When Jason Baron began doing telephone fund-raising for the University two years ago, he had to dial each number manually and fill out stacks of paper pledge cards by hand. Today, the senior communication major wears a headset and sits in front of a computer that automatically dials phone numbers and electronically processes pledges, dramatically increasing the number of calls he can make each night.

Improved technology is just one of many recent changes that are breathing new life into the University’s Telefund program. The program has an enthusiastic new manager, Andrew Bernstein, who keeps student callers motivated with contests, prizes, and a fun atmosphere. Larry Gavrich, vice president for external relations, and Jennifer Williams, the University’s new Annual Fund director, have made Telefund a high priority, giving student callers a strong sense of purpose and the knowledge that they are making a difference.

The results are impressive. In the past, Telefund has typically raised about $150,000 a year. But for 2002–03, students raised $150,000 during the fall semester alone, putting them on track to raise $300,000 by the end of the current academic year.

“I think this is a new era for Telefund. I feel like I’m here for a new beginning,” said Kostas Klokelis, a senior psychology major who is in his second year as a Telefund caller.

Student phone calls to alumni and parents typically have generated about 15 percent of the roughly $1 million raised each year for the University’s Annual Fund. This year, money raised through the Telefund should account for at least 25 percent of the Annual Fund, Williams said. The Annual Fund helps to bridge the gap between tuition revenue and the actual operating expenses of the University, supporting everything from faculty salaries to scholarships to high-tech lab equipment.

But it’s not just the dollars raised that are important; the number of alumni who contribute to the University, regardless of amount, also is critical. Alumni participation rates play an important role in college and university rankings and in the awarding of grants. The University of Hartford’s alumni giving rate is 7 percent, lowest among our peer institutions.

Student Telefund callers know that every alumni gift makes a difference, no matter the size. Maxsandra Edwards, a sophomore who plans to major in finance, said she was touched by her conversation with one recent graduate. Even though he currently is unemployed, the alum pledged $10 because he remembered how challenging it was to make ends meet as a student. It’s
people like that, Edwards said, who make it possible for her to get the financial aid she needs.

Tracy Mingo, a senior management major, said she finds it rewarding to raise money that will benefit future students, and she also enjoys keeping alumni connected with their University. Mingo said that alumni often talk to her about their experiences and ask her questions about their alma mater.

When we call alumni, they feel like they are still a part of the University. We are that connection for them,” she said.

Students like Mingo staff the Telefund Call Center five evenings a week during the school year. Every night from Sunday through Thursday, 12 students make 100 to 150 calls each.

Cheering them on is Bernstein, who began working last fall as assistant director of the Annual Fund and manager of the Telefund program. Bernstein, a 1997 graduate of Quinnipiac University, was a successful telephone fund-raiser himself as an undergraduate, having raised $100,000 in three years.

He shares his enthusiasm for the job with his student employees, and they clearly enjoy working for him. He buys them prizes at the University bookstore, shares pizzas with them, and keeps the atmosphere focused but fun.

“It’s obvious that Andy likes doing the job and he enjoys working with us. He goes above and beyond what’s expected,” said Klokelis, one of the student callers. “He’s got good ideas, which motivates us even more.”

Enthusiasm for the Telefund extends all the way to the top. University President Walter Harrison and Gavrich both visited the call center during the fall to let students know how important their work is and to show their appreciation.

Daniel Millman, a sophomore communication major and student caller, said the renewed emphasis on the Telefund makes him feel good about the work he’s doing. “I know I’m helping out the school, which makes me feel good.”

A new Center for Learning and Instruction (CLI) planned for the main level of Mortensen Library is receiving generous support from a variety of sources. A $52,000 gift from a private foundation has been matched with another $52,000 from the University’s Parents Association. In addition, an anonymous individual donor who has already contributed $50,000 has now pledged another $50,000 for the project.

Mortensen Library and the Faculty Center for Learning Development (FCLD) joined forces in planning the CLI to meet the need for specialized instruction, guidance, and technical assistance brought on by the technology explosion. The new, shared teaching facility will provide technology instruction in a large electronic classroom capable of holding up to 30 students and will be a source of both demonstration and hands-on learning for the entire campus community.

“It’s one of the most exciting things we’ve done,” said Randi Ashton-Pritting ’98, the University’s director of libraries. The University Libraries represents one of the largest concentrations of technology on campus, she pointed out. “The new center offers an exciting way to work collaboratively, share technology resources, and continue our seamless approach toward technology services.”

Ashton-Pritting is particularly pleased with the generous donations that the project has attracted. The recent gifts will cover a large part of the cost of the CLI, but she is still seeking some additional funding and an endowment to support its evolving programs and keep abreast of rapidly changing technologies into the future.

Hartt Awarded $1.3 Million HFPG Grant

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving has awarded $1.3 million to the University’s Hartt School for the Performing Arts Center, one of the largest grants in the foundation’s history. In June 2002, officials from the University and the foundation joined with North Hartford community leaders at the site to announce the grant at a press conference.

“We’re so pleased to support truly great ideas like this,” said Michael

Parents Group Among Donors to Learning Center

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Bangser, executive director of the Hartford Foundation. “It is exciting to be able to help a world-class performing arts school get a facility that befits its expanding role and, equally important, to help provide an economic boost to the neighborhood.”

The Hartford Foundation has designated $1 million of the grant money for the capital costs of the portion of the center that will be used by The Hartt School’s Community Division. The remaining $300,000 will be used to support enhancement of the Community Division’s collaboration with The Artists Collective and to expand programs that engage Hartford children in the performing arts.

The project will enhance the University’s commitment to strengthen its engagement with its North Hartford neighbors. University officials expect the renovation of the former Thomas Cadillac distributorship, which has stood vacant since 1995, to continue the economic development activity spearheaded by The Artists Collective’s state-of-the-art cultural arts center.

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the Capitol region—the City of Hartford and 29 surrounding towns. Since 1925, the Foundation has been providing grants and other support to nonprofits, bringing people together to discuss important local issues and helping donors ensure that their gifts will have maximum impact.

“Before I designed a choral rehearsal hall, I sang. Before I did a dance studio, I danced.” With this unusual admission, Mike Howard describes the beginnings of his 20-plus-year career as an architect specializing in the design of performing arts centers.

Howard is a principal in HMS Performance Architecture of New Orleans, the firm that has been as the local architects for the project (see accompanying story).

So how is it that Howard found himself singing and dancing? Back in 1980, he was all set to begin work on a communication, music, and theatre complex at a university in New Orleans when the school’s dean said, “If you’re going to design a building for this institution, you’re going to go back to school.” And so Howard spent two months finding out what it was like to be a performing arts student.

During the course of that early project, Howard became intrigued by the combination of high-level design and the huge degree of technology that are essential components of a successfully designed performing arts center. He had found his passion, and designing these facilities has been his life’s work ever since. Today about 80 percent of the business his firm undertakes involves performing arts centers for educational institutions like the University of Hartford.

The Hartt School’s dance, theatre, and vocal music programs and portions of its Community Division will be the occupants of the new University of Hartford Performing Arts Center. The center’s design must accommodate the needs of each discipline while melding the parts into an aesthetically pleasing whole.

Howard’s many years of experience in designing this type of architecture make him comfortable with that task. Rather than focusing on any negatives, he prefers to look at the rewards inherent in such a challenge.

“Mixed-use projects bring diverse people together,” Howard says.
“Building a building that does
that improves the human condition by putting
diverse people together
and exposing each to what
the other is doing.”

Achieving this balance
is where the fun is,
according to Howard. “The
pounding of dancers’ feet
on a floor could be the
most annoying thing in the
world when you’re trying
to teach a particular piece
of music in a particular
cadence. There’s an
excitement that comes
from finding the solution
to that.”

But the fact that it’s a
multi-use complex is not
the only challenge the
Performing Arts Center
poses. There is the task of
building it within an
existing space, the three
structures that make up
the former Thomas
Cadillac distributorship.
Some of the options that a
blank slate of new
construction offers won’t
be available. Howard and
his team will have to think
in new and creative ways.
It does help, however, that
the existing buildings were
designed by one of the
eminent figures in
American industrial
architecture, Albert
Kahn.

Howard feels the
complex of three buildings
is a perfect candidate for
transformation into a
performing arts center,
largely due to Kahn.

“Albert Kahn believed in
humanizing the industrial
environment for the
worker,” Howard says. “He
believed in natural light,
ventilation, creature
comforts. He designed for
the common man.”

Trademark features of
Kahn’s work that were
originally designed to
benefit factory workers—
unobstructed floor plans,
large windows, and
skylights—fill the needs of
dancers, actors, and
musicians surprisingly
well.

The drawings Howard
and his colleagues have
produced translate Kahn’s
vision of a comfortable
work environment into an
impressive 21st-century
arts facility. As conceived,
the University of Hartford
Performing Arts Center will
be a bright, airy home in
which Hartt students and
children in the Community
Division will perfect their
craft, as well as an
enjoyable space in which
parents, friends, and
neighbors will gather for
performances.

Successfully completing
a project like the Perform-
ing Arts Center takes more
than just reconfiguring
three buildings. Howard
says he sees strength in
the University’s
commitment to the
project—from President
Walter Harrison on down.

“They got very serious
about what the performing
arts bring to them as a
university,” says Howard.
“They put together the
best group of individuals—
the most talented—who
are committed to the belief
that this is an incredibly
valuable piece of what a
University of Hartford
education is all about. And
that, to me, is terrific.”

Campus Proves a Magnet for Architectural Firm
Buildings that make up a community are the focus of Smith Edwards, the local architectural firm for the University of Hartford Performing Arts Center.

The Hartford-based firm is nationally recognized for its expertise in the design of school buildings. A particularly striking example is the University of Hartford Magnet School, which was designed to reflect Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner’s theories about how children learn.

Smith Edwards is also noted for its work on existing buildings and has served as architects for the restoration of many Connecticut landmarks, including the Old State House and the chapel at Cedar Hill Cemetery in Hartford, the Francis Gillette House in Bloomfield, the Oliver Ellsworth Homestead in Windsor, and Bank of Boston’s Exchange Building in New Haven.