, the George C. Marshall Museum and Library located on VMI's post is also temporarily closed. 🦋



The new gift shop area for the Stonewall Jackson House will be ready for visitors once non-essential businesses are allowed to open again.—VMI Photo by Mary Price.



United States should arrange for immediate return to the United States, unless they are prepared to remain abroad for an indefinite period.”

Hall and Hardin swung into action. “We needed to recall all cadets who were studying abroad,” said Hall. He added that international travel at VMI is governed by General Order 73, which states that international travel is banned when the State Department issues a Level 3 or higher advisory.

Turner Leigh '22 had a particularly harrowing experience getting home from Cairo, Egypt. When the Level 4 travel advisory was issued, Leigh inquired about getting a flight home, but was told that the Cairo airport was closed.

Hardin tried to verify this information. She finally got word that seats were available on a flight out of Cairo the next day, albeit at a steep price. Hardin emailed Leigh to say, “Book that flight now.”

“So, on the flip of a dime I packed my bags, cleaned my apartment, called my landlady to let her know I was leaving, and caught an Uber to the airport, all the while praying that the flight was legit,” Leigh wrote in an email. He was home after a 26-hour, 3-flight trip.

Also, as the spring 2020 semester began, there were 36 international cadets enrolled at VMI. By the end of the first week of April, all but three had returned to their home countries.

When spring furlough began on Thursday, March 12, all cadets, including international students, departed post for various destinations. The next day, an email came out announcing



Turner Leigh '22 visits the pyramids while studying at the American University in Cairo, Egypt, earlier this year.—Photo courtesy of Turner Leigh '22.

that the Institute would move its classes online through April 17—a date that was later extended to include the entirety of the semester.

A decision was made to let international students move back into barracks if need be, since many would otherwise have nowhere to go once the furlough ended. On

March 22, approximately 14 international students arrived back on post, where they were screened by Dr. David Copeland, Institute physician, before being allowed to move back into barracks, two to a room.

Keeping tabs on the cadets in terms of mental health and day-to-day needs has been Hardin.

Over the spring furlough, Hardin stepped in to help an exchange cadet from Lithuania with a tricky journey of making it back to VMI from Florida.

Over the last 10 days of March, most of the international cadets booked flights home. In the end, three remained: two from Lithuania and one from mainland China. By the first weekend in April, they had moved into Moody Hall, which has kitchen facilities, and Hall and Hardin were prepared to help them get groceries as needed.

“It was very important to me, and I felt that it was my responsibility, to make sure that each [cadet] came home,” said Hardin.

With the State Department’s Level 4 travel advisory in effect

until further notice, VMI has canceled all summer study-abroad programs, and it is unknown when study abroad will resume. ❁



Ethan Gilmore '22, Christopher Soo '22, Joseph Snyder '22, and Mason Tarkenton '22 hold up a VMI flag in Vilnius, Lithuania, earlier this year.—Photo courtesy of Christopher Soo '22.

# A Message from the VMI Alumni Agencies

By Stephen Maconi, *Chief Executive Officer, VMI Alumni Agencies*

These are unprecedented times for our nation and our beloved community. The uncertainty and unpredictability of this global pandemic creates a worldwide challenge unlike anything most of us have ever experienced. Yet, in a recent communication from Gen. J.H. Binford Peay III '62, superintendent, he mentioned that no community is better suited to overcome adversity than the VMI family.

Your VMI Alumni Agencies staff is working remotely, and we are open for business. While events and travel are suspended, we are determined to continue our important work by phone, letter and digital communications.

Our outreach efforts are centered around the importance of staying connected with our alumni in new, unique, and extraordinary ways and ensuring they are taken care of, feel supported, and know we care. It's also about finding moments of joy and happiness to celebrate during this time of uncertainty and creating opportunities to celebrate all that is great about VMI,

including how to recognize New Market Day and celebrate the cadets as they commission and graduate, thereby welcoming them into the alumni ranks. It's also about seeing what we can do to reschedule postponed events in the future and looking for unique ways to replicate the experience they would have experienced this spring. Reunions offer extraordinary times of bonding and brotherhood among VMI alumni, and we are working hard to reschedule the spring reunions that were postponed. We cannot wait to welcome our reunion classes back to post soon.

From a fundraising perspective, our bias is toward continuing thoughtfully onward. Thoughtfully is the key word. We understand everything has changed, and we hope this virus will soon pass and for the health and solid footing of the VMI family to be fully restored. Although the Institute still depends on private support to maintain the excellence of its program, we know that donors will know best when to step forward and give.

We believe donors give because of the impact of their gifts. We also believe that higher education is a noble endeavor—a national resource whose value is amplified in circumstances such as these. The fact that a Marshall Plan to bolster our medical systems and beat this pandemic was called for on the floor of the U.S. Senate is a poignant reminder that VMI's educational mission is distinguished in times of great adversity and relative tranquility.

We believe in VMI, and we believe that giving is a force for good. Now, more than ever, is the time to stand by those beliefs. We understand that regaining individual balance is paramount. Once the VMI family has done so, we believe helping VMI do likewise for the sake of providing the Corps of Cadets with a comprehensive, problem-solving, character-building education, will once again be a priority.

In all of this, we want our alumni, volunteers, and supporters to know how grateful we are for them. 🌿

## Alumni Agencies Goes Virtual

VMI Alumni Agencies has had to adjust to the coronavirus pandemic to ensure continued engagement with alumni and friends. With traditional spring events such as alumni reunions and the benefactors' luncheon canceled, staff at the Alumni Agencies are strengthening relationships with alumni and donors via phone calls, emails, and social media instead.

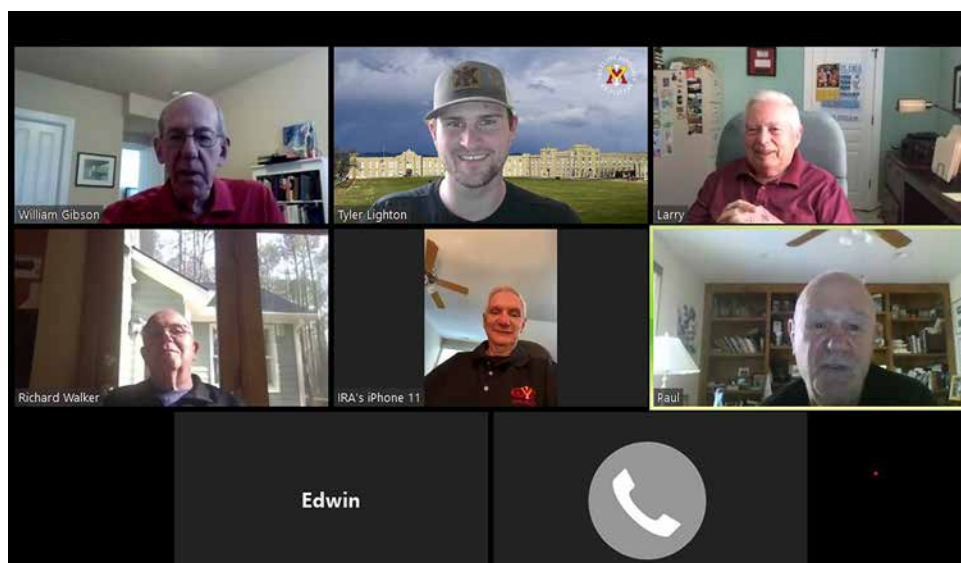
Also, the Alumni Association, the Foundation, and the Keydet Club have all modified their messaging to stress care and concern for the VMI family, and the spring meetings related to governance of all three organizations were moved online.

In addition to the virtual meetings, Thom Brashears '95, chief operating officer of the Alumni Association, has also made Moody Hall available to house three international cadets who needed a place to stay for the remainder of the semester.

At the Foundation and Keydet Club, Meade King '85, chief operating officer,

has been overseeing a phone outreach to benefactors, while coaches have been making calls to athletic donors.

— Mary Price



TJ Lighton '15, director of alumni outreach, meets with members of the Raleigh chapter of VMI alumni online.—Photo courtesy of TJ Lighton '15.



# College Closures Slow Lexington Businesses

By Mary Price

It's been a beautiful spring in Lexington, with temperatures in the 70s arriving well ahead of schedule, along with a show of vibrant color from daffodils, tulips, and hyacinths. The streets of downtown, though, are nearly empty as the coronavirus pandemic has turned what's typically the busiest season of the year for Lexington merchants into one of stress, anxiety, and worry over lost sales.

By mid-March, downtown Lexington was already feeling the weight of the coronavirus pandemic, with not only VMI but also Washington and Lee University switching to distance learning for the remainder of the spring semester. On March 24, Gov. Ralph Northam '81 ordered that all non-essential businesses must close—and the State Theatre, a long-time Lexington landmark, went dark. Restaurants were forced to close their dining areas, although they are still permitted to be open for takeout.

"We're all very sad. It's not just the cadets that are gone, but everybody's gone," said Rebecca Logan, executive director of Main Street Lexington. "Our local businesses are doing the best they can to keep the doors open."

Logan explained that in Lexington, merchants typically stock up on inventory over the winter in anticipation of spring sales—sales that are driven in part by people coming to town for reunions and graduations at VMI and W&L. With those events canceled, and sales consequently lost, "it doesn't give them a lot of reserves to weather this," said Logan.

Restaurants, she noted, operate on thin margins in the best of times, and business this spring has been grim. The Palms, a Lexington fixture since 1975, has temporarily closed, and many of the other spots popular with cadets, such as Pure Eats and Macado's, are doing the best they can to hold on via a carryout menu. The Southern Inn, with its classic neon sign marking its place on the



Downtown Lexington sits mostly empty of cars and people after Gov. Ralph Northam '81 ordered non-essential businesses to close on March 24.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

Lexington restaurant scene since the 1930s, is now offering family meals for carryout.

Several restaurant owners have told Logan that business is only about 30 to 40 percent of what it would normally be this time of year.

"I think a few of them can survive under such circumstances, but only for about a month or so," she commented

"Everybody's taking a big hit." ❁



The State Theatre, and many businesses in Lexington, remain closed.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

## Courageous Leadership Speaker

The VMI Center for Leadership & Ethics hosted John Urschel, author, Ph.D. candidate in mathematics at MIT, and former offensive lineman for the Baltimore Ravens on March 4. As part of the Courageous Leadership Speaker series, Urschel talked about family, academics, football, and the value of applying quantitative reasoning to life.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.





# VMI Athletics: Understanding and Positive

By Maj. Michelle Ellwood

No one could have predicted the sudden halt of sports in the spring of 2020, from Little League to Major League Baseball and everything in between. The Southern Conference men's basketball tournament wrapped up March 9, one of several conferences able to complete the full season and championship process. VMI's last game was on March 7 against East Tennessee State University, the team that went on to win the tournament.

In mid-March, following the decisions of the NCAA and the various conferences in which VMI participates, VMI coaches, cadet-athletes, and staff put a hold on practices, winter wrap-ups, and spring match-ups.

Spring sports were certainly impacted the most, as many cadet-athletes found out about the cancellations in the midst of practice, or even during a game in the early season. Several sports have activities happening throughout the academic year, including track and field. Darrin Webb, director of men's and women's track and field and cross country said, "This is the first time in my 26 years at VMI and college coaching that both our track coaching staff and cadet-athletes have what would be considered an off season."

While formal practices aren't permitted, cadet-athletes are encouraged to continue their individual training. Baseball players have daily workout



Foster Stadium, along with all facilities on post, is closed to the public for the time being.—VMI Photo by Maj. Michelle Ellwood.

plans, if they're able to fit them in. For sports like swimming, that's a little tricky. "We usually do a lot of technique-based training in the spring. Our athletes aren't able to get into a pool or gym at the moment," said Andrew Bretscher, head coach of VMI swimming and diving.

Athlete recruiting has been and continues to be significantly impacted, as the NCAA instituted a temporary "dead period" where coaches could only communicate with recruits through phone calls, texts, or emails. No visits or evaluations of potential VMI athletes are permitted during this time—a time

of the year when many athletes are typically displaying their top performances in their final games or matches.

Athletic staff remain busy with administrative duties in support of cadet-athletes and preparations for future seasons, including scheduling and equipment inventory. All facilities have been closed, including Foster Stadium, a place where many from the community would walk or run on the track throughout the year. Most members of the staff are able to work remotely.

On March 30, the NCAA announced a decision to allow certain athletes an extra year of eligibility. This extension is only for athletes who play spring sports, and athletic

Despite my initial attitude towards learning remotely, I, along with my instructors, am learning to roll with it and get through. On the other hand, soccer is a part of my day that has been challenging to fit into this quarantine lifestyle. In Southern California, any non-essential travel is prohibited and strictly enforced. All gyms and other businesses deemed 'non-essential' have been closed. Typically, I would conduct sprint, stadium, and high intensity full body workouts, as well as run and hike. Being quarantined makes this a challenge, but needing reconstructive knee surgery, which has been postponed due to the pandemic, makes this nearly impossible.—*Mariah Woods '22, Member of the VMI Women's Soccer Team.*

scholarships may not be the same for the additional year. Dr. David Diles, VMI athletic director, said, "We are still evaluating how the additional year of eligibility will impact VMI's department. I expect that we will have a small number of spring sport cadet-athletes return for 2021."

Despite it all, cadet-athletes have displayed positivity and understanding. "I couldn't be prouder of how they have been able to take it for what it is, and understand that this is a necessary means to an end," said Jonathan Hadra, head baseball coach at VMI.

Webb agreed, saying, "Our cadet-athletes are smart, strong, resilient people, and once they wrapped their heads around the gravity of the situation as a whole, they have been amazing."

Coaches, while proud of their athletes and hopeful, remain concerned about the long-term impact on collegiate athletics.

The financial hit from lost ticket sales and NCAA revenue have led to sports programs being cut at some colleges. There's also a new juggling act of bringing in new players under more restrictive recruiting rules while including returning players who were expected to graduate.

"At the end of the day, we will continue to do the right thing by the players and program, and will work earnestly to continue to



Moe was named the Southern Conference's most popular mascot. —VMI File Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

provide a competitive and positive Division 1 experience," said Hadra.

Before all of the cancellations, one of the last athletic recognitions of the 2020 academic year went to Moe, VMI's kangaroo mascot. By popular vote, Moe was named favorite Southern Conference mascot. Ingles, the sponsor of the contest, awarded VMI a \$1,000 scholarship and donated \$1,000 on behalf of VMI to Hoops Against Hunger. 🦘

## Daniels Ceremony

Cadets honor Jonathan Daniels '61, a civil rights hero, on March 4. A wreath was presented in Jackson Memorial Hall and guests were reminded of his words, "I wish you the decency and the nobility of which you are capable." —VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.



## Rank Announcement

The class of 2021 gathered in Jackson Memorial Hall March 10 as rank announcements were made for academic year 2020-21. Next year's cadet captains are Troy Smith, regimental commander; Joseph Murray, regimental executive officer; Jacob Saunders, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion commander; Joshua Lassiter, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion executive officer; Jonathan West, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion commander; James Booth, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion executive officer; Benjamin Ashmore, S1 captain; Eric Munro, S2 captain; Adam Alexander, S3 captain; Kyle Karadayi, S4 captain; Parker Davis, S5 captain; John Duncan IV, S6 captain; Joshua Krogman, S7 captain; Nathan Krug, Company A commander; Tyler Haiges, Company B commander; Emma Pratt, Company C commander; Junius Cox, Company D commander; Kevin Rae, Band Company commander; Leslie Giron-Molina, Company E commander; Jordan Chauklin, Company F commander; David Lanclos, Company G commander; Adam Fodness, Company H commander; and Harrison Smith, Company I commander. —VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



# Post Operations Scale Down and Prepare for the Future

By Mary Price

“The Institute rolls on, even when the parking lots are empty.”

So said Brig. Gen. Dallas Clark '99 on April 2, as he and others attempted the Herculean task of keeping vital services going on post even as the coronavirus pandemic brought nearly all aspects of life at VMI and across the nation to a shuddering halt.

As deputy superintendent of finance, administration, and support, Clark oversees a plethora of seemingly disparate areas, ranging from Physical Plant to Parkhurst Dining, the company responsible for food service in Crozet Hall, to the comptroller's office and many more. All have been affected by the constantly changing pandemic situation.

“I have no answers. It's all so fluid. It'll change by next week,” said Lt. Col. Michelle Caruthers, director of Physical Plant, in early April.

“A lot of the decisions we're making target June 10, but it's likely that date could get pushed out beyond that. We have to have backup plans A, B, C, and D,” she continued.

With cadets not coming to post for the remainder of the academic year, and only some faculty coming to post to teach their classes remotely, Caruthers had to make the difficult decision to place 90 percent of her 130-person staff on public health emergency leave. The other 10 percent were needed for performing essential services such as grounds maintenance and cleaning buildings.

“This is not an easy time for [Physical Plant],” she commented. “We had to look at the bare, essential duties that needed to be performed.”

Chief among those duties is making sure that buildings, even lightly used ones, stay clean in the face of a viral threat. It's easier, of course, if there's less space to clean.

“We're closing down as much as we can,” said Caruthers. “If space doesn't need to be used, it's locked off and shut down.”

With that strategy in mind, Physical Plant staff have closed restrooms in many buildings so that only two are open per building, one for men and one for women. Classrooms are only open for

online instruction, and office space is only available to faculty and staff using that space. Temperature settings have been adjusted to minimize heating and cooling of unused spaces, and there have been changes to the hot water system to conserve energy.

Many Physical Plant employees who are still working spend their time cleaning. “There's been incredible work done by the house-keeping staff,” said Dallas Clark. “They've been doing a lot of wiping and sanitizing.”

Other Institute operations, among them the barber shop, the tailor shop, the military store, and Crozet Hall, were entirely shut down in late March and early April. “Pretty much everything is shut down,” said Lt. Col. Lee Clark '93, director of auxiliary services, on April 3.

Most employees who work in those areas took public health emergency leave for that time period and then returned to work the first full week in April, with a new mission: helping members of the commandant's staff enter cadet rooms and collect VMI-owned items for cleaning and storage.

Lee Clark deemed this process “an interesting little adventure” that involved teams of three people each going through rooms one by one and removing VMI-owned items, while leaving everything else.

“Our main goal was to get [uniforms] out of barracks, so the tailor shop can get them prepared for next year,” said Lee Clark. In doing this, Clark had the support not only of the commandant's staff and a number of auxiliary services employees, but also the athletics staff. He noted that on the first day of going into cadet

rooms, the head coaches of the football, basketball, and baseball teams had all showed up to help.

“It's been huge having the athletic department assist us,” Lee Clark noted.

Furthermore, those working in barracks had masks to wear, courtesy of the tailor shop employees. Lee Clark noted that in the first week alone, those employees had produced more than 500 masks.

So far, no VMI employees have been laid off due to the coronavirus. However, layoffs have occurred at Parkhurst Dining and Follett, the company that runs the VMI Bookstore.



Teresa Alexander switches from sewing uniforms in the tailor shop to sewing masks for the VMI community.—Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Lee Clark '93.



Parkhurst has laid off approximately 100 workers and encouraged them to apply for unemployment benefits through the Virginia Employment Commission. Parkhurst did keep a very small staff of employees working as long as cadets remained on post, however. The bookstore has laid off a small handful of employees since moving to online-only operations.

Some operations on post, though, are like Physical Plant—operating with a skeleton staff. The mailroom, for example, still has two people coming in each weekday to pick up VMI's mail from the Lexington post office to forward packages and other mail to cadets. Lee Clark noted that this time of year, many 1<sup>st</sup> Class cadets commissioning into the armed services order their uniforms and have them shipped to VMI. This year, of course, such cadets had no way of knowing they wouldn't be returning to post after spring furlough.

"We've got to do a turnaround and ship back to the [cadets]," said Lee Clark. ❄



More than 500 masks have been made for the VMI community by the employees of the tailor shop.—Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Lee Clark '93.

## Construction Continues Despite Pandemic Disruption

By Mary Price

This spring, as most of post sits quiet and empty thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, construction is the one aspect that's continued to move forward regardless. Work on the Preston Library and Scott Shipp Hall renovation projects is right on track, as is construction of a new headquarters for the VMI Post Police.

"Everybody's working the same schedule," said Col. Keith Jarvis '82, director of construction, in early April. "The contractors haven't reported any impact from COVID-19. Nobody's shut their doors."

Contractors, though, have been taking extra precautions on their job sites. The contractors have set up hand sanitizing stations, and they're wiping down commonly used surfaces such as handrails and tools that are used by multiple workers. Workers



Crew members of Wiley-Wilson continue work on the post police headquarters on Letcher Avenue—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

aren't required to wear face masks, though some choose to do so.

"There's a lot of precautions taken by the contractors themselves," said Jarvis. "Each company has put in place their own revised rules for the work site."

Future projects seem to be unimpeded by the pandemic. VMI's next big-ticket undertaking, construction of a \$44 million aquatics center to be built adjacent to

the Corps Physical Training Facility, is on track, as funds for its construction have already been approved by the General Assembly.

"We're still set to break ground in mid- to late June," Jarvis reported.

Having cadets away from post earlier than expected, though, has allowed the construction office to push forward the timetable on two projects and begin them now rather than wait until summer.

The first involves relocating a retaining wall at the intersection of Parade Avenue and Anderson Drive, near the George C. Marshall Foundation building. "We're going to push that wall back

about seven feet to improve visibility," Jarvis explained. "With the increased traffic through Jordan's Point, we wanted to do this to improve the line of sight."

The second involves work on an underground steam line beneath Burma Road between the Post Hospital and Carroll Hall.

"We wanted to do it when there's little to no impact to the buildings," Jarvis commented. ❄



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## Epidemics and the Corps of Cadets

By Col. Keith Gibson '77, Director, VMI Museum System

Just six years after the founding of VMI, in 1845, a typhoid fever epidemic struck Lexington and the Institute. The cadets were quarantined to post. This health emergency resulted in the building of the VMI Hospital in 1848-49. The hospital could



The old hospital—seen here in 1890—was built after an outbreak of typhoid fever in barracks in 1845.—Photo courtesy of VMI Archives.

accommodate 16 cadets and is located between barracks and the mess hall. The building now houses the Office of International Programs and the chaplains' offices.

During the last week of September 1889, typhoid fever quickly spread through the Corps. The source was found to be the underground gray water drainage system in barracks. On Oct. 16 of that year, the Corps was placed on furlough. Classes resumed on Nov. 29. Out of a Corps of about 300, three cadets died and six cadets did not return to post.

In 1903 and 1910 typhoid returned to barracks, resulting in an unplanned furlough. The 1903 hiatus was from Oct. 23 to Nov. 24; 11 cadets were infected but no deaths resulted. In 1910 the furlough extended from Nov. 21 to Jan. 4, 1911, during

which time there were 38 cadet cases—again no deaths. The Corps numbered about 600. W&L was also closed during the 1910 outbreak, with severe economic consequences for Lexington merchants. Both instances were tracked to the campus water supplies.

During the influenza epidemic of 1918, many Virginia public schools were closed by local school boards, but colleges across the state remained open, choosing to keep students quartered on campus rather than sending them home. While *The Cadet*, the Corps newspaper, carried mention of alumni influenza deaths, it never mentioned the impact on the Corps, which was relatively mild.

Quarantine to post has also been used several times to combat disease. A short time before the 1927 Christmas furlough, which had only existed since 1925, the Corps was called into Jackson Memorial Hall and told that four cases of infantile paralysis, or polio, had been discovered in the Corps and thus cadets would not be released for the Christmas holiday. The cadets made the most of the situation. On Dec. 29, the Corps was at last released for a brief period, returning to barracks on Jan. 11, 1928. By then, the Corps had grown to about 750.

The influenza epidemic of 1928 hit the Corps particularly hard. A temporary hospital for more than 300 cadets was set up in the 200 level of Jackson Memorial Hall (location of the VMI Museum today). The Institute and other colleges around the state extended the planned Christmas furlough, from Dec. 16, 1928, to Jan. 5, 1929. At the time, it was the longest Christmas furlough ever granted at VMI. ❄

There are so many uncertainties right now and a big part of VMI is learning how to navigate during times of uncertainty; the Rat Line is a prime example. It's those experiences that I am thankful to have had because now I know how to adapt to this situation. It's all about taking it one day at a time.—  
*Alexandra N. Duklis '21, Psychology Major.*