

FALL
2026

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Duty First
Designing the Future
Almost Famous

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Alumni *Redefining What's Possible*



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SEPTEMBER 25 – 26, 2026

This fall, return home to campus to reconnect with old friends and make new ones.

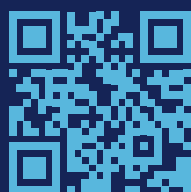
During Homecoming, you'll have a chance to hear updates on your college, tour campus, and celebrate the 25- and 50-year graduates and award recipients during our Welcome Breakfast. Later, bring your family for Phil Phest, with food, music, and activities.

Register today!

Full schedule of events on **page 63**.
Learn more about Homecoming by
scanning the QR code or visiting
Jefferson.edu/Homecoming.



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The **Jefferson Alumni Network** is an exclusive, virtual community where you can connect and reconnect with Jefferson alumni!

Search by name, class year, major, college, specialty, or geographic region, and begin connecting today.

Make the connection now at alumninetwork.jefferson.edu or scan the QR code with your smartphone!





Founded, Again, on a Good Idea

I don't believe in growth for its own sake. Jefferson's growth is always strategic — we expand where we have genuine strengths and where the job market is headed. That discipline is how we maintain an over 92% placement rate.

And it turns out to be deeply consistent with who we have always been.

Consider how this University was founded. In 1824, George McClellan looked at Philadelphia and saw a city that needed more physicians. So, he established Jefferson Medical College. Sixty years later, Theodore Search, a Philadelphia woolen manufacturer, surveyed the American textile industry and noticed that European competitors were outpacing us, in large part because Europe had textile schools and we didn't. So, he founded one himself: the Philadelphia Textile School, which would eventually become part of the Jefferson family. Two extraordinary institutions, now one, founded on the same premise: Identify a real need, then build something exceptional to meet it.

We are at a similar inflection point today. And we are responding the same way.

This summer, we announced the creation of three distinct colleges: the College of Business;

the College of Fashion & Textiles — honoring our legacy as the nation's first textile school — and the College of Architecture, Design & Engineering. This isn't reorganization for its own sake. It's clarity of identity, depth of focus, and expanded opportunity for our students and partners. Each college reflects a field that is growing, that employers are hungry for talent in, and that Jefferson is already exceptionally well positioned to lead.

What's more, Sidney Kimmel Medical College is expanding its reach in ways that would have made George McClellan proud. We are establishing a four-year regional campus in Allentown, Pennsylvania — right in the heart of the Lehigh Valley — where a newly constructed, 54,000-square-foot facility will train the next generation of physicians beginning in 2029. And in Delaware, we have been selected to establish that state's first four-year medical school. Physicians, research consistently shows, are more likely to practice where they train. These campuses will build physician pipelines where communities need them most.

Together, these developments — three new colleges, two new medical campuses — reflect a single coherent vision: a university designed for the future of the professions, the future of healthcare, and the future of the regions we serve. Each expansion

aligns directly with our Strategic Plan 2030, which commits us to professions-focused education, student success, collaborative discovery, and the kind of Jefferson synergy that creates new employment pathways for our graduates.

We're not merely growing. We're building something worth growing into.

You are part of that.

One of the genuine joys of my role is meeting the alumni whose expertise makes our reputation and whose support makes all of this possible. I look forward to seeing many of you at Homecoming this fall. Come find me — and let's talk about our exciting future. 🍷

Susan C. Aldridge, PhD
President
Thomas Jefferson University



08



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The Greeks believed three sisters, the Fates, governed every life: Clotho spun the thread, Lachesis measured it, Atropos cut it. Mortals didn't choose their thread, only how they carried it.

Put another way: Perspective matters. Adversity can become resolve. Challenge can become opportunity. Chance can become hope.

This issue of Innovator is full of people with that kind of perspective.

Madeline Ullom '38 (page 8), a young Army nurse in World

War II, became one of the first American women taken as a prisoner of war — yet she stayed committed to her duty, caring for patients while keeping a diary hidden in the seam of her skirt.

For Adam Snook, PhD '08 (page 32), serendipity arrived at commencement, when he glanced at the name tag on the seat beside him and asked a stranger, Mÿ Mahoney, PhD, to help him reinvent cancer immunotherapy.

As a kid, Melasia Pinder '20 (page 36) dreamed of becoming a vet, until severe allergies ruled

it out. At Jefferson, she forged a new path instead, one that would eventually put her at the center of a creative collective during Philadelphia's World Cup and America250 semiquincentennial events.

Fate is what you make of it. That's why Jefferson keeps producing people who don't let fate define them, but who redefine what's possible.



Fall 2026
On the cover:
Alumni who
redefine what's
possible.

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[time machine]

DUTY FIRST

Surviving Bataan Corregidor and
Captivity in World War II
One Angel's Story

BY FREDERICK E. RUCCIUS III

‘Had the diary been discovered, she could have faced execution by the Japanese. That diary is the only known contemporaneous account written by one of the Army nurses during captivity ...’

During my time at Jefferson, I was fortunate to meet many interesting and inspirational people. They shared not only their personal histories but also their firsthand experiences of significant historical events. I realized that these remarkable stories existed only in my memory, so I began recording them to ensure they would not be lost.

Many of the people I met were veterans of World War II. Among them was Madeline Ullom, who graduated from what was then the Jefferson Nursing School in 1938 before joining the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. Inspired by her sister, who was already serving as an Army nurse, Madeline hoped to see the world and experience a life of adventure.

After serving for a time at Walter Reed Army Hospital, she was assigned to Manila in the Philippines. Following two years of peaceful service, her life changed dramatically when the Japanese attacked the city on Dec. 8, 1941. As Manila came under assault, she worked long hours in the operating room at Sternberg Hospital caring for the wounded. When American forces abandoned Manila, she was evacuated to Corregidor, the island fortress in Manila Bay. There, the hospital operated within the Malinta Tunnel, a massive underground complex carved into solid rock in anticipation of war.

As fighting intensified on the Bataan Peninsula and casualties mounted, Madeline was reassigned to one of the field hospitals established there. Like the soldiers she cared for, the nurses endured constant danger and hardship under enemy attack. When it became clear that American forces on Bataan were about to surrender, the nurses were evacuated back to Corregidor.

Following the surrender of Corregidor, Madeline became a prisoner of war and was sent, along with the other Army nurses, to Santo Tomas Internment Camp. It was the first time in American history that women had been held as prisoners of war. She remained there for nearly three years, enduring starvation-level rations and severe malnutrition until the camp was liberated in 1945.

After the war, Madeline remained in the Army, retiring as a lieutenant colonel in 1964 and settling



in Tucson, Arizona, where I visited her many times. Throughout retirement, she remained active, accepting many invitations to speak about her wartime experiences. She proudly wore her Jefferson nursing pin until later in life.

And Madeline had many stories to tell, for during her captivity she had secretly kept a diary on onion-skin paper, concealing it in a pocket sewn into her skirt. Had the diary been discovered, she could have faced execution by the Japanese. That diary is the only known contemporaneous account written by one of the Army nurses during captivity and it is published for the first time in my new book, “Duty First – Surviving Bataan, Corregidor and Captivity in World War II: One Angel’s Story.”

Here, then, are excerpts from Madeline Ullom’s extraordinary story, “Duty First.”



Attack on Manila

For Madeline, fear was a constant companion during these days. She recalled, "Everyone was on duty, time meant nothing. ... When the first bombs fell near Sternberg, I was so scared I felt petrified. A patient's abdomen had just been opened when an air raid alarm sounded. We continued to operate. ... The thin galvanized roof above the surgery rattled. We were so busy that outside sounds seemed far away. After that session, my fears left me. ... I often slept on the operating table, or just put a pad in the corner somewhere to go to sleep. When things happened, there was no time to call people back and say 'get on duty.'"

Evacuating Manila

When MacArthur declared Manila an open city, Madeline was affected deeply by the changes, especially the absence of the flag: "The American flag was not hoisted to the pole above Sternberg General Hospital's entrance. ... A desolate, helpless, and unrealistic sensation gripped me. So many of my close friends departed. Officers no longer carried arms. ... Lights of the city shone at night, although not as extensively as before the first week in December."



Life on Bataan

As the battles continued, Madeline stated, supplies were stretched to the point of bursting. "The supply of plasma and for blood transfusion was soon exhausted. Doctors and enlisted men donated blood. The influx of many orthopedic cases used up the supply of traction ropes. Jungle vines were substituted. Backs ached from long dawn-to-dusk hours of changing dressings of patients on beds about one foot from the ground. Amputees without hope of prosthesis tried to learn to balance and movement in their weakened condition. Gauze was washed, sterilized, and reused. Amputees spent long hours stretching and folding gauze." All were undernourished and suffered from either malaria, dysentery, or other jungle malady. Despite these ailments they were reluctant to not report for duty. There were so many sick and wounded soldiers that the nurses were remiss to shirk their duties.



Surrender

"A corpsman stopped to gravely inform us he saw the white flag at the tunnel entrance. ... A desolate, numb, unbelievable feeling engulfed one. We listened to the words we had pushed to the backs of our minds. ... No one spoke. We walked away as though we were in an unrealistic situation."



Prisoner

When asked about the effect of being a prisoner had on her in later life, she replied: "It has made me appreciate freedom. It's made me appreciate many qualities in people and circumstances that I would never have thought about before. It has made me a little cautious. It has made me a little more thoughtful and it makes you question. Makes you very analytical. Things are not always as they seem as regard to circumstances or people. You take nothing for granted. If people say something you accept it because maybe, it's the proper thing to do to accept. You might not necessarily agree with it and you might question it in your own mind."

Captivity

Madeline could have spent her time in captivity looking after herself first and spending her time just waiting for MacArthur to return and release her from captivity while bemoaning her fate. That was not the stuff that she was made. She jumped into her work and staffed the hospital and clinics. When the starvation diet deprived her of their strength she continued her work. She may have been a Prisoner of War, but she was a nurse and Army officer first. She carried out her duties despite the many obstacles thrown in front of her with dignity and professionalism. After the liberation of the camp, she could have joined the celebrations but took time to care for the wounded and later spent hours in the operating room.

Sacrifice

Madeline summed up the sacrifice and meaning of her time in prison better than anyone.

"Suddenly and with stark delineation, the full impact of what it means to be a prisoner of war entered into and became our reality. The loss of freedom is, perhaps one of the most difficult things any American, or any citizen of a democracy, can endure. Freedom is after all, the essential ingredient of democracy. ... I and my fellow POW's, the survivors of Bataan and Corregidor, are proud to be counted in that long line of patriots, who have been willing to risk everything – for the right to be free."

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3PM C 25 GOVT					
WUX WASHINGTON DC 1227P MAR 10					
MRS MARY L ULLOM					
BOX 613 ONEILL NEBR					
YOUR DAUGHTER SECOND LIEUTENANT MADELINE M ULLOM ARMY NURSE CORPS					
REPORTED A PRISONER OF WAR OF THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT IN THE PHILIPPINE					
ISLANDS PERIOD LETTER FOLLOWS					
ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL					
100P					

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Q5 54 GOVT= WUX WASHINGTON DC FEB 16 844A					
MRS MARY L ULLOM= BOX 612 ONEILL NEBR=					
AM PLEASED TO INFORM YOU THAT OFFICIAL REPORT JUST RECEIVED					
STATES YOUR DAUGHTER SECOND LIEUTENANT MADELINE M ULLOM LAST					
REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN RESCUED BY OUR FORCES IS NOW ENJOYING					
A BRIEF REST AND WILL BE RETURNED TO THE UNITED STATES BY					
FIRST AVAILABLE AIR TRANSPORTATION FURTHER DETAILS WILL BE					
FORWARDED PROMPTLY WHEN RECEIVED=					
ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL.					
830A .					

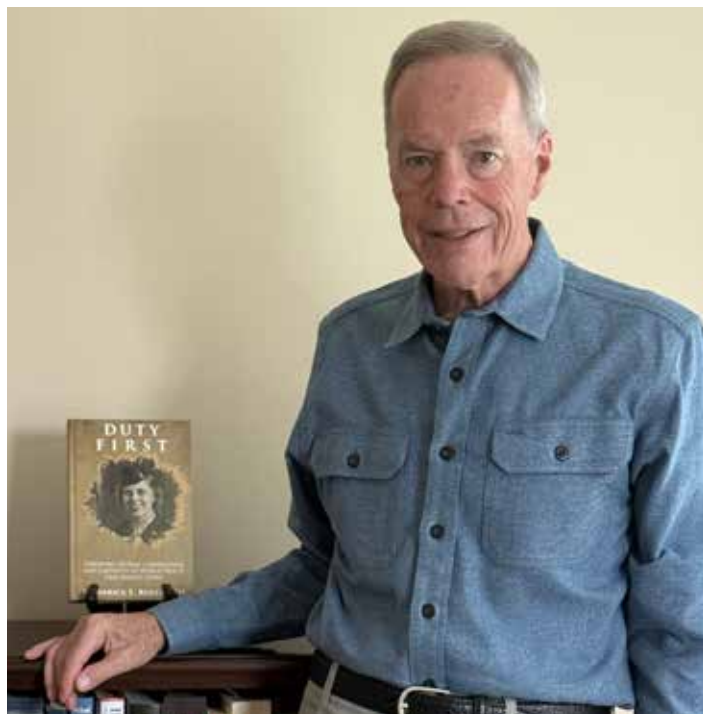


Duty

It was 7:00 PM, February 3, 1945, at Santo Tomas Internment Camp, Manila. Second Lieutenant Madeline M. Ullom, US Army Nurse Corps, was walking back to her quarters after her shift at the camp hospital. In the distance, she heard gunfire and the sound of internal combustion engines. She raced back to her quarters to tell the other nurses who had been prisoners of the Japanese with her since May 1942, "The Americans are out there, we heard their guns!" At 8:50, a tank from the First Cavalry Division, "Battlin Basic," crashed through the front gate of the internment camp. The day they had been envisioning for three years had arrived.

Madeline's long nightmare and that of her fellow internees had come to an end.

After almost three years of captivity, Madeline and the internees celebrated the arrival of their American saviors. It had been a long journey for Madeline from the attacks of December 8, 1941, to Corregidor and Bataan and then to Santo Tomas. But the celebration was short-lived for her. She found a wounded American who needed care and then spent the rest of the night working in the operating room on the other wounded soldiers. While others celebrated, she performed her duties. But that was the way she lived her life from her childhood in O'Neill, Nebraska, to her training in Philadelphia, and now during the war as a POW in Manila. Duty came first. 🇺🇸



About the Author of 'Duty First'

Fritz Ruccius has always been a student of history. He has two master's degrees and one in Reformation history. He studied World War II military history and the Holocaust as part of a graduate program at Temple University. He also taught several history courses at the college level.

He came to work at Thomas Jefferson University in 1997 as the director of trusts and estates and rose to the position of senior vice president for development before retiring in 2015. He continued to work with Jefferson as a consultant presenting programs to alumni groups around the country. Topics of his presentations included: World War II; Jefferson innovations; Sumner Jackson, MD, and the French Resistance; the Vietnam War; Jonathan Letterman and the formation of the Ambulance Corps during the Civil War; and, of course, Madeline Ullom.

Fritz and his wife, Pearl, live in Lewes, Delaware.



SIGN ON, TURN A PAGE, CHILL OUT!

Join the Thomas Jefferson University Alumni Book Club, an online group for reading, learning, relaxing, and connecting with your fellow Textile, PhilaU, and Jefferson graduates.

Visit pbc.guru/Jefferson to join today!



Thomas Jefferson University Creates Three New Colleges to Advance Future-Focused Academic Strategy

BY IRISA GOLD

On July 1, the Kanbar College of Design, Engineering & Commerce officially transitioned into three new colleges — the College of Business, the College of Fashion & Textiles, and the College of Architecture, Design & Engineering.

The academic restructuring is part of a broader strategic plan to strengthen the University's academic identity and support long-term vision and growth.

"We're designing the university for the future," says University President Susan C. Aldridge, PhD. "This move strengthens our academic identity, better reflects the distinctiveness of our programs, and provides clarity for prospective students and partners. This new structure is intended to

enhance their experience through new collaborations."

Notwithstanding the changes, students will remain in their current programs with no alteration to curriculum, faculty or advising. Each new college, under the leadership of its deans, brings a focused vision and expanded opportunities, offering a range of undergraduate, graduate, and online programs.

Led by Dean Philip Russel, PhD, the College of Business features programs including accounting, artificial intelligence, business administration, business analytics, finance, information technology management, international business, management, marketing, and organizational leadership.

The College of Fashion & Textiles is led by Dean Marcia Weiss and offers programs including fashion design, fashion merchandising and management, textile design, textile technology, and textile engineering.

The College of Architecture, Design & Engineering is an expansion of the College of Architecture and the Built Environment and is led by Dean Barbara Klinkhammer. It includes programs such as animation and digital media, architecture, construction management, engineering, industrial design, interior design, landscape architecture, mechanical engineering, and more, and introduces a newly established Department of Design.

Meet the Deans



Philip Russel, PhD

Dean, College of Business, and Professor of Finance

What are your goals for the new College of Business?

Our goal is to position the College of Business as a lifelong learning hub where students and professionals return throughout their careers to acquire new knowledge, strengthen their skills, and stay ahead in a rapidly evolving global economy. We will:

- Elevate our academic identity by offering a dynamic portfolio of programs that respond to evolving industry needs and clearly communicate the distinctive value of a Jefferson business education.
- Champion interdisciplinary learning and global awareness that prepare students to lead with creativity, adaptability, and confidence.
- Expand industry partnerships to increase employer engagement and provide more experiential learning opportunities.
- Advance lifelong learning through flexible, relevant pathways that prepare learners at every stage, from high school students to seasoned professionals seeking to upskill and reskill.
- Promote impactful scholarship that addresses real-world challenges, informs business practice, and enhances teaching and innovation.

How is the new college going to prepare our students for the future of work?

The future of work requires professionals who are adaptable, analytically skilled, technologically fluent, and able to solve complex challenges across disciplines. Our curriculum combines a strong business

foundation with the liberal arts, analytics, leadership, innovation, and artificial intelligence. Through internships, industry-sponsored projects, and immersive learning experiences, students develop the technical expertise, professional competencies, and lifelong learning mindset needed to thrive in careers that will continue to evolve.

How will the new configuration of colleges foster collaboration between them?

The creation of the College of Business alongside the Colleges of Fashion & Textiles and Architecture, Design & Engineering strengthens Jefferson's interdisciplinary model. Building on initiatives such as the DEC [design, engineering, and commerce] core curriculum and partnerships across the University, we will expand collaborative teaching, research, and experiential learning.

The new structure also provides greater flexibility for students to combine disciplines through complementary majors and minors and creates seamless pathways from undergraduate to graduate study. Together, these opportunities reflect Jefferson's commitment to preparing graduates to solve complex challenges through interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation, and real-world learning.

Can you share a fun fact about yourself?

Before GPS and smartphones, I drove coast to coast across both the U.S. and Canada in my rusty-but-trusty aqua-blue Dodge Shadow, navigating with paper maps and listening to FM radio.



Barbara Klinkhammer

Dean, College of Architecture, Design & Engineering

What are your goals for the new College of Architecture, Design & Engineering?

We want to create an integrated, collaborative environment where architects, designers, engineers, and construction management professionals learn from one another while developing deep expertise in their own disciplines.

Our goal is not simply to prepare students for their first job, but to equip them with the adaptability, curiosity, and interdisciplinary mindset to lead professions that will continue to evolve throughout their working lives.

How is the new college going to help prepare our students for the future of work?

Philadelphia serves as our living laboratory. Students work alongside faculty, community organizations, public agencies, and industry partners on projects that address real needs in our society and in neighborhoods throughout the city. These experiences foster civic engagement while giving students firsthand experience in applying their knowledge to meaningful challenges.

Architecture, design, engineering, and construction management students work together with leading industry partners on real-world projects that mirror professional practice. They gain experience with the latest tools including AI-enabled workflows, computational design, advanced digital technologies, engineering analysis, and digital fabrication while developing the creativity, critical thinking, communication, and leadership skills that will enable them to thrive throughout their careers.

How will the new configuration of colleges foster collaboration between them?

The new structure creates stronger identities for each college while making it easier to collaborate across them.

Students and faculty will have expanded opportunities to work with colleagues in health, business, the sciences, and the creative disciplines on real-world projects that improve lives and communities. This interdisciplinary culture reflects Jefferson's unique strength and ensures our graduates understand how design, engineering, health, and technology intersect to create innovative solutions.

Can you share a fun fact about yourself?

Architecture truly runs in my family. My father was an architect, two of my siblings are architects, and all of my siblings married architects. Some of my earliest memories are traveling with my father, sitting in city streets, town squares, and landscapes, sketching buildings, and learning to observe the world through the eyes of an architect. Those experiences sparked a lifelong passion for design and for creating places that improve people's lives.



Marcia Weiss

Dean, College of Fashion & Textiles

What are your goals for the new College of Fashion & Textiles?

We are advancing the legacy and future of fashion and textile education through creative collaboration, responsible innovation, and purposeful design. Our goal is to become the destination for students, faculty, and thought leaders who believe fashion and textiles can improve lives through creativity, innovation, and impact. We are building a college where talented students from around the world learn alongside accomplished faculty and industry visionaries. We will continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with leading companies and organizations, expand global and experiential learning opportunities, and invest in emerging areas of research and creative practice.

Our alumni are central to this vision. Their expertise, mentorship, and engagement help connect our rich history with an ambitious future. Together, we will become one of the world's premier destinations for fashion and textile education.

How is the new college going to help prepare our students for the future of work?

The College of Fashion & Textiles prepares students not just for the jobs that exist today, but for the careers, industries, and opportunities they will help create tomorrow. Tomorrow's leaders must be collaborative problem-solvers, effective communicators, and lifelong learners who can navigate constant technological and societal change.

Our students learn by doing. Through immersive industry partnerships, sponsored projects, internships, global experiences, and

interdisciplinary collaboration, they graduate with the experience, confidence, and professional networks needed to contribute from day one. As technologies such as artificial intelligence, digital product creation, advanced manufacturing, and sustainable materials continue to reshape our industries, our curricula will evolve in tandem, ensuring students graduate with expertise and future-focused skills. Our graduates understand that innovation is most powerful when it creates value for people, advances sustainability considerations, and strengthens communities.

We improve lives by fashioning the future.

How will the new configuration of colleges foster collaboration between them?

The new configuration creates a cohesive alignment of programs. In sharing the structure of the College of Fashion & Textiles with our industry partners, their reaction has been overwhelmingly positive, with the often-heard remark, "It's about time!" Students who previously had been in separate schools or colleges are now intentionally together. This structure naturally enhances collaboration between programs. New experiential-learning opportunities have already been created due to the restructuring.

The programs in these new colleges are part of the East Falls Campus legacy. Collaboration is in our DNA.

Can you share a fun fact about yourself?

I've had artwork exhibited at the China National Silk Museum in Hangzhou, China.

FASHION STUDIO

brings flair to the runway



BY MIKE BEDERKA



THE FUTURE OF FASHION HAS ARRIVED.

On April 22, Jefferson hosted its annual Fashion Show, selling out Philadelphia's famed Bellevue Hotel. Twenty-seven fashion design seniors showcased their capstone collections to a crowd of current and prospective students, University colleagues and leadership, industry representatives, and area fashionistas.

With inspirations ranging from the whimsy of the circus to the women of the Tudor period to Ragnarök — the prophesied final battle of Norse mythology — the looks represented the culmination of years of hard work and celebrated student creativity, craftsmanship, and innovation.

Each student presented four garments on the runway, with collections featuring evening wear, formal wear, streetwear, intimates, resort wear, and more. Many designers collaborated with students in Jefferson's Textile Design and Industrial Design programs to complete their pieces.

University President Susan C. Aldridge, PhD, described the annual fashion show as Jefferson at its most creative and inspiring.

"We're not just educating students, we're shaping leaders, fueling innovation, and advancing industries," she says. "Through immersive, hands-on and purpose-driven learning, our students don't just graduate with knowledge; they leave with experience, perspective, and the power to lead in a world changing by the minute. This is professions-focused education. It's experiential. It's cross-disciplinary. It's real world."

Aldridge also shared the news of the creation of the College of Fashion & Textiles to support Jefferson's long-term vision and growth.

"This new structure will further strengthen the Jefferson student experience by enhancing

opportunities for collaboration and innovation across disciplines," she says.

Aldridge closed her remarks by introducing alumna Madison Chamberlain '17 as the Jefferson Spirit of Design Award honoree, a distinction presented to an individual who has had a major influence on design and design education. Previous recipients include luminaries such as Tommy Hilfiger, Geoffrey Beene, Nicole Miller, and Stuart Weitzman and alumni William Calvert '92, Jorge Salinas '94, Mike Ternosky '00, and Jay McCarroll '97.

Chamberlain's work — recently featured in *Vogue* magazine — centers on creating colorful, nontraditional custom-wedding dresses, bridal jumpsuits, separates, and bold accessories, including veils, capes, and gloves. What began as a small ready-to-wear women's-wear line has evolved into a full studio.

"At Jefferson, we prepare students to challenge the status quo — to redefine possible through design that matters," Aldridge says. "Madison Chamberlain has lived that mission with grace, purpose, creativity, and brilliance."

Chamberlain congratulated the designers on their accomplishments, noting that her team of three all graduated from Jefferson (or will soon).

"Today, my brand is built on everything I learned here at Thomas Jefferson University and the life experiences that came after graduation," she says. "The creative self-exploration encouraged throughout the entire curriculum lives in the DNA of my designs. I may be biased, but I think this program creates the most talented and driven designers."

Carly Kusy, program director of Thomas Jefferson University's BS in Fashion Design and MS in Fashion Design Technology



programs, applauded all the fashion students for challenging conventions and bringing their boldest ideas to life.

“This has been a remarkable year, and tonight you’ve seen why,” Kusy told the crowd. “Our senior class has amazed us once again with their passion, drive, and unrelenting creativity. We’re at a pivotal point, and we need new voices willing to question, challenge, and reimagine what fashion can be.”

Student fashion designers who showcased their work on the runway were Abby Brubaker, Adriana Cameline, Alexandra Tierney, Anna Ferreri, Annalee Capuano, Brooke Boyd, Dayanara Cid, Eleana Garcia Perez, Elissa

Christina Lopez, Ella Cascone, Gabrielle Towne, Jaida Marshall, Joseph Ward, Kayla Lawson, Kaz Kipp, Lily Kate Yach, Megan Zeiler, Mel Gorecki, Miabella Courtney, Nina Ceccanecchio, Omar Gómez, Sami Moritz, Siana Rosini, Stephanie Lorenzo, Teresa “TJ” Mitchell, Tre’ Stanard, and Zara Menegaux. The 2026 Senior Awards winners are:

- President’s Award (Best Senior Collection): Siana Rosini
- CCA Award (Excellence in Design Innovation): Joseph Ward
- Deloitte Award (Most Ready for Retail): Zara Menegaux
- Coates Brothers Clothing of Philadelphia Award (Excellence in Workmanship and Quality): Eleana Garcia Perez
- L. Tadd and Sandy Schwab Award (Most Creative Collection): Jaida Marshall
- Baldridge Award (Excellence in Evening Wear or Bridal): Annalee Capuano and Megan Zeiler
- Fashion Design Faculty Award (Excellence in Design): Omar Gómez
- Fashion and Textile Futures Center Award (Excellence in Collaborative Textile Design): Elissa Christina Lopez and Dusty Ruth Prancel.

Marcia Weiss Named Dean of College of Fashion & Textiles

Thomas Jefferson University President Susan C. Aldridge, PhD, announced the appointment of Marcia Weiss as dean of the newly formed College of Fashion & Textiles. Weiss, who served as interim dean, assumed the role on July 1, 2026.



As interim dean, Weiss demonstrated outstanding leadership and selfless service to her programs and the University. She brings to the classroom decades of industry experience, including 19 years with Burlington Industries, where she ascended to the role of vice president of design for the House Fabrics Division.

A specialist in woven design, Weiss is nationally and internationally recognized in her discipline and well respected among her peers, students, and alumni. Her research interests include culturally significant textile practices in West Africa and Central Asia. An exhibited artist, her work has been displayed throughout Asia, Europe, and North America.

In addition to her academic leadership, Weiss maintains a consulting practice that spans color/trend research, multilayer textiles, and advanced woven structural solutions for a range of applications. Her current practice involves the joy of multilayer ikats, celebrating a rich family history of artisanal craft.

Weiss earned her bachelor’s degree in textile design from Philadelphia College of Textiles & Science and her Master of Fine Arts in fibers from Savannah College of Art and Design. She teaches graduate-level studio courses and is a frequent presenter at conferences and symposia.



Therapy Dogs Offer Emotional Support

Thomas Jefferson University Hospital is welcoming new therapy dogs to its team, with puppies such as Maggie and Brucey preparing to support staff and students.

The therapy dogs will roam the nursing stations and classrooms on Jefferson's campuses, spreading comfort to those who need it. The goal is to provide emotional support and relief to those working in high-stress hospital environments, as well as to students feeling the pressure of their studies.

"We know from the research it reduces stress; our students come

between exams and really enjoy the opportunity to relax," says Susan C. Aldridge, PhD, president of Thomas Jefferson University.

"On your worst day which, many of us have for any reason — illness, stress, multiple meetings — you can't help but relax and smile when you are with a dog," says Marie Ann Marino, EdD, RN, dean of the Jefferson College of Nursing.

One of the dogs in training is Brucey, a 5-month-old chocolate Labrador retriever who is named after Bruce Michell, a Vietnam veteran and friend of Pete Ciarrocchi, chairman and CEO of Chickie's and Pete's. Michell recently passed away.

"I wanted to honor him ... because he's a veteran,"

Ciarrocchi says.

All the therapy dogs are trained by Leashes of Valor, a Virginia-based organization that provides no-cost therapy dogs to combat veterans.

Chris Bowers, a retired U.S. Marine who was injured in Iraq in 2008, serves as the director of programs for Leashes of Valor. He says that therapy dogs are helping to save lives.

"The lessons that that little black dog taught me outweighed any class I ever sat in," he says. "I think at the end of the day it's healing souls as much as it's healing wounds."

Soon, Brucey will head back to Fredericksburg, Virginia, for two years of intense training before joining the Jefferson staff.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF CARE

Jefferson expands the physician pipeline to Delaware and the Lehigh Valley



A FAMILY IN Sussex County, Delaware, must drive 45 minutes for a pediatric appointment. A grandmother in the Poconos puts off a specialist visit because the nearest one is two counties away.

America has a doctor shortage problem, and it is getting worse. By 2036, the United States could face a shortfall of up to 86,000 physicians, according to a 2024 projection from the Association of American Medical Colleges. Rural counties are losing physicians faster than they can replace them. And medical school seats have not kept pace with a growing, aging population.

Jefferson is doing something about it. In the span of six weeks this summer, the University announced two new regional campuses of Sidney Kimmel Medical College — one in Delaware and one in Allentown, Pennsylvania — each designed around a simple, evidence-backed premise: Physicians tend to practice where they train.

A First for Delaware

On June 2, Gov. Matt Meyer stood alongside Jefferson leadership to announce something Delaware has never had: a four-year medical school of its own. Delaware is one of only a handful of states without an institution granting MD or DO degrees, and for generations its aspiring physicians have had to leave the state to train — and often never returned.

The new Sidney Kimmel Medical College Delaware Regional Campus, based at the University of Delaware in Newark, will welcome its first class of 40 students in fall 2028. Preclinical work will occur in New Castle County, while the heart of the initiative lies farther south. Clinical training will center on Kent and Sussex counties, where the physician shortage is most severe and where an aging, increasingly rural population needs care the most.

“We need to stop exporting future doctors and start educating them here at home,” Meyer said. Jefferson CEO Joseph G. Cacchione, MD, framed the University’s role as an imperative: “Jefferson is committed to being part of the solution to Delaware’s physician shortage. ... Jefferson is all in.”

The partnership builds on decades of history. Since the late 1960s, Jefferson’s medical school has reserved roughly 20 seats a year for Delaware students through the Delaware Institute of Medical Education and Research. The effort is backed by a five-year, \$157 million federal Rural Health Transformation grant, part of a broader push by the state to bring \$1 billion to bear on access to care in Kent and Sussex counties, including tuition assistance for students who commit to practicing in southern Delaware after graduation.

A Second Campus, 90 Miles North

Six weeks later, Jefferson announced a second expansion, this one in Allentown. The new four-year Lehigh Valley regional campus of SKMC will occupy more than 54,000 square feet of newly built space at One Center Square in downtown Allentown, enrolling its first class of 45 students in July 2029.

Students there will follow the identical JeffMD curriculum taught in Philadelphia — same learning objectives, same assessment standards, same graduation requirements — with clinical training conducted across Jefferson Health’s Lehigh Valley hospitals and outpatient sites. The campus builds on an already deep relationship: During the 2025–2026 academic year alone, more than 80 Jefferson medical students and eight physician assistant students completed clinical rotations in the region.

“Physicians are more likely to practice where they train,” said Said Ibrahim, MD, the Anthony F. and Gertrude M. DePalma Dean of SKMC. The Lehigh Valley campus also inherits the infrastructure and faculty expertise of the SELECT program, a



From left, Neil Hockstein, MD, Delaware surgeon general; Said Ibrahim, MD, Sidney Kimmel Medical College dean; Joseph G. Cacchione, MD, Jefferson CEO; Susan C. Aldridge, PhD, Thomas Jefferson University president; David Tam, MD, Beebe Healthcare president and CEO; and Laura Carlson, PhD, University of Delaware president.

partnership between Lehigh Valley Health Network and the University of South Florida whose final class graduates in 2027.

Local leaders were quick to describe the human stakes. Allentown Mayor Matt Tuerk pointed to students who might otherwise leave for medical school and never come back: “An Allentown School District student with a dream to be a doctor can do premed at Cedar Crest College and now stay in Allentown for her MD.”

One Strategy, Two States

Taken together, the Delaware and Lehigh Valley campuses represent a deliberate expansion strategy, not two isolated announcements. Both target regions with acute, well-documented physician shortages. Both pair Jefferson’s 200-year academic pedigree with deep local clinical partnerships. And both are built on the same underlying insight: Training doctors in the communities that need them most is one of the most effective ways to keep those doctors there for good.

“With the expansion of Sidney Kimmel Medical College into the Lehigh Valley and Delaware, and the continued growth of our academic and clinical programs, this is a time of tremendous opportunity,” said University President Susan C. Aldridge, PhD.

For a medical school built on the idea that medicine is a calling rooted in place, the message to Delaware and the Lehigh Valley is straightforward: Train here, stay here, serve here.



Students presented their Market East concept to University leadership, community stakeholders, and city leaders on April 17.

Through Unique Studio, Jefferson Students Reimagine Market East

The Philadelphia neighborhood of Market East, which stretches from City Hall to Independence Mall, has long lacked an identity. Jefferson students in a unique College of Architecture, Design & Engineering capstone studio plan to change that.

Throughout the spring semester, students conducted intensive research, met with community stakeholders and city leaders, iterated and built models, and, on April 17, presented their concept — an ecological district that restores the heartbeat of Market East. Rooted in history and driven by the voices of its itinerant populations, the capstone studio asserts a vision that embodies Jefferson’s mission and core values.

“This is a visionary project,” says University president Susan C. Aldridge, PhD. “Our students have done an extraordinary job. I couldn’t be prouder of them.”



Scan the QR code to learn more about the incredible, innovative

Jefferson students who reimagined a future for East Market Street.



There’s That Jefferson Airstream Again!

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Jefferson’s 1960s Airstream trailer served as a critical central-command center for health-care professionals in the field, enabling some 15,000 people to receive COVID testing. Now, the Office of Community Health & Impact is reinventing and redesigning it in a way that helps Jefferson meet people where they’re at.

The latest innovation for the vehicle came in the form of a spring special-topics course. In the class, students from various disciplines worked together to ideate renovations for the Airstream, present them to leadership, and then support its physical reinvention into the future.

The students were placed in four multidisciplinary teams.

Each team member hailed from different departments and brought new, yet complementary, knowledge and skills to each of their groups. The final design incorporated items and ideas from each of the teams for a combined winning result.

From learning to successfully collaborate across disciplines, to planning and managing budgets, to creating prototypes, the students were excited about the opportunity to learn from each other and to partner with others they otherwise may not have had the opportunity to work with. [J](#)

By Brian Hickey



Hear the episode:

Scan to listen to the student designers, faculty, and leadership discuss the future of the Airstream.



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HOME OF SIDNEY KIMMEL MEDICAL COLLEGE

CLASS OF 2026

They began their time at Jefferson with distinct ambitions and career paths, but they are now linked by a shared milestone as Class of 2026 graduates. We caught up with a dozen students from across programs to reflect on their favorite memories, future plans, and more.

BY MIKE BEDERKA



Yumna Ahmed, Doctor of Pharmacy

The pharmacy field has long called to Yumna Ahmed. She attended Jefferson undergrad for health sciences, knowing where her graduate studies would take her.

“Pharmacy is innovative,” Ahmed says, “and I love to learn.”

Having friends from undergrad provided a sense of familiarity, especially through a shared study group. Other College of Pharmacy highlights include a community project presenting health info to seventh graders and several rotations, including ones with Jefferson Health Plans and Thomas Jefferson University Hospital. At the latter, she gained insight into the workflow of a large pharmacy team.

“Each person has a certain role to ensure patients receive their medications,” she says.

With graduation, Ahmed plans to focus on the pharmacist licensure exam, known as the NAPLEX, and continue her pharmacy journey.



Jasmin Bickham, BS in Marketing

As a first-generation college student, crossing the commencement stage meant the world to Jasmin Bickham. “My whole family is so proud of me,” she says.

Bickham transferred to Jefferson after earning her associate degree at a community college. Marketing’s blend of analytical and creative thinking plays to her strengths.

While at Jefferson, she interned at Subaru for a year on its digital platforms team — a connection she made at a University career fair. Bickham also founded Jefferson’s Women in Business Leadership Program, which hosts webinars with alumni and pairs students with mentors in the field.

“The two years flew by,” she says.



Zariah Brown, MS in Engineering with Textile Engineering Concentration

After finishing her undergrad degree in materials science and engineering, Zariah Brown didn't plan to go back to school. She worked in industry for a couple of years. Still, after some real-world experience, she knew she needed additional textile education for her next career step: becoming a product engineer at an athletic footwear and apparel company.

"I've always been an athlete — basketball, volleyball, track, soccer," Brown says. "Merging my two passions is a dream. I want to make a shoe with the best tech to help athletes to jump higher, run faster, or create something that wicks away sweat more effectively."

Jefferson's national reputation for textiles led her to Henry Avenue, although Brown admits she knew little about the field when she began her studies.

"I started on the ground floor, but I came in humble and ready to learn," she says. "The faculty were always helpful. If I had questions, they had answers. If I wanted to learn more, they were ready and willing to help."

Joining a student research group with engineering professor Radika Bhaskar, PhD, also prepared her for life after Jefferson. "I didn't expect that group would enhance my academic experience as much as it did," she says. "I never had the chance to do research before. I got to work hands on, experimenting with other students and learning how to conduct research properly."



Nikki Dedes, BS in Pre-Medical Studies

Nikki Dedes feels an overwhelming sense of gratitude as she graduates, but she knows it's just part of her journey. She starts at Sidney Kimmel Medical College this summer.

Dedes has wanted to be a physician for as long as she can remember, making casts out of wipes for her American Girl dolls. Also, as an injury-prone soccer player growing up, she often found herself in the hospital with a split chin or forehead.

"I was a frequent flyer to the ER but always felt comfortable in a hospital setting," she says. "I loved the doctors, and it sparked my curiosity about the field."

Dedes excelled both in and out of the classroom at Jefferson. Along with earning numerous personal accolades on the women's soccer team, she helped propel the Rams to a Central Athletic Collegiate Conference championship and back-to-back NCAA Sweet 16 appearances.

"I couldn't say enough good things about Jefferson — the faculty, the staff, my classmates, and teammates," says Dedes, who hopes to pursue a career in sports medicine. "I've had the best experience here, and staying felt like a natural next step."



Abby Jackson, Doctorate of Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy gives Abby Jackson everything she wanted in one degree with facets of rehabilitation, psychology, public and population health, and social and civil justice. Her aunt, a now-retired occupational therapist, provided early inspiration.

“It’s surreal,” Jackson says. “I’ve been waiting for this moment since I was 15 years old.”

For her capstone, she worked with Project HOME’s Hub of Hope, which offers housing options and programs for people who are unhoused. Jackson collaborated with 15 participants to write advocacy letters to government officials in support of Project HOME’s Homelessness Is NOT a Crime campaign.

She also embraced the University’s many interprofessional opportunities, including the palliative care program, ARTZ at Jefferson, the Asano Humanities & Health Certificate, and an exchange program with Ulster University to learn about healthcare in Northern Ireland.

“I appreciated the opportunity to grow and absorb as much as I could while I was here,” says Jackson, who earned the OT Department’s Advocacy and Occupational Justice Award. “I know it will enhance my professional abilities.”



Cami Jacobson, BS in Information Technology Management

The University’s new Information Technology Management program gave Cami Jacobson a space to “geek out,” while helping the Jefferson community.

Jacobson followed a nontraditional pathway to the University. While homeschooled in high school, she took classes at a community college. The flexibility of Jefferson’s online accelerated program allowed her to incorporate those credits and finish in December, after just one year here.

“Plus, I could graduate debt free, which has been my goal since eighth grade,” Jacobson says. “Jefferson checked all the boxes.”

The University’s small classes, which covered a mix of business and technology topics, allowed her to learn from her classmates and experienced faculty, resulting in “less memorization and more discussions.”

In addition, Jacobson completed a for-credit internship at Jefferson Health, which she parlayed into a full-time position here as a security analyst. In part, she creates simulated phishing emails to help ensure colleagues don’t fall for real scams. “I can protect others and teach them how to stay safe,” Jacobson says.



Emily Luckenbach, Bachelor of Landscape Architecture

One night in high school, Emily Luckenbach took an online quiz to help figure out her career plans. The answer, landscape architecture, surprised her. Luckenbach had never heard of the field, but after some research, she knew it would be a perfect fit as it combines her love of art, nature, and environmental science.

For her senior capstone, Luckenbach partnered with the Hill Top Preparatory School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, a school for neurodiverse students. She collaborated with teachers, administrators, and students to design a restorative exploration trail made of five distinct “worlds” that invite neurodiverse students to step out of classroom fatigue and into environments where curiosity and self-directed exploration unfold.

Luckenbach recently accepted a full-time position as a graduate landscape architect at Pennoni. “I had four years of pushing my passion forward,” she says. “I’m really proud of where I am, and I’m excited to graduate.”

Kai Mangahas, BS in Health Sciences

Decorated student-athlete Kai Mangahas has played soccer since age 5, and some of his favorite Jefferson memories have come with his Rams teammates — practices, games, grabbing food together at Kanbar, and everything in between.

Soccer also strengthened his ability to connect with people from diverse cultures and personalities and to navigate uncertainty. “That will translate into the healthcare industry,” he says. “You never know who will walk through your door as a patient.”

After earning numerous CACC All-Academic honors, Mangahas will attend grad school to become a physician assistant.

“Working in a senior living home for five years has made me love caring for others,” he says. “I want to be a physician assistant to help people holistically and thoroughly. The flexibility and growing importance of the PA profession also influenced my decision to pursue this field.”





Cody Owens, Accelerated BSN Plus

Cody Owens knew he wanted to be a nurse after completing his military service in 2016. A passion for hands-on care carried him through his four years with the Marines.

Even during off hours, Owens often found himself “at the hip” of corpsmen during man-down scenarios. He also spent two months training in live combat casualty care, working with tourniquets, live tissue, chest seals, Stop-the-Bleed techniques, and more.

His time in the Marines taught him to recognize subtle cues and stay focused in high-stress situations — skills that will carry over to nursing, says Owens, a Jefferson College of Nursing-Independence Blue Cross Foundation Service Scholar.

After working as an advanced emergency-medical-technician for the past six years, Owens will continue his career in the cardiac intensive care unit at Jefferson Abington Hospital, where he completed his capstone.



Paris Schell, BS in Biopsychology

Don’t be surprised to see Paris Schell on Capitol Hill soon. She will attend graduate school in the Washington area to study social policy and pursue a career in politics.

“Throughout my journey, especially while helping support my family as my grandmother battled cancer, I became deeply aware of the inequities that exist within our systems,” she says. “Watching her fight with strength and dignity until her last breath instilled in me a responsibility to advocate for better systems and stronger communities.”

Schell spent the past four years with Jefferson’s Student Government Association, the last two as president. She worked passionately to support her classmates and make Jefferson a better place, all while developing her leadership skills.

“My favorite and most transformative experience was finding my authentic voice,” says Schell, who founded Jefferson’s Intercultural Advisory Board. “That growth is something I will carry with me into every space I enter moving forward.”



Shiyun Tang, BS in Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences with Medical Dosimetry Concentration

Shiyun Tang's educational and professional life saw many twists and turns before Jefferson. After earning her undergrad degree in communication and master's in arts management, she worked for a few nonprofits.

When the pandemic hit, Tang pivoted and returned to school for integrative design and media to improve her coding and computer skills. Here, she found the work somewhat repetitive.

Tang's husband, a medical physicist, suggested a different, more fulfilling option — medical dosimetry — which brought her to Jefferson. The field builds on her work experience and desire to help others. Plus, her father's cancer diagnosis gave her insight into the behind-the-scenes aspects of treatment.

"That changed my perspective," Tang says. "The technology amazed me."

Some of her favorite Jefferson memories came from working with medical physicists and dosimetrists during an Asplundh Cancer Pavilion clinical rotation. Starting this September, Tang will work as a medical dosimetrist at a North Jersey medical center.



Arezoo Zomorodi, MD, MS in Healthcare Quality and Safety

As the vice chair of quality for the Department of Pediatrics at Nemours Children's Health, Arezoo Zomorodi, MD, recognized she could strengthen her impact in the role by pursuing additional training.

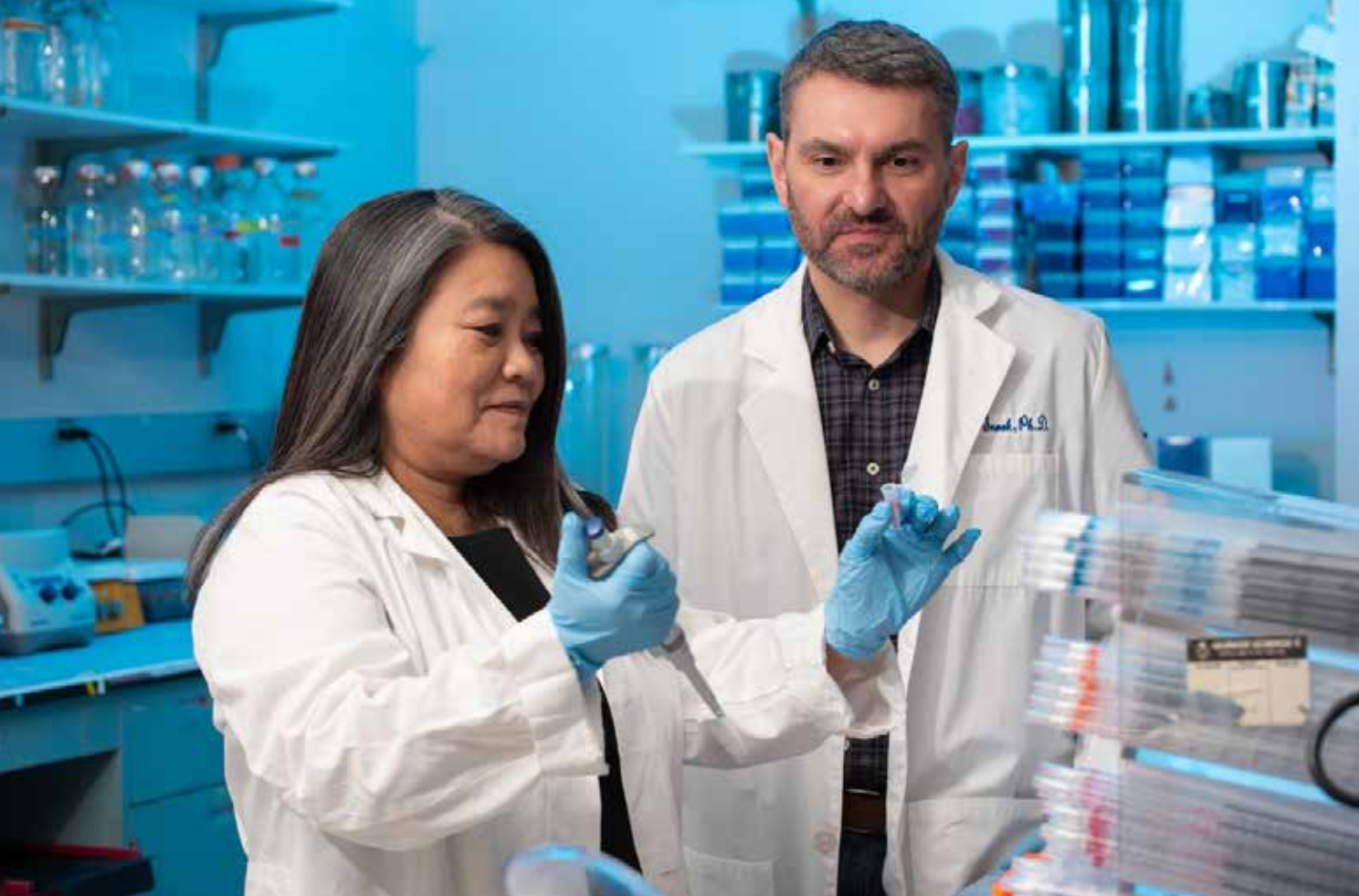
"It makes my work more thoughtful and academic now," says Zomorodi, also a pediatric emergency medicine physician.

Through the Healthcare Quality and Safety program, she studied strategies to prevent adverse events, suboptimal care, ineffective treatments, inefficient processes, and unnecessary clinical variation across health systems.

Her capstone — a rewarding, large-scale project — explored ways to improve antimicrobial stewardship in pediatric patients with otitis media and pneumonia.

Zomorodi offers these words to physicians in academia considering another degree: "It's important to differentiate yourself and develop a niche to be successful in an area academically intriguing to you. It brings joy and adds another dynamic to one's career."

Thomas Jefferson University's Class of 2026 enters the workforce as innovators, designers, healthcare professionals, and changemakers. [▶](#)



Searching for a Universal Cancer Immunotherapy

An unlikely research partnership may enhance the reach and impact of CAR-T therapy for cancer.

BY DEBORAH BALTHAZAR

It was the spring of 2018 at Thomas Jefferson University's commencement ceremony, and Adam Snook, PhD '08, and Mý Mahoney, PhD, had never met before. They worked in different departments on very different research projects. Dressed in their academic regalia, they shuffled inside to find their seats. Before the ceremony began, Snook, a cancer immunotherapy researcher, glanced at the name tag on the seat next to him and quickly looked it up on his phone.

"When I walked up to my seat, I saw this man on his phone," recalls

Mahoney, a biomedical researcher who studies skin biology. "The next thing I knew, he leaned over and said, 'Hey, you want to work on CAR-T together?'"

This serendipitous exchange led to the start of a groundbreaking research project. Together, Snook and Mahoney have set out to work on a new version of CAR-T, one of the biggest advances in cancer immunotherapy. Their goal is ambitious: to potentially solve two of CAR-T therapy's biggest challenges. First, expanding CAR-T to treat a wide range of solid tumors for cancers such as breast, colon,

pancreatic, lung, prostate, and liver, which the therapy currently doesn't effectively target. And second, making CAR-T accessible for more patients. The therapy's current mode of production requires a lot of time and money, and there's a limit to the number of people who can be treated with these potentially curative therapies.

By the time their students were crossing the stage, accepting their diplomas, Snook and Mahoney had already started charting their next steps.



The current capacity is just a few thousand patients who can be treated annually. ... And so, we need to be able to do something different that could be applied more universally.

ADAM SNOOK, PHD '08

Immunotherapy — A Revolution in Cancer Treatment

For over 160 years, scientists have searched for ways to harness the body's immune system to fight cancer. Early efforts, dating to the 19th century, explored whether infections could stimulate the immune system to attack tumors. By the 1960s, researchers had identified key immune system components, like T cells, that played an important role in recognizing and eliminating early cancers. The first breakthrough in this line of research came in the 1980s, when researchers discovered that T cells could be genetically modified to recognize and destroy cancer. This led to the development of chimeric antigen receptor T-cell therapy, or CAR-T.

The therapy is made by removing T cells from the cancer patient, turning them into stronger cancer-fighting cells in a laboratory, and then restoring them to the patient. The first-generation CAR-T cells, developed in the 1990s, showed promise in the lab and in mice, but failed in human trials. The modified T cells struggled to persist in the body, and there was no reduction in tumor size. At the same time, other forms of immunotherapy — such as cancer vaccines and immune checkpoint therapies — were being explored as alternative strategies, but they each had their own hurdles.

In 2001, Snook had started his PhD research in the midst of these exciting times in immunotherapy. His early work focused on developing cancer vaccines, but by 2009 his focus expanded to include CAR-T therapy just as the field was experiencing a turning point. Researchers had developed a new generation of CAR-T cells, improving their ability to persist and attack cancer cells.

This led to the landmark FDA approvals of six CAR-T therapies between 2017-2022, which were made possible by years of clinical trials, and early high-profile successes, including the first successful use of CAR-T therapy in a pediatric patient in 2012.

But while it has been revolutionary for some cancers, CAR-T therapy has significant limitations. One is that it is highly personalized — each patient's own immune cells must be collected, modified to recognize and target the patient's specific cancer type, and then infused back into the patient. Essentially, no two patients would ever receive the same therapy. For that reason, the process of making the therapy is both time-consuming and expensive, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars per patient.

"The current capacity is just a few thousand patients who can be treated annually," says Snook. Because the therapy is generated for one patient at a time, there is a massive bottleneck on the number

of patients that CAR-T can be manufactured for each year. "And so, we need to be able to do something different that could be applied more universally," he continues.

Snook and Mahoney, associate professor and professor, respectively, in the Department of Pharmacology, Physiology, and Cancer Biology, began to discuss more of a "one donor, many recipients" model. "It's a challenging proposition, but it's the only way to be able to scale CAR-T cells to treat many, many people in a single year," says Snook.

Taking a universal approach would also allow for an expansion of the types of cancer for which CAR-T therapy can be used. But that raises a critical question: How do you take a one-person therapy and make it work for thousands without losing its incredible effectiveness? This is where the target protein underlying Mahoney's research provided a potential solution.

From Dermatology to Cancer Therapy: The Role of DSG2

The ideal target is one that answers one of the stickiest problems in immunotherapy: finding molecules that are unique to cancer cells and not found in normal cells. That way, the CAR-T therapy would not attack normal cells in an autoimmune reaction. Mahoney's almost three-decades-long research on a family of proteins called desmosomes has shown that they have unique properties that make them very promising as a candidate for a semi-universal target.

Desmosomal proteins help hold skin cells tightly together and control growth. When Mahoney started to study the role of these proteins in autoimmune diseases of the skin, she came across a lesser-known type of desmosomal protein called desmoglein 2 (DSG2). It was largely overlooked, most likely



As a bench scientist, I don't always get to see how my research might help patients. But this has given me an opportunity to see how it can be applied, and one day could possibly help even one person out there. That would make me happy, and Adam has made that possible.

MÝ MAHONEY, PHD

because it was expressed in such low levels in the skin.

Normally, DSG2 levels drop in adulthood and become essentially hidden from immune cells. But in many epithelial-derived cancers — such as breast, colon, pancreatic, lung, prostate, and liver — the DSG2 levels persist, making them a strong target for a wide array of cancer types.

But that was not the only reason DSG2 was attractive to the researchers. In the early 2000s, a breakthrough paper showed that when DSG2 was deactivated, cells didn't just come unglued — they died. Mahoney wanted to know why.

“That finding led me to 26 years of studying this protein, inside and outside of the desmosomal structure,” says Mahoney, who was in the dermatology department at the time she met Snook. “The most important thing is that cells seem to need DSG2 to survive.” That insight became even more significant when researchers discovered that many cancer cell types continue to express DSG2. If tumors rely on DSG2 to stay alive, then targeting it could be a way to selectively kill cancer cells, making it a potential Achilles' heel.

Mahoney's expertise and deep knowledge of the adhesion protein made the collaboration with

Snook that much more fruitful. Soon, they started calling their future therapy Desmo-CAR-T or “DesmoCART” for short.

She also recognized that while cancers retain DSG2, they lose the other varieties of sticky desmosomal proteins. That means that tumor cells are less tightly held together, making tumors more accessible to the DesmoCART cells that are engineered to find the DSG2 within. This could help solve another problem of CAR-T therapy: that it's rarely effective against solid tumors.

Targeting cancerous cells in this way would leave normal cells intact since they don't express DSG2 at all or only deep within the desmosomes, which would be inaccessible to CAR-T cells, which act at the cell surface. This could be a major step forward in preventing toxicity, since many adverse events occur when the CAR-T cells attack molecules on the surface of healthy cells.

“To date, we haven't been able to separate safety and efficacy,” says Snook. “But because of that biology around DSG2 expression, we think we have a window where maybe we can now study them separately.”

Putting DesmoCART to the Test
Feeling confident that this idea would work, Snook and

Mahoney started writing grants and creating CAR-T cells right away. To cover all bases, they designed tests to see if the therapy worked against cancer cells, while preventing the autoimmune toxicity that can happen when CAR-Ts attack normal cells.

In one experiment, the researchers injected mice with colorectal cancer cells under their skin. When they were given DesmoCART cells, the researchers observed that tumors disappeared after 28 days and they stayed in remission for at least four months after the experiment.

Testing for efficacy is relatively easy, but testing for safety is a different story altogether. “Safety is not commonly tested at this stage. A big reason is that it's hard,” says Snook. Because there is no perfect way to replicate what would happen in a human body with model systems in the lab like mice and cancer cells, Snook and Mahoney tried as many systems as they could to come close to replicating human biology.

In general, CAR-T molecules are very specific — for example, they will not bind to other DSG proteins, like DSG1 or 3 or 4. But they also don't usually cross species lines either, meaning that they couldn't use a regular mouse model to test the therapy. They had to create a transgenic mouse that had both human cancer and expressed human DSG2 proteins on its normal cells.

When they gave the DesmoCART cells to those transgenic mice, the researchers found no obvious signs of toxicity: significant changes in body weight, and signs of organ damage or diseased tissue compared to control CAR-T cells. The lack of toxicity is promising because this might mean that cancer cells would be destroyed while healthy cells are left alone.

Another part of that experiment was to look at whether the DesmoCART cells could keep

fighting cancer if it came back after the initial treatment. The researchers challenged mice with a second dose of cancer cells after the DesmoCART had successfully fought off the first dose. “We showed there was immune memory,” Snook says. The mice’s immune system remembered the cancer and the DesmoCART cells were still there to fight off those cells. “And that’s really important! From a patient’s perspective, it’s crucial to make sure that the T cells can attack a recurrent cancer,” he says.

The Road Ahead

Now, with promising results in hand, Snook and Mahoney believe that they have enough preclinical data to get an investigational new drug certification from the FDA to start a clinical trial.

“Raising the money is really the biggest hurdle,” says Snook. “It’s probably at least \$10 million to get from where we are today to do a trial.”

The uphill battle might be a little easier now that Snook agreed to license the DesmoCART therapy to the life sciences company Vittoria Biotherapeutics.

Snook and Mahoney connected with Nicholas Siciliano, PhD, the CEO of Vittoria Biotherapeutics, who was in the same doctoral program as Snook. When it learned of the DesmoCART technology, Vittoria was eager to license the innovation and advance it through the next stages of drug development and testing.

The therapy aligns with Vittoria’s focus on developing novel cell-based immune therapies. The company has already been working with the Jefferson team for over a year and will continue laying the groundwork for a new drug certification. Over the next couple of years, Snook and Mahoney hope to progress into a phase 1 clinical trial, which would be a first safety test in humans.

Subsequent clinical trials of their universal solid tumor CAR-T therapy would test for the best dose and efficacy.

Jefferson’s growing leadership in CAR-T therapy is already visible across its health system. Lehigh Valley Health Network, part of Jefferson Health, is the only hospital in the region offering the cell-based cancer treatment.

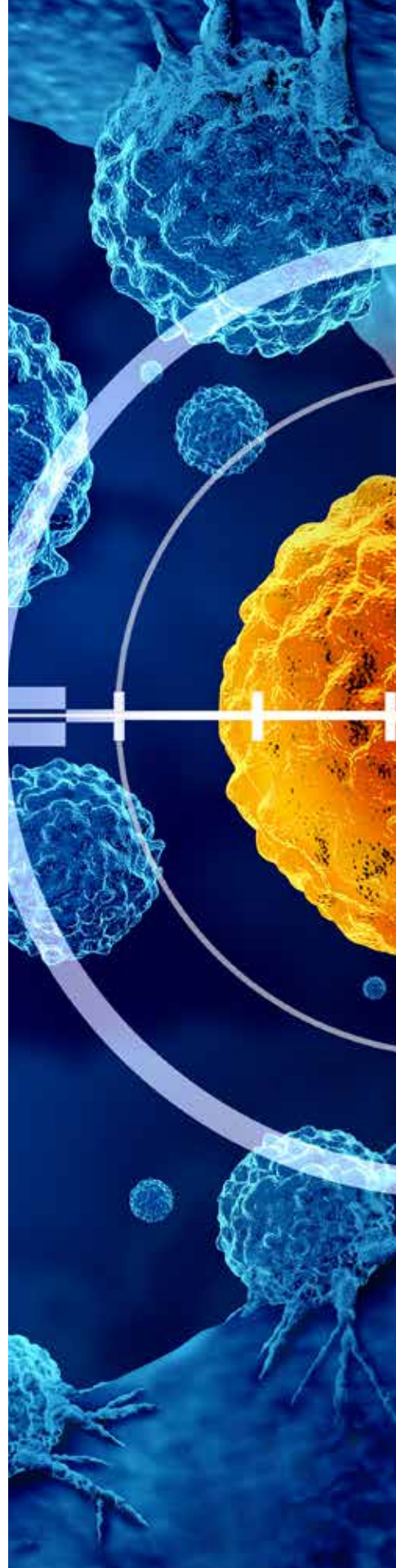
Although it will be years before DesmoCART could possibly be approved for patients, both researchers see that their work will go toward making a difference in a world where over 10 million cancer patients die every year resulting from a lack of effective treatments.

“As a bench scientist, I don’t always get to see how my research might help patients. But this has given me an opportunity to see how it can be applied, and one day could possibly help even one person out there. That would make me happy, and Adam has made that possible,” says Mahoney.

Snook agrees about the potential for a breakthrough, saying “I like creating the tools for physicians to help patients. That is really what gets me excited.”

This feature originally appeared in the April 2026 edition of Research at Thomas Jefferson University.

Research.Jefferson.edu/magazine





Almost Famous





Melasia Pinder '20 Connects Philadelphia's Creative Community

BY IRISA GOLD

Melasia Pinder '20 didn't set out to become a connector of Philadelphia's creative class — she wanted to be a veterinarian.

But an allergy to animals sent her looking for another outlet for her curiosity, and she found it in Jefferson's Fashion, Merchandising, & Management program, where color theory, garment construction, and balance sheets shared a classroom.

That unlikely combination — equal parts artistry and arithmetic — would become the engine behind Almost Famous Events Collective, the business she built to give Philadelphia's independent artists and designers a stage.

A North Philadelphia native, Pinder arrived at Jefferson as a

transfer student in the second half of her sophomore year.

"I had a knack for math, so I fell into fashion merchandising where you can merge the creative with the business side of things," she says. The robust fashion education and small class sizes brought Jefferson — and fashion merchandising — to life, and she valued the chance to work in concert with not only fashion design students but also the textile departments actually creating fabrics and patterns, which was not available at her first school.

"I was enamored by the fashion program and being back in the city," she says. "I received a thorough understanding of fashion. It was a tight-knit community, and my peers and professors felt like my family."

Pinder appreciates the benefits realized through combining her major with a minor in graphic design. "I learned color theory and took drawing classes that allowed me to translate it into drawing fashion illustrations," she says. "We sewed, created prototypes, and learned how to construct an article of clothing. This was very important in understanding how it all works, especially when you are working alongside designers."

It was an unforgettable trip to China with Jefferson in her junior year that transformed and inspired not only Pinder's education, but also her future career. "We traveled to multiple cities — Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hong Kong — and visited garment-dyeing factories and textile mills," she



says. “These were all the things that we were studying. It was surreal to actually walk into those spaces, and I didn’t think was possible until it was presented by Jefferson.”

Pinder graduated during the pandemic, when much of the world moved online to a virtual environment. “I had learned in my entrepreneurship class to recognize a problem and create a solution,” she says. “I was able to sit still and think about what I wanted to do and how I wanted to move forward.”

She understood the importance and benefits of networking and fostering relationships and knew that the world would soon be ready to reengage. “Everyone was excited to get back outside and back together,” she shares.

Building connection and community came naturally.

“All of my friends were artists, designers, performers — these were the people that I surrounded myself with and was inspired by,” she explains. “I recognized their need for physical space to get together, connect, and promote their brand, so I took the opportunity to create a platform to serve them.”

In 2021, Pinder started her business, Almost Famous Events Collective, based on a mission to create inclusive spaces that unite artists who aspire to build a better world. Her role as catalyst, connector, community builder, educator, and entrepreneur began to take shape, and she skillfully utilized her education as a springboard to create a dynamic business venture. “When you work together and bring different aspects of art together, you can create something a lot bigger than yourselves,” she says.

From her first event, a pop-up shop in a storefront on Philadelphia’s South Street, to today, five years later, her business platform has blossomed to also include more retail

opportunities; an annual fashion show; and markets, panel discussions, and a festival merging the performance, fashion, and the visual arts.

This summer, Pinder was offered the exciting opportunity to partner with Meantime PHL, an organization seeking to activate vacant spaces throughout Philadelphia that was working with the city to revitalize the 900 block of Market Street.

Her Almost Famous store was included as one of six storefronts on the block. Her location featured the work of a collective of independent designers of clothes, artwork, jewelry, home décor, and more. In addition to reaching local traffic, the shop offered an opportunity to showcase Pinder's wares to visitors in the city for the World Cup as well as America's 250th birthday celebration.

"A lot of these travelers wanted to take a piece of the city back home with them," Pinder says. "They came into the store specifically asking, 'Are these Philly designers?' 'Are these Philly brands?' I was happy to be able to offer that to them and to see the artists' work amplified in that way."

She was excited to be a part of Philadelphia's efforts to connect with visitors both near and far through the World Cup and America250 semiquincentennial events. "This project really speaks to my mission to create this platform enabling creative entrepreneurs, artists, and designers to reach a wider audience and connect with people that they otherwise may not have had access to," she says.

“When you work together and bring different aspects of art together, you can create something a lot bigger than yourselves.”



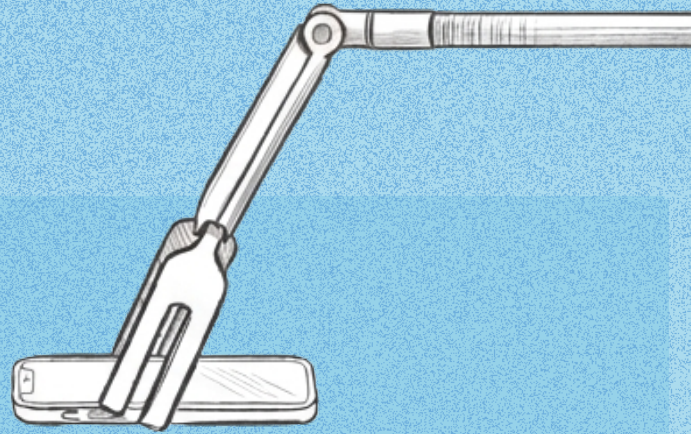
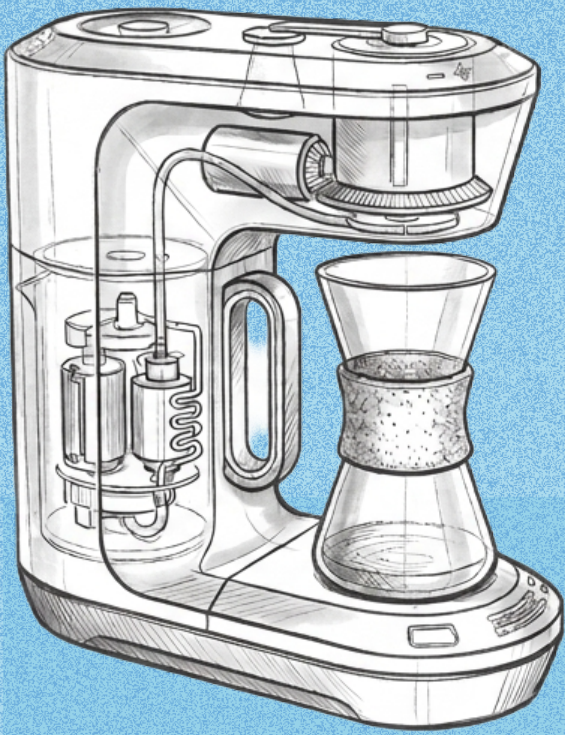
"I'm so grateful. It was a full-circle moment. I just didn't imagine being on Market Street in Center City."

Pinder is a true maestro in orchestrating meaningful, long-lasting connections while introducing and showcasing new artists and designers whose legacies will resonate for years to come. Her parents continue to inspire her and gave her the confidence to always believe in herself and pass along those beliefs.

"Growing up, I felt driven and inspired by the people that came before me who showed me what was possible through the work that they were doing," she says. "They instilled in me that I could reach for the stars and gave me a lot of freedom to explore. I remember how excited I felt and how important and valuable those experiences were to me, and I just felt compelled to pass that on."

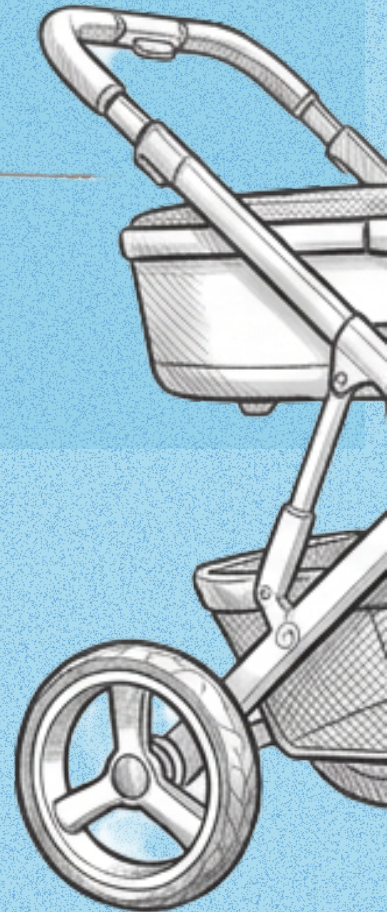
She envisions a dynamic, physical event space for Almost Famous as a natural next step for her enterprise in the near future. "Maybe part storefront, part event space, and part work and collaborative space where we could have a creative playground," she says. "I see the value in people connecting. It's a calling. Connections drive us forward — it's like the meaning of life."

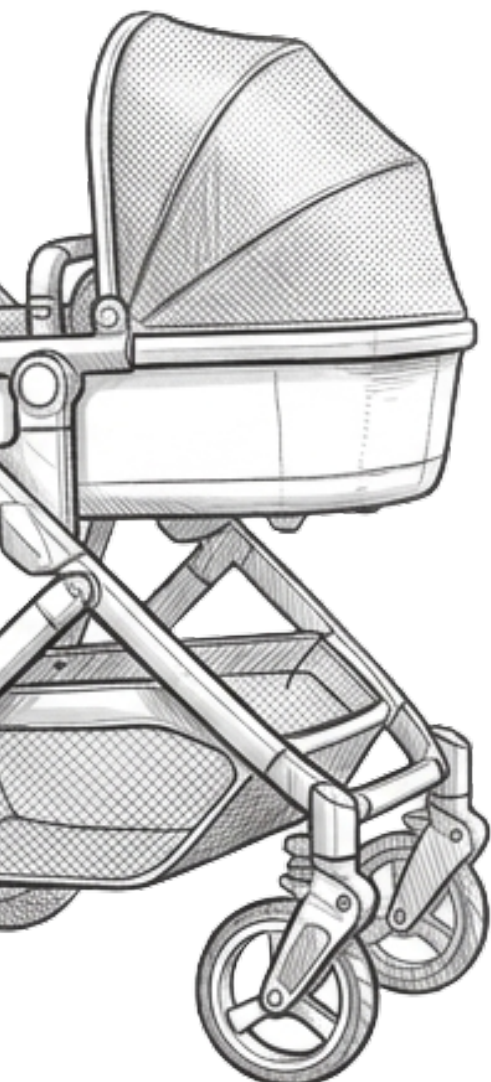
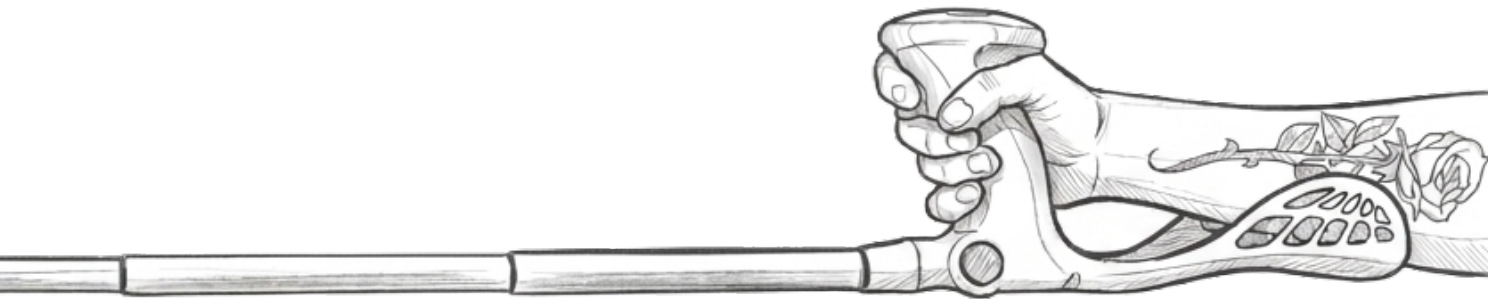
"When I was graduating school, I didn't feel pressured to fit into any box and decide what I wanted to do right away," she says. "Somewhere deep within me, I knew. I followed my intuition, which pushed and propelled me, and I felt like I was always right where I needed to be. It's beautiful to be in this moment and to see how everything has come to fruition." 🍀



DESIGNING THE FUTURE

BY IRISA GOLD





IT WAS AN INVENTIVE modular pour-over coffee machine introduced at Jefferson's undergraduate Industrial Design program's senior capstone presentations this spring that caught the eye of alum Colin Eggert-Crowe, MS '17.

A product development manager at Iron Mountains, a design and engineering firm in Morgantown, Pennsylvania, that specializes in the juvenile industry, with baby gear such as car seats and strollers as the primary product focus, he had recently become involved in recruiting and was looking for bright new talent.

It was only natural that for his last two hires he returned to his alma mater. "I saw a number of really talented presentations and was able to get a quick understanding of the capability of

the students coming out of the program," he says. He hired the coffee machine's creator, 2026 graduate Kolby Ritter, straight out of school. "Everyone was also just blown away by his talent, and the program prepared him and gave him the opportunities to grow."

Eggert-Crowe, who graduated from Drexel University with an undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering, had always wanted to go into consumer product development. After a year in the industrial machinery field, he became intrigued with industrial design. "It was a perfect combination of engineering and art," he says.

Thomas Jefferson University's (then Philadelphia University's) Master of Industrial Design program had recently been ranked one of the best on the East Coast.

"We're equipping the students with the mindset to constantly seek new knowledge and new possible solutions, as the explanation that you used two years ago may not be applicable now."

Eager to expand his knowledge base and capabilities, Eggert-Crowe enrolled.

He found the hands-on, real-world experience and opportunities invaluable, and appreciated the chance to work with companies to solve specific problems and uncover new insights.

"I was exposed to new tools, product types and testing, problem-solving approaches, and manufacturing processes," he shares. "I left with the ability to perform user research, dissect a problem that an industry, company, or population of users is having, and then get creative in how I extract and address those insights and turn that into a manufacturable, scalable product."

Eggert-Crowe began his career at Iron Mountains in 2017 as an associate design engineer, working part-time halfway through his master's program. He later moved up into the roles of design engineer, followed by project leader and his role today as product development manager, where he manages several designer engineers and works with the company's chief development officer.

Industrial design at Jefferson sits at the intersection of art and engineering, a harmonious blend of humanities and art with STEM and business. Here, a student's educational journey transcends far beyond the confines of the

classroom or lecture hall. Content is taught in the context of projects and the process of design. While some programs may concentrate specifically on manufacturing and technology and others on product aesthetics, a well-calibrated balance incorporating both is a key differentiator for Jefferson's undergraduate and graduate industrial design programs.

As human needs and society continue to evolve, so too does the field of industrial design. The University puts its students squarely in focus, ensuring that its leading-edge curriculum is not only synchronized with current industry demands, but also anticipates the evolution of the industry by empowering its students to nimbly and skillfully adapt to meet — and master — the future with skill, creativity, innovation, and confidence. While what they learn may not initially be relevant to their work, they are being taught skills that will serve them for the entirety of their career, rather than just their first job — or even the first day in their role.

The role of the industrial designer continues to be critical because of the ever-changing nature of technology, society, economy, and business models. "You have to be able to look at your career and at what you're designing as a kind of 'applied futurism' and know where the

world is going in order to, as Wayne Gretzky said, 'skate to where the puck is going to be rather than where it is,'" says professor Tod Corlett, the program's director and William L. Jasper Chair.

Jefferson students learn that all of their initial questions must always be accompanied by follow-up inquiries — and that there is never simply one answer. "We're equipping the students with the mindset to constantly seek new knowledge and new possible solutions, as the explanation that you used two years ago may not be applicable now," says associate professor Eric Schneider.

From manufacturing to automotive to healthcare, from Google to Nike to Meta, Jefferson industrial design alumni can be found across the business spectrum. "The fact that employers out there feel that our students have those skills right out of school is the best feedback that we could possibly have that our curriculum is doing what it was designed to do," says Corlett.

Both current and former students rave about Schneider's influence and impact on their educational and career journeys — and their relationship doesn't stop at graduation. "When asked which class they learned the most from or value the most, invariably they say professor Schneider's," shares Eggert-Crowe. "He is the throughline."

JEFFERSONIANS CLIMBING THE IRON MOUNTAINS

Jefferson and Iron Mountains have built a positive, collaborative, and mutually beneficial relationship. In addition to Eggert-Crowe's recruiting visits to Jefferson's campus, this past spring Schneider and his students took a field trip to Morgantown and paid a visit to



Thomas Jefferson University alumni now at Iron Mountains (from left): Julia Ponzek, Kevin Kline, Colin Eggert-Crowe, and Kolby Ritter

Iron Mountains.

“It’s not only a great recruiting tool for us,” says Eggert-Crowe. “It gives students the ability to see how others are using this degree, its options, and practical applications.”

Currently, three Jefferson alumni are part of his Iron Mountains team. “I see a noticeable difference in students coming from Jefferson,” Eggert-Crowe shares. “They have done a uniquely good job of preparing students for this role — in design, design thinking, creativity, and engineering. There are a variety of real-world applications.”

Julia Ponzek, MS ’24, joined Iron Mountains in 2024 as an associate design engineer. For her thesis project, in collaboration with Jefferson occupational therapy students, she created a motorized, electronic reacher assistive

device for patients suffering from fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva, a rare, debilitating genetic condition where bones gradually replace muscle and connective tissue.

“Over the course of a year, I was able to regularly meet with the OT students to show them progress on the design and prototypes,” she says. “I also had the opportunity to share prototypes with members of the International Fibrodysplasia Ossificans Progressiva Association which gave me invaluable real-world insights into uses for the device.”

Ritter also came on board as associate design engineer following his successful capstone presentation. His integrated coffee machine, DuoBrew, includes a hand grinder, kettle, and scale, and will heat and pour water, all at the push of a button.

“Through prototyping, presenting design solutions, conducting user research, and evaluating manufacturing considerations, I learned to think critically, iterate quickly, and adapt my designs based on feedback and real-world constraints,” he shares.

“The Jefferson difference is doing,” Eggert-Crowe says. “It’s the sense of try things, do things, make things work, make things not work, fail, and try again. When you graduate, you know what you’re doing and you understand the real meaning of the things that you’ve learned, how you can use them, who values them, and how you can apply them in a way that will make the life that you want fulfilling.” 



Fifteen Years of

CHICKEN FINGER THURSDAY

*Tradition rules the roost at
East Falls dining hall*

BY CINDY LEFLER

Q: Why did the Jefferson student cross the road?

A: To get to the chicken fingers!

For a decade and a half, students at Jefferson's East Falls Campus who are feeling a bit peckish on a Thursday have had the delicious opportunity of indulging in a culinary tradition — Chicken Finger Thursday.

The idea was hatched when students started requesting dining services to add chicken fingers to the menu. Dining services decided to make it a special one-day-a-week event, and Chicken Finger Thursday was born. The offering of delicate morsels of breaded and deep-fried chicken caught on quickly and had diners scrambling to get their servings. Soon, it became a campus institution with a devoted following.

It became so popular that the demand started outweighing the supply. The enthusiasm has never wavered.



Every week about 500 pounds of chicken fingers are cooked and served — and that's no paltry sum! It would take a mathe-mechicken to add up how many tons of the tenders have been consumed by students, faculty, staff, and visitors since 2011.

While the original fingers were cooked from frozen pieces, eventually they were transitioned to fresh, hand-breaded morsels because they are tastier and healthier. To ensure everyone gets to enjoy the treat, the menu has eggspanded to include the original recipe, as well as vegan, halal, and gluten-free options.

They are served with a variety of dipping sauces, including honey mustard, ketchup, barbecue, and hot sauce, and french fries.

Chicken Finger Thursday is such a feather in the cap of Jefferson that admissions ambassadors — called Rambassadors — tout it highly during campus tours. It has also inspired merch. In fact, dining services celebrated the milestone anniversary of Chicken Finger Thursday this year by hosting a design contest for a new logo.

The contest winner, Sophia Del Pizzo, an interior design major, is eggcited to have her design featured on a limited-edition T-shirt.

"The inspiration for my design came from a mixture of a symbol of celebration and capturing the popular demand and love for Chicken Finger Thursday by students each week. ... I came up with the concept of a chicken party-ing," she says on her Instagram post. "That concept then evolved into the design where the chicken is playing the drums with chicken fingers."



You've gotten your education. You've pulled the all-nighters, read the books, turned in the projects. You've waited in line at Chicken Finger Thursdays. You've fulfilled the requirements

CARSON KRESSLEY H'13

While the chicken fingers are not offered around the cluck, they are served for eight hours on Thursdays — from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. — to accommodate any student who has been cooped up in their dorm room immersed in their studies.

The food is so popular that when a fowl rumor that the dining services planned to discontinue it made the rounds recently, it inspired panicked emails and Instagram messages. But be assured, the tradition is too big to lay an egg — Chicken Finger Thursday will go on.

The weekly event even got a shout out by a celebrity. In his 2013 graduation address, Carson Kressley, former member of the University's board of trustees, well-known fashion expert, and "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy" TV alum, told the students: "You've gotten your education. You've pulled the all-nighters, read the books, turned in the projects. You've waited in line at Chicken Finger Thursdays. You've fulfilled the requirements." 🍗



Jefferson Alumna Finds 'Perfect Fit' in Fashion Industry

BY CINDY LEFLER

As a child, **Jenna Keen '14** watched her dressmaker grandmother craft clothing with bolts of fabric and a sewing machine.

"She inspired my interest in apparel from a young age. Seeing the garments she created sparked my appreciation for craftsmanship and attention to detail," says Keen, a fashion design alumna who is a technical development manager for custom athlete apparel at New Balance in Boston.

But, while Keen says she loved design, she was more drawn to the technical side of the fashion industry.

"My passion lies in perfecting fit, creating flat patterns, and bringing a designer's vision to life through thoughtful construction and engineering," she says, noting that her goal is to help create products that perform for elite athletes' needs and fit exceptionally well.

Keen, originally from South Harrison, New Jersey, has followed her passion to several positions at renowned athletic apparel companies across the country. She recently spoke with Jefferson about her education and the sportswear industry.

■ **Why did you choose Jefferson for your education?**

I chose Jefferson because of its outstanding fashion design and textiles program and its strong reputation within the industry. What stood out to me was the balance between the fashion design curriculum and the academic foundation of a Bachelor of Science degree. The program offered a unique blend of design, technical, business, merchandising, product development, and textile coursework that prepares students for a variety of career paths within the apparel industry.

I was also drawn to the collaborative and innovative environment. Seeing the annual fashion show really solidified my decision. It showcased not only the creativity of the students but also the high level of craftsmanship and professionalism that the program fostered.

In addition, Jefferson's career fairs and industry networking opportunities played a significant role in launching my career.

■ **Where has your Jefferson degree taken you?**

My first full-time role came directly from an interview at a Jefferson career fair during my senior year. I began my career as a technical designer at Under Armour. After five years I joined Nike as a technical designer. Today, at New Balance, I lead technical development from concept through commercialization. I oversee fit, garment-pattern development, construction, and product execution to

ensure athletes receive quality performance-apparel that meets both functional and aesthetic expectations.

■ **How did each job lead you to where you are today?**

Each role has expanded both my technical expertise and my understanding of the apparel industry. One of the most valuable aspects of my career has been the opportunity to travel internationally; it has taught me the importance of building strong relationships, adapting communication styles, and collaborating effectively across different cultures and regions.

■ **The custom athlete-apparel field has been historically male dominated. Are you beginning to see a shift with more women entering the field and with more designs focused on women in sports?**

While the athletic apparel industry has historically been viewed as male dominated, many of the teams I've worked on throughout my career have been led and shaped by talented women.

Where I do see a shift are the growing visibility and investment in women's sports. As that market expands, brands increasingly recognize that female athletes need products designed specifically for them rather than adaptations of men's products. This shift is driving greater investment in female-focused research, athlete testing, and product innovation. We're seeing more use of body-scan

data, fit studies, wear testing, and direct athlete feedback to better understand how women move, compete, and perform.

■ **There has been some talk of the next "big thing" in the industry being the use of AI. How will this affect the industry overall?**

I see AI as a tool that supports creativity and productivity rather than replacing human expertise.

Platforms with AI capabilities help teams visualize products faster, simulate accurate fabric physics, and reduce the number of physical prototypes required during development. That said, I don't see AI replacing designers or technical designers. While AI can generate concepts that may seem impressive at first, it often lacks the accuracy and understanding needed to create garments that are truly wearable, manufacturable, and commercially viable.

■ **How do you see yourself as part of "what's next" in the athletic wear industry?**

I hope to continue being part of what's next by doing what I love most: solving fit challenges, refining patterns, and creating great products. Throughout my career, I've always been passionate about craftsmanship, innovation, and performance. As the industry evolves, I look forward to continuing to learn, mentor others, and help develop products that make athletes feel and perform their best. 🏆

RAM → ROUNDUP

For the latest news and updates, subscribe to the Ram Roundup newsletter at Jefferson.edu/Newsletter



Women's Rowing Makes Program History

Jefferson women's rowing claimed the Rams' first-ever gold medal at the Jefferson Dad Vail Regatta in the Varsity 8 race to win the Henry Backe Trophy. The Rams then followed with their first silver medal in the Varsity 4 at the NCAA Championships to close the season. Rower Ashlyn Chaffee was named to the Collegiate Rowing Coaches Association All-America First Team, head coach Ryan Hurley earned CRCA East Region Coach of the Year honors, and his staff won East Region Coaching Staff of the Year.



Dave Thomas

Dave Thomas Retires as Full-Time Coach After Successful Season

Cross country and track and field coach Dave Thomas announced his retirement from his full-time coaching role. A 17-time Central Atlantic Collegiate Conference Coach of the Year, Thomas coached the teams to 20 CACC titles along with 154 All-CACC runners. This past spring, Olivia Grahn was named CACC Women's Track Athlete and Track Rookie of the Year, while Dylan Boyle earned CACC Men's Track Rookie of the Year honors.

R A M S RISE UP CHALLENGE

SAVE THE DATE

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7 – FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9

Get ready for the 8th annual Rams Rise Up fundraiser in support of Jefferson Athletics — and 48 hours of game-changing impact for student-athletes!

Stakes will be high as teams go head-to-head, climb the leaderboard, and unlock bonus funds for equipment, training, travel expenses — and unforgettable experiences that last a lifetime!

Ways to Get in the Game:

1. **Sponsor a Match:** Help fuel the competition by sponsoring a matching gift. Contact annualgiving@jefferson.edu.
2. **Make Your Move Early:** Get a head start on your gift at [Jefferson.edu/RRUGift](https://jefferson.edu/RRUGift).
3. **Follow the Action:** Visit the above link for updates, event details, and other ways to participate.

EVERY GIFT COUNTS. EVERY DONOR MATTERS. EVERY TEAM CAN RISE.



From Jefferson Roommates to Brand Builders

BY CASSIE DRUMM

Roman Reed and Krish Sheth met as freshmen, roommates, and teammates on the Jefferson baseball team. Over the years, they've shared practices, classes, and the experience of growing within the Rams program. This year, their partnership took on a new dimension — one that moved beyond the field.

As student interns working between Jefferson Athletics and the University marketing department, the two helped shape a refreshed visual identity for Jefferson Athletics, bringing a student-athlete perspective to a University-wide branding effort.

"We wanted people to see Jefferson Athletics and immediately recognize who we are," Reed says. "There's so much pride here. We just needed to bring that."

Jefferson Athletics is home to 17 NCAA Division II teams and boasts conference championships as well as a strong academic track

record among its student-athletes. However, Reed and Sheth saw an opportunity to present that excellence more cohesively across social media, apparel, facilities, and recruiting materials.

"As athletes, we lived this every day," Sheth says. "We know what Jefferson Athletics feels like. We wanted the brand to reflect that energy and pride."

Reed is a visual communication design student focused on visual consistency and storytelling. Sheth is a health sciences major pursuing a graduate certificate in organizational leadership. Together, they approached the project from a strategic lens, researching peer institutions and considering long-term impact.

The internship quickly evolved into a true collaboration.

"This experience has been mutually beneficial for everyone involved," says Alexa Hayes, marketing director at Jefferson and

project marketing lead. "We're incredibly fortunate to have such talented, driven students. In particular, Krish and Roman brought unique perspectives as former student-athletes who are still closely connected to the program. Their firsthand insight, paired with strong research and a constant flow of creative ideas, has made a meaningful impact in expanding and strengthening the Athletics brand."

The goal wasn't to reinvent Jefferson Athletics. It was to refine and unify it.

Working alongside Hayes, assistant vice president for Athletics Corey Goff, and design lead Dan Falvey, the students contributed ideas that more closely aligned Athletics with the broader Jefferson brand, including incorporating the University's signature "J" and creating more-consistent visual standards across platforms.





Campus to Café



At the Saffron Café in Manayunk, **Smit Patel '25** serves up specialty coffees, traditional Indian food, and a warm sense of community.

Born and raised in Gujarat, India, Patel says his upbringing gave him a deep appreciation for hospitality, kinship, and food. He and his childhood friend and business partner Ojas Patel (no relation) opened the café in May 2026 with the hopes of creating a welcoming place that brings people together.

“We want Saffron Café to become a place where people connect, study, work, meet friends, and experience something new,” Smit Patel says. “If someone leaves with a smile, discovers a new favorite drink, or learns something about Indian culture, then we’ve accomplished what we set out to do.”

He didn’t set out to be a restaurateur. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Finance and Management at Jefferson and works full time as a global lead for a large financial institution based in New York.

Patel says he was drawn to Jefferson for its close-knit community, small class sizes, and endless chances to get involved. While there, he had the opportunity “to learn from incredible professors who genuinely cared about helping students succeed, both academically and professionally.”

It was the lessons his professors taught in the classroom that encouraged him to think beyond the classroom.

“[They] taught me to approach problems from both a financial and entrepreneurial perspective. Many of my professors encouraged us to apply what we learned



“Many of my professors encouraged us to apply what we learned to real-world situations, and that mindset gave me the confidence to take calculated risks ...”

to real-world situations, and that mindset gave me the confidence to take calculated risks,” Patel says. “The business knowledge I gained — from financial planning to management — has been invaluable in building and operating Saffron Café.”

The idea for the cafe began during his days at Jefferson, where he started whipping up Indian food to sell to his fellow students from his apartment kitchen.

“I noticed there weren’t many late-night food options around campus, so I began making Indian-inspired rice bowls for friends and classmates. Word spread pretty quickly through campus, and before long I was serving dozens of students,” he says. “It ended up being a great learning experience in entrepreneurship, customer service, and operations, and in many ways it planted the seed for what eventually became Saffron Café.”

That seed took root when also he noticed that there weren’t many cafés that blended high-quality specialty coffee with Indian flavors and culture. After graduating from Jefferson, Patel began traveling for work and noticed something else.

“I visited cafés around the world and realized how much a café can become a community gathering space, not just somewhere to grab coffee,” he says.

He took those worldwide experiences, combined them with an entrepreneurial mindset, and brought them back to home where he was determined to create something unique — a place

where people could experience Indian-inspired drinks and food in a modern café environment.

He brought the idea to his friend, and together they turned that vision into a reality.

Patel says running the restaurant while working full time in the finance industry is definitely busy, but not overwhelming because of the teachings of his guru, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj. The key is having the right priorities.

“One lesson that has always stayed with me comes from my guru, who teaches the importance of balance and using your time wisely. He emphasizes that if you stay disciplined, organized, and focused on serving others, you can manage multiple responsibilities without losing sight of what matters,” Patel says.

That means planning the days carefully, trusting his team, “and making sure that whatever I’m doing — whether it’s finance or the café — I’m fully present in that moment.”

Patel says he’s incredibly excited about the future. He is constantly thinking of ways to expand the menu, create new drinks, and make the café even more of a community destination that welcomes one and all.

“I would tell people to come in with an open mind. Even if you’ve never tried Indian flavors before, I promise you’ll find something you’ll love. It’s more than just coffee — it’s an experience, and we can’t wait to share it with you!”

Saffron Café is at 4331 Main St., Manayunk. 📍

1969

John Michael Bukata,

Accounting, accepted a position with Deloitte (then Haskins & Sells) in its New York office after graduation. He ultimately became an audit partner and spent his entire career with that firm, mainly in its New York and Philadelphia offices. He has been happily retired since 2008.

Michael Kromm, Accounting, was commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps on June 6, 1969, at graduation. He was the only one that year to be commissioned. After 32 years, four months, and 15 days of service to country and corps, he retired as a colonel. He was the chief of staff of Marine Forces Pacific, the largest combatant command in the U.S. Marine Corps. With his background education at the Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science, he retired to California, became a certified public accountant, and earned his MBA in taxation. From auditing, he migrated to the investment management industry and became a chief financial officer and chief compliance officer in that industry. On December 31, 2020, he retired from that position and moved from California to Kansas City, Missouri. "I presently chase my seven grandchildren, ages 1 to 11. My eighth grandchild will arrive in early October. Life is good. ... Children are such a joy!!!"

1976

John William Thomas,

Accounting, moved his family to Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, after graduating. He continued his pursuit of an MBA at Tulsa University. He worked in finance

and/or accounting in Oklahoma for 49 years before retiring and working part time as a self-employed CPA and life and health insurance agent.

Doug Schwab, Fashion Apparel



Management, was elected to the board of directors of the MPT Foundation Inc., which is the fundraising affiliate of Maryland Public Television. Schwab is widely known throughout the Cumberland area for his decades of community involvement. He currently serves as president of B'er Chayim Temple and as a board member of Mountain Maryland Trails. He chaired Cumberland's Downtown Development Commission and helped lead the 2024 Baltimore Street revitalization project. A lifelong champion of Scouting, Schwab founded Scouting America Troop 89 in 1977 for scouts with special needs and served as president of Potomac Council BSA from 2010 to 2013. He currently serves as a board member of the Pittsburgh-based Laurel Highlands Council of Scouting America. His extraordinary service to Scouting has earned him the Distinguished Eagle Scout, Silver Beaver, Shofar, and Woods awards. Professionally, Schwab spent three decades as vice president of technology for the

S. Schwab Company and Ralph Lauren Childrenswear.

1991

Deborah Tate Pecci,

Accounting, went directly to the University of Pennsylvania for law school after graduating. She began her legal career at Duane Morris in Philadelphia, where she rose to partner before joining Allied Universal — then known as SpectaGuard — in 2000. After a series of promotions, she now serves as deputy global general counsel, supporting the legal function for a leading security and facility services company operating in more than 100 countries with approximately 770,000 employees.

1997

Lucia DiSpigno Viola, Fashion

Design, is the vice president of fashion, home and culinary design, development, and global sourcing for QVC and HSN.

1998

Maurice Francis Wilson,

Nursing, carries Jefferson's values with him every day. Since graduating, he has continued his work in the world of surgery. His first nursing opportunity started at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore, advancing to the level of supervisor. From there, he became the director of surgery at Chesapeake Health System with a continued growth pattern. He is now the vice president of surgical services at Inova health system. "Growing older, now with my spouse and a 25-year-old son! Wow, time continues to pass. I think that we all should value the time we have and what we bring to this thing called nursing."

Scholarships Open Doors

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2015

Matthew Johnson, Biology, has traveled extensively through more than 25 countries and continued his education essentially nonstop since graduating. He went on to medical school at Rowan University, graduating in 2020, and finished residency at Yale a couple of years ago. He also completed an MBA at the University of Massachusetts and a Master of Science in Health Law and Strategy at New York University. He is in law school pursuing his Juris Doctor at Fordham University. During this time, he has been the medical director at a university hospital and opened and now owns his own practice.

2018

Joseph K. Fairley, Entrepreneurship, says, “So much has happened since my MBA experience at PhilaU! So much I have been blessed by. In all, I’ve spent my career helping entrepreneurial service companies grow through a combination of strategic marketing, business development, and operational excellence. In short, I help entrepreneurs grow their businesses.

“My experience with PhilaU was a ‘later-in-life’ MBA. The experience was one that I will be forever grateful to have had. The people I met, the professors with the patience to support the needs of this later-in-life student – and both instrumental in providing a career ‘recharge’ of my skills and abilities.

“With new skills in hand, I have been driven beyond my own expectations, focused on building strong client relationships, developing national real estate

portfolio service programs, and creating growth strategies that deliver measurable results for the firms I represent.

“Today I am further blessed to lead the national account/business development and marketing departments for DDP Roofing, interestingly a Philly-based family company, where I continue to apply the innovation mindset and entrepreneurial thinking that were hallmarks of my Philadelphia University MBA experience!

“Thank you, Jefferson ... aka PhilaU to me!”

2023

Soumik Datta, Textile Technology, has focused on building his professional career in production coordination and operations management. “Working in fast-paced environments has helped me strengthen my leadership, communication, and organizational skills while managing complex projects and collaborating with diverse teams. My journey after graduation has been one of continuous growth and adaptability. I have expanded my knowledge in operations, supply chain, and business management while balancing professional responsibilities and personal goals. These experiences have taught me the importance of resilience, problem solving, and lifelong learning.

“Jefferson played an important role in shaping my professional mindset and preparing me for real-world challenges. The foundation I received continues to guide me as I pursue new opportunities and work toward long-term career growth. I’m grateful to remain part of the Jefferson alumni community

and hope my journey can inspire current and future graduates to continue pushing forward, embrace new challenges, and never stop learning.”

2026

Karen Jeffin, Respiratory Therapy, has been preparing for her National Board for Respiratory Care examinations and completing the licensure process since graduating. “I am excited to begin my career as a respiratory therapist and continue to grow in critical care and patient-centered healthcare. I am also grateful to have graduated summa cum laude and to have been recognized on the Dean’s List during my academic journey at Jefferson.”

BUSINESS ALUM HITS IT OUT OF THE PARK



Matt Massarelli '18 has gone from an internship with the Philadelphia Flyers to designing iconic pieces for Major League Baseball, including this year's Home Run Derby Chain, created to celebrate Philadelphia and America's 250th anniversary.

Massarelli, who owns his design firm, Matt Massarelli Design LLC, was in his senior year at Jefferson in 2017-2018 when he landed the internship with the Flyers as a graphics intern. After graduation he went to work full time for Major League Baseball, a move he says was a dream come true for a kid who played baseball from the ages of 5 to 18.

He credits much of his success to the University's emphasis on cross collaboration, and a multidisciplinary approach to education and entrepreneurial thinking.

"TJU gave me the confidence to seek out roles like these and pursue my true passions," he says. "I learned a lot about being a self-starter and about entrepreneurship."

In 2021, Massarelli was called on to design the Home Run Derby Chain for the MLB event held in Denver. He says he was thrilled to have the opportunity to do it again this year, alongside fellow designers John Luongo and Kenny Hwang. The piece features a striking bell design and 250 mixed-cut rubies. “And yes,” Massarelli adds, “it actually rings!”

Now living in New York City, Massarelli uses the term “full circle” to describe his return to Philadelphia for the assignment.

"I feel like my time in Philadelphia was paramount to being able to design a piece such as this. There are so many callbacks to the city and its place in baseball and American history throughout." 



1955

Thomas B. Templeton, MD

1957

Shirley I. Johns

1958

Bruce C. Lushbough, MD

1960

Francis W. Wachter, MD

1961

Janet J. Rapp

1963

Frances E. McGill

1964

Edwin L. Downing, MD

1965

Robert G. Somers, MD

1967

Stephen Gosin, MD

1969

Mark Pliskin, MD

1970

Wayne R. Kosik

1971

Barry R. Kavitsky

1972

Francis Naso, MD

1974

Donald L. Kahn, MD

1976

George J. Lahage Jr.

1977

William I. Forbes III, MD, PhD

1978

Daniel P. Kegel, MD

1981

Deborah A. Drissel

1982

The Rev. Susan C. Czarnecki, RN, MSN, MDiv

1984

Dennis G. Desilvio

1992

Michael G. Doerr

1995

Jane E. Dugan

1996

Marvin T. Alford

Monica A. Dent

2000

Tannese Williams

2003

Amy E. Donathan

2014

Janice Reid-Clarke

2023

Samantha Hovatter



Explore, Learn, and Experience the World with Thomas Jefferson University Alumni!

As part of our commitment to lifelong learning, the Office of Alumni Relations offers opportunities for group travel for Jefferson, Textile, and Philadelphia University alumni, friends, and families. Our varied itinerary of travel destinations combines educational forums, unique adventures, and excursions to places of historical and cultural interest, with opportunities to discover nature's majestic landscapes and incredible wildlife. These trips offer the highest-quality travel experience through our partnerships with experienced travel providers.

- ▶ **Bordeaux to Lisbon Aboard Le Lapérouse**
October 1–12, 2026
- ▶ **Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta & Santa Fe**
October 7–12, 2026
- ▶ **Bali, Singapore, Thailand & Angkor Wat**
November 10–25, 2026
- ▶ **Holiday Markets Cruise:
The Festive Rhine River**
December 5–13, 2026
- ▶ **Flavors of the Italian Alps**
June 12–20, 2027

For detailed trip information and to join our Travel Interest List, visit Jefferson.edu/AlumniTravel or contact Alumni Relations at 215-955-7750 or alumni@jefferson.edu.

JEFFERSON INNOVATOR Magazine

TRIVIA

Give our open-book quiz a shot!
HINT: All of the answers are in this issue!

1. **Which dipping sauce is NOT served with fries alongside Jefferson's East Falls Thursday chicken fingers?**
 - A. Ketchup
 - B. Ranch Dressing
 - C. Honey Mustard
 - D. Hot Sauce

2. **What gemstone is incorporated into the MLB Home Run Derby Chain designed by Matt Massarelli '18?**
 - A. Sapphire
 - B. Amethyst
 - C. Ruby
 - D. Emerald

3. **Where did Melasia Pinder '20 travel during her time at the University that inspired her career?**
 - A. Paris, France
 - B. London, England
 - C. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
 - D. Guangzhou, China



Submit your answers at **Jefferson.edu/InnovatorTrivia** or scan the QR code with your smartphone camera by Oct. 21, 2026. A perfect score will enter you in a drawing to win a Jefferson T-shirt.



a gift that changes lives for generations

Unlock the True Potential of Your IRA

Imagine transforming your retirement savings into a gift that changes lives for generations. Through your IRA, you can support our medical students, research, and programs in ways that leave a lasting mark on the future of medicine and healthcare.

Thanks to recent tax law changes, there are smart, tax-efficient ways to make a meaningful gift today!

Make an Impact with a Qualified Charitable Distribution

If you are 70 ½ or older, you can transfer up to \$111,000 per year directly from your IRA to Jefferson — tax-free. Because Jefferson is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, this transfer reduces your taxable income while fueling the discoveries, education, and patient care that make a real difference.

Create a Legacy with a Life-Income Gift

Your IRA can also fund a unique opportunity that creates a lasting impact at Jefferson, provides lifetime income, and defers taxes on a portion of your required minimum distribution!

Under the Secure Act 2.0, donors 70 ½ and older can make a one-time, tax-free QCD of up to \$55,000 to establish a life-income gift, such as a Charitable Gift Annuity, benefiting you or your spouse. This gift is excluded from taxable income and counts toward your \$111,000 annual QCD limit, offering both personal and philanthropic rewards.

Plan Ahead with a Beneficiary Designation or Bequest

You can name Jefferson as the beneficiary of all or a portion of your IRA. It's a simple way to create a legacy that strengthens our University's future without affecting your cash flow during your lifetime. Your IRA can do more than grow your retirement savings — it can grow the future of Jefferson.

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all roads lead back
to School House Ln. & Henry Ave.





HOMECOMING

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

Homecoming Golf Outing | 8:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.

Homecoming Welcome Reception | 5:30 p.m.

Celebrating 30 Years of the Bachelor of Architecture and
40 Years of Interior Design | 6:30 p.m.

Thomas Jefferson University Athletics Hall of Fame | 6:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

Once a Ram Always a Ram Breakfast | 9 a.m.

TJU 411 | 11 a.m.

Campus Walking Tour | 11:30 a.m.

Women's Tennis vs. Queens | noon

Women's Soccer vs. Bridgeport | noon

Phil Fest | noon

Ramfly Beer Garden | 12:30 p.m.

Women's Volleyball vs. Felician | 1 p.m.

Men's Soccer vs. Bridgeport | 2:30 p.m.

Student Organization and Greek Life Meetup | 4:30 p.m.

Homecoming Nerdology Trivia Night | 6:30 p.m.

Register today!

Learn more about Homecoming by
scanning the QR code or visiting
Jefferson.edu/Homecoming.



1101 Market Street, 22nd Floor
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Change Service Requested

HOMECOMING

SEPTEMBER 25 – 26, 2026

*This fall, return to campus and
reconnect with fellow alumni of
Philadelphia College of Textiles &
Science, Philadelphia University,
and Thomas Jefferson University.*



Check out the full Homecoming
schedule and register today at
Jefferson.edu/Homecoming.

