

# The Briar Wire

THE SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE ALUMNAE NEWSLETTER

## Dear Alumnae and Friends of Sweet Briar College,

On any extended journey, there's a voice that usually arises — from our companions or from within ourselves — that asks the question, "Are we there yet?"

As Sweet Briar College approaches the conclusion of its second full academic year of its rise after the attempted closure of 2015, we have much to celebrate. In the process of rescuing and rebuilding an institution we love, we have seen innumerable milestones — miracles of commitment, leaps of faith, and exceptional acts of selflessness and generosity.

Among the most recent evidence of Sweet Briar's renaissance is the appointment of President-elect Meredith Woo, who brings world-class leadership in higher education and philanthropy, and is eager to stand shoulder to shoulder with us to propel the College to new levels of prominence, relevance, and strength.

In terms of academic life, Sweet Briar's faculty continues to distinguish itself, as evidenced by Professor John Gregory Brown's recognition as the third Sweet Briar professor in four years to earn the Outstanding Faculty Award from the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia.

Our alumnae also continue to give selflessly of their time and support, resulting in three times the financial contributions year to date in 2017 over 2016. We've also just wrapped a week in which members of the Board, Alumnae Alliance, and various working groups came to campus to work strategically together for the benefit of the College.

But, no, my friends, we are not there just yet.

Our financial modeling of the College's operating needs, sunk costs of the attempted closure, and the growth capital required to forge Sweet Briar's path to sustainability, strength, and prominence total \$71 million over four years — \$20 million of which we aim to raise this year by June 30.

While ambitious, this is absolutely possible because of you, the Sweet Briar community.

As the poem goes, we "have miles to go before we sleep," but Sweet Briar was saved because of you, continues to rise because of you, has shaken off the

dust and neglect of a more than decade because of you, and is becoming a beacon for women's higher education once again — because of you.

Your support makes a new future for Sweet Briar possible.

I ask you to join the faculty, staff, students, and our alumnae sisters in supporting Sweet Briar's renaissance. Together we will bring her home to her rightful place of leadership in women's higher education — now and forever.

With my deepest thanks for all you do.

Mary Pope M. Hutson '83

Vice President for Alumnae Relations and Development  
[mpmhutson@sbc.edu](mailto:mpmhutson@sbc.edu)



To celebrate Sweet Briar's successes over the past two years, and to usher in Sweet Briar Forever Month, President Phil Stone for the second year planted a new rose bush beside the bell tower. Ultimately, it will be "a very full rose garden," he promised the students, faculty and staff who gathered for the occasion. Students participated in the planting of a new rose as well.



## Board of Directors of Sweet Briar College

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*We have a position open in our office.  
Visit [sbc.edu/human-resources/  
faculty-staff-job-openings/](http://sbc.edu/human-resources/faculty-staff-job-openings/) to find out  
more.*

*For more information about Alumnae  
Relations and Development staff, please  
visit [sbc.edu/alumnae-development/  
staff/](http://sbc.edu/alumnae-development/staff/).*

*(800) 381-6131*

*PO Box 1057  
Sweet Briar, VA 24595*

*Special thanks to Maggy O'Donnell '18 for  
her help with this issue of The Briar Wire.*

## Planned Giving: Charitable Gifts of Life Insurance

The primary advantage of a charitable gift of life insurance is that it often provides a cost-effective way to make a sizeable gift to your favorite charitable organization. A current life insurance policy is a simple and attractive way to support Sweet Briar. You can make a gift of life insurance in three ways:

1. You can make Sweet Briar College both the owner and the beneficiary of a new policy. You receive an income tax charitable contribution deduction for the premium payments and thus your tax savings can lower the cost of your gift.
2. You can make Sweet Briar College the owner of an existing policy. This is particularly appropriate if you no longer need the policy. You receive an immediate income tax charitable contribution deduction for the charitable gift. If the
3. You can simply name Sweet Briar College as the beneficiary of a new or an existing policy. Since this is not an irrevocable designation, you do not receive an income tax charitable contribution deduction for your gift. At your death, however, your estate receives an estate tax charitable contribution deduction for the entire amount.

### For more information, please contact:

Claire Dennison Griffith '80, Director of Major and Planned Gifts

PO Box 1057 | Sweet Briar, VA 24595 | Phone 434-381-6479 | Email: [cgriffith@sbc.edu](mailto:cgriffith@sbc.edu)

Check out our new planned giving page, [plannedgiving.sbc.edu](http://plannedgiving.sbc.edu)

*This information is provided for educational purposes. It is not intended as legal advice. Please consult your own advisors who alone are aware of your individual situation and thus in the best position to provide an individual analysis and help you accomplish the best result.*

## Alumnae Alliance Council holds meetings on campus

The Alumnae Alliance Council, co-chaired by Sarah vonRosenberg '72 and Debra Elkins '93, met on campus February 24 and 25. This, the second full in-person council meeting since forming in October 2015, brought together the co-chairs of all of the working groups to discuss the priorities, challenges and opportunities for the Alumnae Alliance as a whole; to drill down into the activities of each of the working groups; and to make a presentation to the board of directors of the College.

"The council has bi-monthly teleconferences; so we are all up-to-date on the progress of each working group. But meeting like this allowed us to hash through, face-to-face, any ongoing or new issues that needed dealing with, and we came out stronger - together," says vonRosenberg.

The council heard presentations from Barb Watts, director of career services; Bill Allen, vice president of enrollment management; Mary Pope Hutson '83, vice president of alumnae relations and development; and Priscilla Carroll '87, director of alumnae relations.

According to Elkins, the presentations and working group break-out sessions were an opportunity to coordinate Alumnae Alliance activities with the needs of the College and to give feedback from alumnae volunteering as leaders in the city and regional clubs, as class officers, and as Alumnae Admissions Representatives (AARs). "It gives the council a chance to work with College staff to assess, strategically and operationally, council execution to better serve the College and alumnae. Key areas of focus included improving communications to the nine decades of alumnae, addressing challenges identified by clubs and class officers, and continuing to improve council governance and operations. The council used the on-site meetings to consider best practices in transformational change to help position the Alumnae Alliance to effectively and efficiently support the College's renaissance," says Elkins.

Among the agenda items was "developing the bench" for succession-planning purposes

ALUMNAE ALLIANCE CONTINUED ON PAGE 5



## Meredith Woo: Sweet Briar's 13th President

*Scholar, liberal arts advocate, experienced administrator and global leader for women's education*

**W**e are excited to announce the newest member of our community, our next president, Meredith Woo — a tireless champion for women's and liberal arts education. Passionate

about addressing global issues, she joins Sweet Briar on May 15 from her role as director of the Higher Education Support Program for the Open Society Foundations in London.

### Positions held

- Director, Higher Education Support Program for the Open Society Foundations, London
- Buckner W. Clay Dean of the College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, University of Virginia
- Associate dean for social sciences, professor of political science, University of Michigan
- Visiting scholar, Ministry of Finance, Tokyo

- Assistant professor of political science, Northwestern University
- Visiting assistant professor, Columbia University

### Degrees earned

- Ph.D. in political science, Columbia University (with distinction)
- M.A. in international affairs, Columbia University
- B.A., Bowdoin College, Maine (magna cum laude)

*"I am excited to join the Sweet Briar College community on one of the most beautiful campuses in the nation. The Sweet Briar education takes information and turns it into knowledge and wisdom. I look forward to learning from the Sweet Briar community, and to stewarding it as it continues to play a consequential role for women's education in the Commonwealth, the nation and beyond. Thank you for welcoming me to this special place."*

– Meredith Woo

## Sweet Briar will celebrate riding and history at its 90th Annual Horse Show

by Joelle Ziemian, director, Media, Marketing and Communications

**S**ince 1927, riders and horses have gathered each spring at Sweet Briar College to compete in the College's annual horse show. This year, the College will celebrate the 90th year of the event on April 8.

The 2017 horse show will kick off at 8:30 a.m. at the 130-acre Harriet Howell Rogers Riding Center. As they have for the last nine decades, individual riders will compete in a variety of Hunter and Equitation classes at heights from 2' to 3'6". Riders in equitation classes, will be judged on position, accuracy, and the effectiveness of the partnership between horse and rider. Hunter over fences classes will be judged on the performance of the horse.

The College expects approximately 50 riders to participate.

Two legendary riders from Sweet Briar's alumnae will be inducted into the College's Hall of Fame during the Horse Show weekend. Elizabeth "Keedie" Grones Leonard '76 and Mekanah Dunham Morriss '66 will be recognized for their dedication and support of the program.

The 90th Annual Horse Show will feature several special trophies and awards. These include the Fayette-Brown Challenge Trophy, awarded since 1950 to the Sweet Briar rider who demonstrates the best horsemanship and sportsmanship throughout the show. A

panel of judges, including show judge Peg Seals, will select the winner.

Seals serves on the Board of Directors of the Virginia Horse Shows Association.

Another historic important award, given out at the show since 1968, is the Harriet Howell Rogers Challenge Trophy for the champion of the Adult Hunter Division. Last year, Emily Schlosberg '19 and Sweet Briar's Lord of the Dance were awarded this trophy.

Merilee "Mimi" Wroten, director of Sweet Briar's riding program said, "This show has always been important to the College. It is a wonderful way to celebrate our student-riders and our program."

Wroten, ODAC Coach of the Year for the second straight year, noted that even as the world has drastically changed over the past 90 years, the competitors at this show will look and ride much as they did in 1927.

"The arena is new, a few technical aspects are different, but otherwise this year's horse show will be very similar to just like the one in 1927. Now, as then, we celebrate the hard work, dedication, and passion of our students and other riders."

Outside competitors may review the prize list or request one by calling (434) 381-6116. ■



# The Founding of the Sweet Briar Riding Program

by Lynn Rainville, *director, Tusculum Institute*



*An unidentified African American assistant holds the hounds during a Fox Hunt, c. 1927.*



*Rogers with her students, c. 1920s.*

In addition to its award winning riders, well-schooled horses, and its impressive indoor riding arena, the Sweet Briar College Riding Program has a long and rich history, dating back to the founding of the College. And while most past and current students have heard of the nationally-known horseman and SBC riding coach, Paul D. Cronin, or the much-loved instructor, Clayton E. Bailey, the early teachers, grooms, and stable hands are less familiar. Horseback riding instruction at Sweet Briar College began under the leadership of Kentucky native, Harriet Howell Rogers. When she was hired as the Director of Physical Education in 1924, student riders were still relying on borrowed horses from the Amherst Livery Stable. A year later, Wilmer C. Blackwell was hired as Sweet Briar's farm manager. He purchased all of the mounts from the Amherst stable and brought them to the campus barn. Miss Rogers was an expert rider, a well-known field hockey player, and a delegate to international coaching associations. Much admired and loved by her students, one alumna recalled two of her teacher's traits: she knew how to talk to a horse and if push came to shove, the horse was more important than the rider! She helped to design the indoor riding ring (completed in 1938) and retired in 1963, after 38 years of teaching recreational sports at Sweet Briar.

One of Miss Rogers' teachers was the internationally-recognized riding instructor, Russian-born Vladimir Littauer. He served in the First Hussars of the Russian Imperial Cavalry but left after joining the anti-Bolshevik White Army during World War I. He was instrumental

in developing "hunt seat riding" in the United States (a.k.a., the forward seat system first introduced by the Italian rider, Federico Caprilli) and wrote more than a dozen books. Captain Littauer taught at several colleges, including 25 years as a guest lecturer at Sweet Briar. Using state-of-the art equipment, he filmed himself and

his students as they displayed the proper techniques. When he died in 1989, he instructed his heirs to donate his collection of instructional films to Sweet Briar College. One of them, "How to Teach Position," was shot on the Sweet Briar campus between 1948 and 1949 and starred talented student riders.

During the first decade of the equestrian program horses were used for more than just riding. These beasts of burden also pulled supply wagons, led transport coaches (like the Fletcher

family carriage), and dragged the equipment that flattened and paved roads on campus. African American grooms and stable hands played an integral role in this work. The historic evidence of these men comes mostly from unidentified photographs, so we have very few names. Census records provide a few clues, like Landon Jones (1884-1944) who drove a supply wagon on campus in the 1910s or George Sales (1871-c.1960s) who worked as the Stable Boss in 1920. These men and several other "farm hands" were the sons and grandsons of parents who were enslaved by Elijah Fletcher on the Sweet Briar Plantation. Horses and their minders have played an important role in serving the college for two centuries. ■



*Riding Coaches: Harriet Rogers, Wilmer Blackwell, Natalie Roberts, 1931.*

# Google Visit at the National Engineer's Week Banquet Inspires the Campus to Set Goals High

by Marina Biel '18

Sweet Briar College is home to one of two women's colleges with an ABET accredited Engineering Program. Behind this unique program is a group of incredible professors that are invested in our futures. The dedication of the professors is seen through the success of recent graduates. Some professors will even Facetime you at 9 p.m. if you really need help with your homework!

Sweet Briar College recently had the honor to host Sidnie Davis, Sarah Henderson and Antoine Picard during National Engineers Week. These Google employees are working with Sweet Briar as advisors to further develop the Computer Science Program curriculum. Google has incredible insight as to what curriculum and information students need to have a well-rounded computer science and engineering education. During their time at Sweet Briar, they had the opportunity to meet with President Phillip C. Stone, faculty and staff, tour the campus, visit and speak with high school girls at the Introduce a Girl to Engineering event, attend the Engineering Banquet, and have lunch with the Sweet Briar engineering and physics students. Even though their days were packed, they still found time to make it to the riding center to meet the horses. Sidnie Davis, a college recruiter at Google, had the opportunity to go on a trail ride with Louise Goodling, one of Sweet Briar's riding instructors. Their excitement and enthusiasm was wonderful to experience while they were on campus. This partnership will bring great opportunities to Sweet Briar College.

Traditionally, the Engineering Banquet at Sweet Briar College has hosted many inspiring speakers. Last year, Kathryn Thornton, the director of the Aerospace Engineering Program at UVA and a veteran of four space shuttle flights, shared her experiences. This year, the speaker certainly lived up to our expectations and more.

## ALUMNAE ALLIANCE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

and the inclusion of "Plus-Ones" on the bi-monthly conference calls. "The idea is to increase participation to 'Plus-Twos' and 'Plus-Threes.' We encourage alumnae who are interested in participating in one or more of the working groups to email Debra and me [svonrosenberg@smoote.com](mailto:svonrosenberg@smoote.com), [debraelkins@comcast.net](mailto:debraelkins@comcast.net)). We particularly need assistance with the AAR working group and can always use assistance in other areas," says vonRosenberg.

The council also discussed the Principles for Accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS), the regional body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in the Southern states, to make sure that Alliance operations are in accordance with these principles. The council affirmed that it would coordinate any operations, especially fundraising efforts and



from left: Alicia Wooten, Clara Rogers, Lacey Tucker, Karlynn McCarthy, Sidnie Davis, Marina Biel, Sarah Cahoon, Des'rae Davis, MaryKate Bailey, Erika Rugh.

Antoine Picard, a Software Engineer from Google, spoke at the Engineering Banquet. In his speech, he talked about taking initiative to work on a project you are invested in. The result of these projects can positively impact a whole company. He also gave students an inspiring message about their future by encouraging them to find something they are truly passionate about, something they can spend hours working on without it feeling like work. Google's presence on campus has had an uplifting and positive effect on the whole community. Sweet Briar students are excited to see what's next for the computer science and engineering programs.

Sweet Briar's Engineering Program has given me the confidence to strive to achieve my goals. I am no longer afraid and apprehensive to enter a field that is male dominated, because Sweet Briar has taught me to stand up for myself. I hope to use my Engineering Science degree to become a Forensic Engineer. During my time at Sweet Briar, I have realized I have a passion for testing materials and products that can potentially fail. Working to ensure the public's safety doesn't seem like work at all, but more of a challenge I'll enjoy. If I could do this to ensure the public stays safe, I don't think I could call it work. ■

messaging through the College, to permit direct oversight, identifying two opportunities to improve communications to reinforce SACS principles related to fundraising.

First, that various alumnae-related social media outlets (e.g., Facebook pages, Twitter, Instagram) are asked to share official College fundraising announcements, including photos and wording, from the Sweet Briar College Now and Forever Facebook page, to other Sweet Briar-related Facebook pages.

Second, the Alliance will support the College by quickly re-sharing posts and providing links to news articles from the College website via the Sweet Briar College Alumnae Alliance Facebook page. Its strategy is to try to reach as many online alumnae as possible, echoing the College's official public relations pieces.

ALUMNAE ALLIANCE CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



**Reunion registration is open!**  
**sbc.edu/reunion or (800) 381-6131**

#### ALUMNAE ALLIANCE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

As part of its presentation to the Board of the Directors, vonRosenberg and Elkins estimated the value of the alumnae time-in-kind volunteer services to the College has increased approximately 6% over last year's estimate, as alumnae engagement has continued to surge. One area of notable growth is the number of alumnae volunteering as AARs. The AARs covered 140-plus fairs during fall 2016, twice as many as last year. AARs are also volunteering to make calls to prospective students, to encourage them to apply and enroll. The goal is for every accepted student to hear from at least one alumna, so that accepted students experience the engagement of our alumnae network.

Board chair Teresa Pike Tomlinson '87 notes, "Once again the Alumnae Alliance amazed the board with facts and figures that show Sweet Briar has the most engaged and valuable alumnae. Conservatively, millions and millions of dollars in budget-relieving activity is bestowed on the College through Sweet Work Weeks, in-kind consulting, college fair coverage and much more. We are so grateful that our alumnae give back and, then, give back some more. We could not do it without every shoulder at the wheel."

Preceding the council meetings, on February 23, Katie Schellhammer '95, Elkins and Evangeline Taylor '00 led a workshop with students on Sweet Briar's Alumnifire portal, a networking platform launched in January 2015 by Margaretta Colangelo '87 that allows the Sweet Briar community to share job openings and internships exclusively to its community. Taylor called in to the session via the Internet from Nicaragua and led an online tour of the highlights of using Alumnifire to search for internships and jobs. As of early March, some 1,700 in the Sweet Briar community had registered with the portal, with a ratio of 15 alumnae for every current student; 428 alumnae had announced their companies are hiring, and 192 internship opportunities had been posted. ■

#### **Sweet Briar College thanks the Jesse Ball duPont Fund and the Lettie Pate Whitehead Foundation for their generous capacity-building grants**

Sweet Briar recently received two new grants from private foundations. The Jessie Ball duPont Fund in Jacksonville, Florida, made a two-year grant of \$119,000 to help the College build capacity in two of its most critical areas: student recruitment and fundraising. Specifically, for student recruitment, the fund is helping us create new marketing materials and is supporting our work with Capture, an enrollment consulting group who are helping us use advanced digital tools to target and track prospective students and encourage them to apply to Sweet Briar; and in fundraising, the grant is supporting our work with the consulting firm of Alexander Haas, who are helping us define our facility, endowment, and other capital needs, and carry out a feasibility study that will lay the groundwork for the College's next capital campaign.

The Lettie Pate Whitehead Foundation in Atlanta, Georgia, awarded \$75,000 to be used for scholarships in the 2017-2018 academic year for Sweet Briar students with financial need who are residents of one of the following states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.