



Handel Center Update

Interior walls of the Mort and Irma Handel Performing Arts Center begin to divide the former Cadillac distributorship into new spaces.

Herat/Hartford Exchange

WORLD BANK GRANT BRINGS AFGHAN FACULTY TO HARTFORD

The Ministry of Higher Education in Afghanistan and the University of Hartford are working together to help Herat University improve curriculum, upgrade libraries and labs, and help engineering faculty acquire graduate degrees.

The University is receiving \$1.3 million from a larger grant given to the ministry by the World Bank to help rebuild higher education in Afghanistan after years of warfare under the Soviets and neglect under the Taliban. M. Saleh Keshawarz, associate professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering in the College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture (CETA), and his colleagues Hisham Alnajjar and Ivana Milanovic at CETA, are the recipients of this grant. In addition, Keshawarz received a \$215,000 grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development last February. As a result, two professors from Herat have already begun their studies at the University of Hartford (see photo).

The new funding allows 16 members from Herat's engineering faculty, including two women, to come to the University of Hartford and pursue master's degrees in civil and mechanical engineering. The group began work in the spring 2008 semester and will spend 15 to 24 months completing their degrees. Next summer Hartford engineering faculty will travel to Herat to teach for a month.

Keshawarz, a native of Kabul, has visited Afghanistan many times since the fall of the Taliban in 2001 and witnessed firsthand the widespread devastation of roads, bridges, schools and housing in his homeland.

"Improving higher education in Afghanistan, especially engineering education, is an effective way of contributing to the long-term development of Afghanistan," says Keshawarz. "It is a historic opportunity for the University to be part of and an honor for me to be able to contribute in a small way to the well-being of a people who have suffered so much during the past three decades. I am grateful for the support of my colleagues who have taken part in this project." ■



M. Saleh Keshawarz (left), associate professor, welcomes Azizurahaman Azimi (center) and Noor Sayed Jami (right) at Bradley International Airport in August. Azimi and Jami, both from Herat University in Afghanistan, have begun work on their master's at the University of Hartford.

NIMH Grant Targets Stigma of Mental Illness

Otto Wahl, professor of clinical psychology and director of the Graduate Institute of Professional Psychology in the College of Arts and Sciences, was awarded a \$185,970 grant by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to examine the effectiveness of the "Breaking the Silence" instructional program, designed to teach young people about a wide range of mental illnesses and to reduce the stigma still associated with them. The two-year project is a joint effort between Wahl and Amy Lax of the Queens/Nassau chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. The partnership was developed in response to an NIMH initiative supporting collaborative work between researchers and consumer, advocacy and other community groups on the topic. ■

The Legacy of John Hunt

CAREFUL PLANNING ENSURES FUTURE COLLEGE EDUCATIONS

Shortly before John Hunt retired as a vice president at the Travelers Insurance Group in 1997, he became involved through a church group with the newly built Maria Sanchez Elementary School. Located in Hartford's Frog Hollow neighborhood, the Sanchez School serves children who are among some of the most vulnerable to the poverty cycle. Having broken that cycle himself as a child growing up in Iowa during the Depression, Hunt was a strong believer in the importance of education, mentoring and personal accountability.

Hunt began by tutoring Sanchez students after school. First, he devoted a day each week to teaching reading and math. Soon he was spending four days a week at Sanchez. The more he learned about his students' personal circumstances, the more he worried about their futures without mentorship and a sound education. He noticed that some of the students couldn't see properly, so he paid for their vision tests and prescription glasses. He tried to impress upon his students the importance of a college education, and he took them to local colleges for campus visits. Hunt followed their progress after they moved on to high school, helping them stay focused on their goals.

To make those goals more achievable, Hunt and his wife, Carol, along with a silent partner, established full-tuition scholarships at the University of Hartford, the University of Connecticut, and Saint Joseph College, guaranteeing that students from the Maria Sanchez Elementary School would be provided for if they could meet admission criteria.

Hunt wrote a letter to each of his 6th-grade students encouraging them to make it their personal goal to get a college education. "I urge you to dedicate yourself to achieving the highest grades possible in your middle/high school studies. Your high school graduation may seem a long way off. It isn't. So please keep this letter where you can find it. Inform your middle/high school guidance counselors and teachers that because you attended Maria Sanchez Elementary School, you are eligible for a Hunt Scholarship."

Tragically, in the spring of 2007, just as the first group of Sanchez students was



Carol and John Hunt in a 2005 photograph.

about to reach college eligibility for the fall of 2008, Hunt died unexpectedly. Although he will never see any of his students reach their goals, thanks to his and Carol's careful planning, Hunt's legacy of selfless service to others will live on at the University of Hartford. ■

If you would like to learn more about the John and Carol Hunt Scholarships at the University of Hartford, or if you are interested in how you can provide scholarships for deserving students, please contact Peter Congleton, director of planned giving, at 860.768.2415; or visit the University's planned giving website at www.hartford.edu/plannedgiving/.

Artificial Intelligence: A Real Thing

\$250,000 NSF GRANT TO FUND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN AI



Students Myles Garvey '10 (left) and Christopher Padilla '09 (right) explore machine learning techniques in robot movement with Professor of Computer Science Ingrid Russell.

What if an "intelligent" browser could zero in on your particular preferences so that a few key search words from you yielded entries tailored to your interests, instead of an avalanche of useless Web pages? Sound too good to be true? Then you haven't heard about "machine learning."

Recently referred to by *Computerworld* magazine as one of "twelve IT skills that employers can't say no to," machine learning involves the development of computer systems or programs that improve their own performance based on experience. That's right: software that learns.

Now, a \$250,000 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) is giving students in an artificial intelligence

(AI) course at the University the opportunity to explore 26 hands-on laboratory projects that use machine learning to tie together various AI concepts.

"Students come to class with the notion that AI is all about programming robots, but they need to understand the foundational material. We're developing innovative curriculum material to help students see the core concepts and how they link together," says Professor Ingrid Russell, lead principal investigator of the project, who, along with co-principal investigator Professor Zdravko Markov of Central Connecticut State University, will direct 20 scholars from several universities who will be working on the project. ■

Engineering a New Future

ANOTHER HARTFORD SCHOLARS SUCCESS STORY

Jorin Grori spent his first 17 years in Albania, which lies across the Adriatic Sea from Italy. He remembers the red-brick apartment building where he lived in Tirana, Albania's capital city, and its balcony, where he hung out with his friends. Sometimes they talked about their futures.

Grori already knew what he wanted to do with his future. From the time that he was much younger, he had dreamed of becoming an engineer. But he had little hope of ever reaching that goal in his home country.

When he turned 18, his parents decided to leave Albania and move to the United States—"the land of opportunities," according to Grori—so that their son would have a chance to go to school and become an engineer.

Once in Hartford, Grori enrolled at Bulkeley High School in the south end of the city. He decided to stay an extra year at Bulkeley to improve his ability to speak English. It was while he was there that he heard about the Hartford Scholars Program. This program pays half tuition for each student who graduates from a Hartford high school and meets the admission criteria at the University of Hartford.

"Hartford Scholars motivated me to pursue my studies at the University

of Hartford," says Grori. "The financial opportunity that the Hartford Scholars Program provides helps students like me achieve our goals by enabling us to attend a private school that, otherwise, we would not be able to afford."

This year's Hartford Scholars benefit dinner was sponsored by Landmark Partners and University regent Francisco Borges, chairman of Landmark Partners. Also in attendance at the dinner, which raised more than \$110,000 for the Hartford Scholars Program, was President Walter Harrison; keynote speaker Lt. Gov. Michael Fedele; Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez; and Peter Stevens, president of JCY Architecture, which provides many internships for Hartford Scholars.

At the September dinner, Grori received the Mayor's Scholar Award, a \$1,000 prize that recognizes students' academic achievement and the role they play at the University and in Greater Hartford. The award, funded by JCY Architecture, was created as part of the mayor's initiative to increase the number

For more information regarding the Hartford Scholars Program, contact Louann D'Angelo, assistant director, corporate/foundation relations, at the University of Hartford, 860.768.2413, dangelo@hartford.edu.



Jorin Grori '07 (center) celebrates winning the Mayor's Scholar Award as his mother, Artemisi Grori (right), chats with Dona Cassella, director of human resources, Northeast Utilities.

of Hartford students attending college. Since completing his junior year, Grori has worked as a student technician at Northeast Utilities to help pay for his education and help support his family.

On Dec. 2, 2007, Grori received his Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering at the University's Fall Commencement ceremony, and joined the more than 400 individuals who have taken part in the Hartford Scholars Program since its inception in 1990.

After much hard work and family sacrifice, he had become an engineer. ■

Faculty and Staff Raise More Than \$12 Million

GRANTS AND CONTRACTS SUPPORT RESEARCH, BUILDING PROJECTS, NEW PROGRAMS

During the 2006–07 academic year, faculty and staff at the University of Hartford received more than \$12 million in grants and contracts from various outside funding organizations. The amount is nearly three times the total for the previous year.

Individuals within all seven of the University's schools and colleges received funding, as well as a number of departments and programs. Major funding agencies included NASA, the National Science Foundation, the State of Connecticut, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the World Bank.

Two of the University's building projects appeared on the list of recipients. The Mort and Irma Handel Performing Arts Center was awarded almost \$7 million, while the Home Field Advantage project received just short of \$500,000.

The College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture was the top recipient of outside funding among the schools and colleges, receiving approximately \$2.6 million in total, with

approximately \$959,000 allotted to Thomas Filburn, professor of mechanical engineering, and a total of more than \$1.4 million going to Saleh Keshawarz, associate professor of civil, environmental and biomedical engineering (see p. 13).

The Center for Professional Development was granted \$1.3 million in funding to principals Gail Champlin, senior director, and Colleen Kruger, director of continuing and professional education youth services.

Faculty and staff who received outside funding were recognized at a reception in October at the home of Dianne and President Walter Harrison. The Office of the President, Office of the Provost, and Office of Institutional Partnerships and Sponsored Research sponsored the reception. Support for the event was also provided by University regent Morton Handel (Hon. '02) and Irma Handel. ■