

THE MAGAZINE OF MONMOUTH UNIVERSITY » FALL/WINTER 2025

# MONMOUTH



**“My hair was a really big part of my identity. This wasn’t about vanity. I was so scared to lose myself through my treatment.”**

SENIOR ALAYNA  
RIOZZI-BODINE  
SURVIVED CANCER  
AT THE AGE OF 17.  
THEN CAME HER  
SECOND BATTLE.

»P. 30

**PLUS: BRIGHT MINDS. BIG IDEAS. »P. 34**

**AND: STEPHENIE LAGROSSA KENDRICK  
IS BACK IN THE GAME. »P. 40**



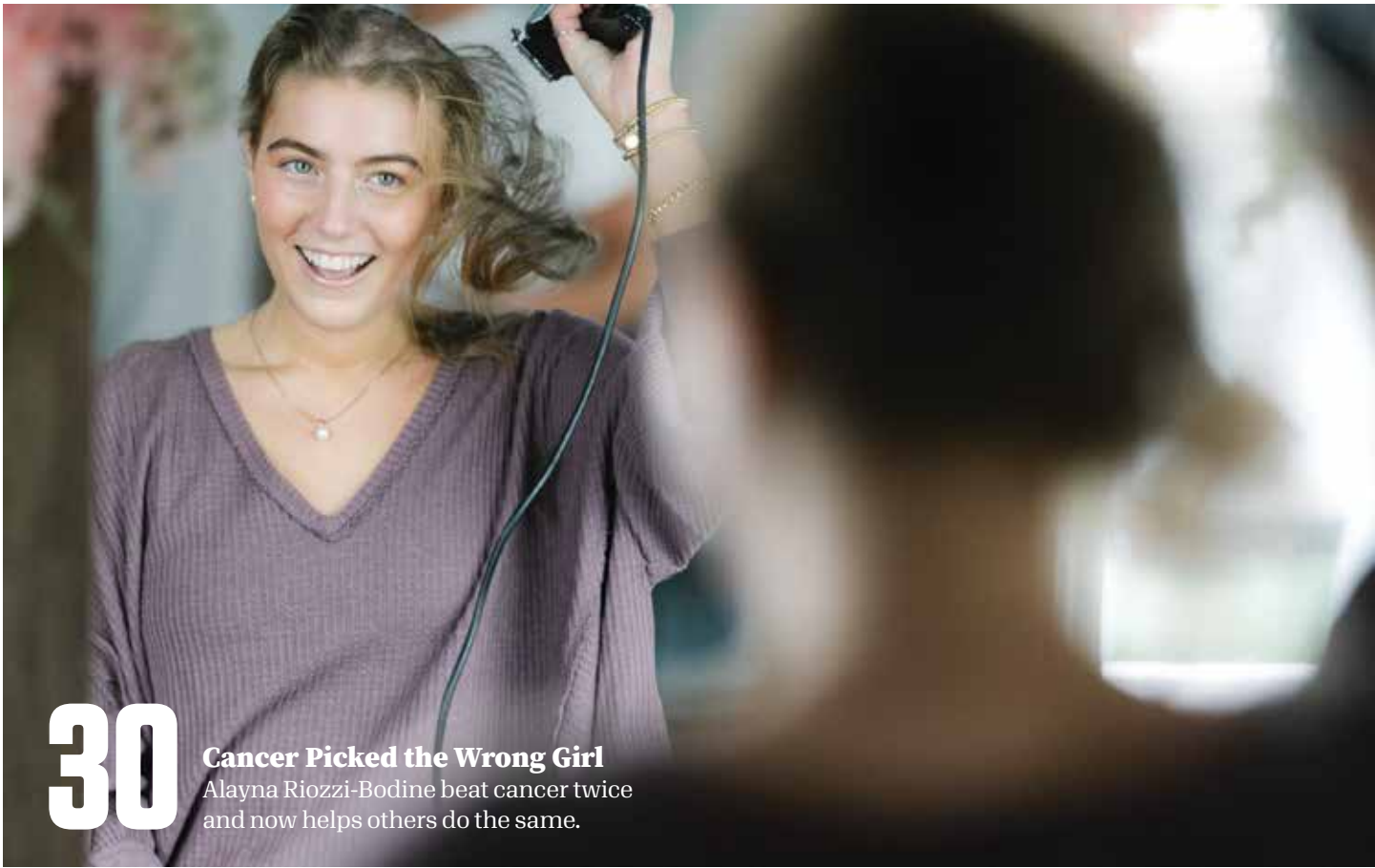
# Looking In





# CONTENTS

FALL/WINTER 2025



30

**Cancer Picked the Wrong Girl**  
Alayna Riozzi-Bodine beat cancer twice and now helps others do the same.



24

**Profit with a Purpose**  
Impact-driven entrepreneurship is thriving at Monmouth.



34

**Discovery in Action**  
Inside the projects powering Monmouth's research momentum.

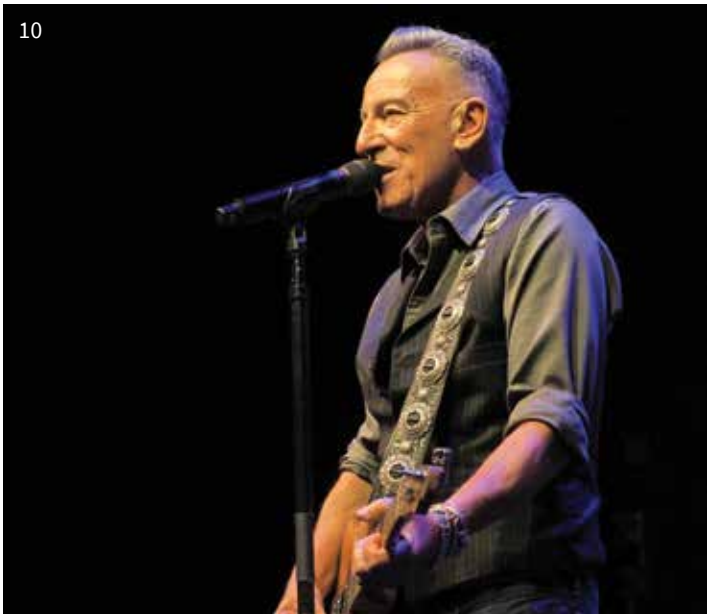


40

**Still in the Game**  
Stephenie LaGrossa Kendrick returns for the 50th season of "Survivor."

## Currents

LEARNING & CULTURE FROM CAMPUS & BEYOND



10

06

**Inside the New Game Plan**  
College athletics is changing fast. Jennifer Sansevero shares how the Hawks are keeping pace.

10

**The View from Here**  
From Bruce Springsteen to standout rankings, here's what's making noise around campus.

12

**Office Space**  
Inside the Human Performance Lab, where every rep is a research opportunity.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- 01 Looking In
- 04 President's Letter
- 05 Correspondence
- 23 Sports Shorts
- 45 Looking Back

14

**Making Software Safer**  
Weihao Qu is creating systems that make software—and user data—more secure.

16

**The Art of the Everyday**  
Kristin Bluemel's new book reveals how women wood engravers carved a modern art movement from the English countryside.

- 46 Alumni Roundup
- 48 Celebrations
- 62 Remembrances
- 63 In Memoriam
- 64 Looking Out

## Athletics

SPORTS, CLUBS & FITNESS



22

18

**Forty Seasons, Still Serving**  
Head coach Patrice Murray reflects on four decades leading Monmouth women's tennis.

20

**Student of the Game**  
Former Hawks forward Daniel James has built a global career mentoring basketball's next generation.

22

**Game Face: On**  
All-American quarterback Derek Robertson talks old superstitions and new goals.

## Class Notes

ALUMNI LIFE



47

47

**Launchpad**  
Ashley Zingilliolu's path from Monmouth led straight to the Ivy League.

52

**Engineered for Endurance**  
Ken Boyle built a career and a legacy rooted in resilience and giving back.

54

**Life Behind the Mascot Mask**  
Matt Francis reveals the highs (and heat) of life as a professional mascot.

58

**The Business of Fun**  
Kureé Sheard turned her side hustle into a top-selling pop culture party brand.





# Reaching New Heights Together

Monmouth celebrates a year of unprecedented progress—from research distinction and national accolades to a record-setting incoming class.

Each fall, I'm reminded that Monmouth's story keeps getting better. What we've accomplished together says a great deal about who we are and where we are heading.

This year, Monmouth University reached several historic milestones. We earned Carnegie Classification as a research college and university (RCU), an affirmation of the high-impact research and scholarly productivity of our faculty that places Monmouth among a distinguished group of institutions contributing meaningfully to discovery and applied knowledge. For a university that began in 1933 as a small junior college, this recognition marks an extraordinary leap.

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education reaffirmed our accreditation this spring, granting 12 commendations and no recommendations—a rare and notable outcome. It reflects the strength of our operations, the excellence of our academic programs, the dedication of our community, and the integrity of our institutional practices as judged by a team of peer reviewers.

That excellence is also showing up in national rankings. Monmouth achieved

its highest-ever placement in U.S. News & World Report: No. 13 on the Regional Universities North list, up 63 spots since first debuting in this very category nearly 20 years ago. We also earned Top 25 placements for Innovation, Undergraduate Teaching, and Social Mobility. The Wall Street Journal/College Pulse rankings also placed Monmouth at a new benchmark, and No. 3 among private universities in New Jersey, behind only Princeton and Stevens Institute of Technology. These external endorsements matter because they reflect the dedication of our faculty, the quality of our students, and the value of a Monmouth degree.

This fall's first-year class is the most academically prepared in Monmouth's 92-year history, boasting a record 3.67 GPA, an average submitted SAT of 1225, and the largest number of Honors School enrollments in University history. At the same time, we welcomed a record number of first-generation and low-income students, with 55.8 percent of the class identifying as first generation or Pell Grant-eligible. These results reflect our mission to integrate excellence and access like few other schools of our kind anywhere.

Momentum extends beyond the classroom. Our comprehensive campaign—Excellence. Access. Ambition.—is nearing completion, with 95 percent of our \$175 million goal secured. The resources generated through this effort are fueling scholarships, endowed professorships, and innovative programs across the University. That campaign will conclude in 2026, but its impact will be felt for decades to come.

And we look forward to a moment of great pride next spring, when the Bruce Springsteen Archives & Center for American Music opens its doors. This landmark facility will celebrate the rich history and tradition of American music while elevating Monmouth's global profile.

I could not be more proud of how far we've come or more optimistic about what's next. Thank you for being part of this remarkable journey and for all the ways you contribute to Monmouth's success.

»PATRICK F. LEAHY, ED.D.  
PRESIDENT

## Correspondence



### A LASTING EDUCATION

Thank you for featuring me in the Spring 2025 issue (“Honoring Tradition, Nourishing the Future”). The magazine is an invaluable resource that fosters community and connection among alumni and their families. It not only keeps us informed but also celebrates our shared experiences and achievements. Being included was truly an honor.

While some say a college student's first-year learning may be obsolete by graduation, that has never been true of the meaningful education I received at Monmouth. My opportunities have only grown and flourished over the years, and I'm proud to be part of the Monmouth University community!

»MICHELLE WASHINGTON WILSON '77

### A FORTUITOUS DISCOVERY

I recently read “Fort Monmouth: The US Army's House of Magic” by Melissa Ziobro '04, '07M, which I learned about from your Summer 2024 issue (“The View from Here”). It is a terrific book on many levels—thorough, factual, and rich with historical insight into key U.S. government decisions.

As it turns out, Monmouth University and Fort Monmouth once shared a powerful collaborative relationship that benefited Monmouth students. I even found an article in the Monmouth magazine archives highlighting this connection (“Forging Strong Ties,” Winter 2000). Even more meaningful to me: the Dr. Jacobs mentioned in the article was my father. He worked at both Fort Monmouth and Monmouth College, where he founded the electrical engineering department.

»STEVE JACOBS '74

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**On the cover**  
Alayna Riozzi-Bodine pictured in 2024 during her second battle with cancer.



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[bankrate.com/loans/student-loans/average-college-graduate-salary/](https://bankrate.com/loans/student-loans/average-college-graduate-salary/)

\*\*Employment outlook for graduate-level occupations, "U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



# CURRENTS

FALL/WINTER 2025

10

The View from Here

12

Office Space

14

Winner's Circle

16

The Art of the Everyday

[ATHLETICS REFORM]

## Inside the New Game Plan

College athletics has entered a new era, one where NIL deals, revenue sharing, and the transfer portal are reshaping the rules. Jennifer Sansevero explains how Monmouth is adapting to stay competitive while preserving what makes Hawks athletics special.

INTERVIEW BY MARK GOLA

In 2021, the NCAA reversed its long-standing policy that prohibited student-athletes from earning compensation. The organization introduced new guidelines around name, image, and likeness (NIL), giving college athletes the opportunity to sign endorsement deals, receive appearance fees, monetize their social media presence, and sell merchandise.

The emergence of NIL combined with the college transfer portal created an unprecedented “Wild West” scenario of unregulated free agency in college athletics. Powerhouse Division I programs formed collectives, groups consisting of program donors and alumni that were permitted to strike lucrative NIL deals with student-athletes. Collectives could target blue-chip recruits *and* student-athletes competing at rival, mid-major, and low-major institutions. →



The pay-for-play culture widened the gap of competitive balance between the Power 5 conferences and the rest of the Division I playing field.

This past June, the NCAA adopted the House v. NCAA settlement to address myriad legal, financial, and fairness pressures related to NIL. Schools can now opt in to a model, allowing them to share a capped amount of revenue (\$20.5 million) directly with athletes outside of third-party NIL deals. The newly formed College Sports Commission is tasked with enforcing settlement rules and monitoring NIL deals above \$600 that must be reported and assessed for fair market value.

So, what does this mean for Monmouth University? We spoke with Director of Athletics Jennifer Sansevero, J.D., about the profound impact of NIL on college athletics and Monmouth.

**Why did the NCAA need to adopt new rules for NIL?**

The reality was that NIL deals shifted in a direction they were not intended to go. Name, image, and likeness, in its purest form, was adopted to compensate student-athletes fairly through endorsements and business ventures. But it transformed into what could seem like a pay-for-play scenario. Collectives were popping up at Power 5 programs and providing alleged recruiting inducements and pay-for-play opportunities. You were not seeing student-athletes doing commercials and leveraging their name. They were receiving payments that far exceeded market value, and there was no regulation. It just went off the rails.

The House settlement has adapted it to a revenue-sharing model, and institutions are now permitted to provide direct benefits to student-athletes. It provides greater flexibility for institutions and increases opportunities for student-athletes to receive benefits.

**Are there challenges for mid-majors in this new landscape?**

There are challenges for mid-majors, but there are also tremendous opportunities for student-athletes that never existed before. Look, when a player at a mid-major school has a breakout season, they might

**“Part of our original purpose is to discover and develop champions in life. We now have a greater responsibility to educate and support our student-athletes in different ways.”**

not return. The high-major institutions are in a position to recruit those athletes and offer lucrative deals. Mid- and low-major program rosters can be negatively impacted by this; however, it can be an exciting opportunity for the athlete.

It has happened here at Monmouth. A men’s basketball player had an incredible season last year and received over a million-dollar deal from a Big 12 school. That is life-changing for that young man, and that is fantastic! Monmouth helped give him a great opportunity, and he will always be grateful for us taking a chance on him and developing him into a player who received an opportunity of a lifetime.

**Monmouth recently launched the Hawk Excellence Fund. What is its purpose?**

We formed the Hawk Excellence Fund strategically and to make the statement, “Monmouth is in the game!” We have designated this fund to directly support our student-athletes in this new landscape of college athletics. We are not mixing our operational dollars with providing benefits to our student athletes. We are focusing on producing new revenue streams—not using our operational dollars—to provide benefits to our student-athletes. We’ll continue to rely on contributions from our alumni and donors to compete in the Coastal Athletic Association (CAA) and nationally.

A difference with the Hawk Excellence Fund is that contributions are tax deduct-

ible. This fund provides benefits directly to our student-athletes, particularly in our marquee sports.

**Are there student-athletes at Monmouth who have signed NIL deals?**

We do have student-athletes across several sports who have NIL deals. A track athlete last year [who recently turned professional] had a deal with Under Armour. She wore Under Armour and did some advertising in exchange for compensation. We have athletes engaged with social media platforms who are compensated for promoting companies and their products. We also have local businesses and restaurants who pay athletes to make appearances at events.

These are literally name, image, and likeness deals that provide additional benefits to our student-athletes and engage Monmouth athletics with the community.

**Does the athletics department assist athletes in understanding how to navigate this new landscape?**

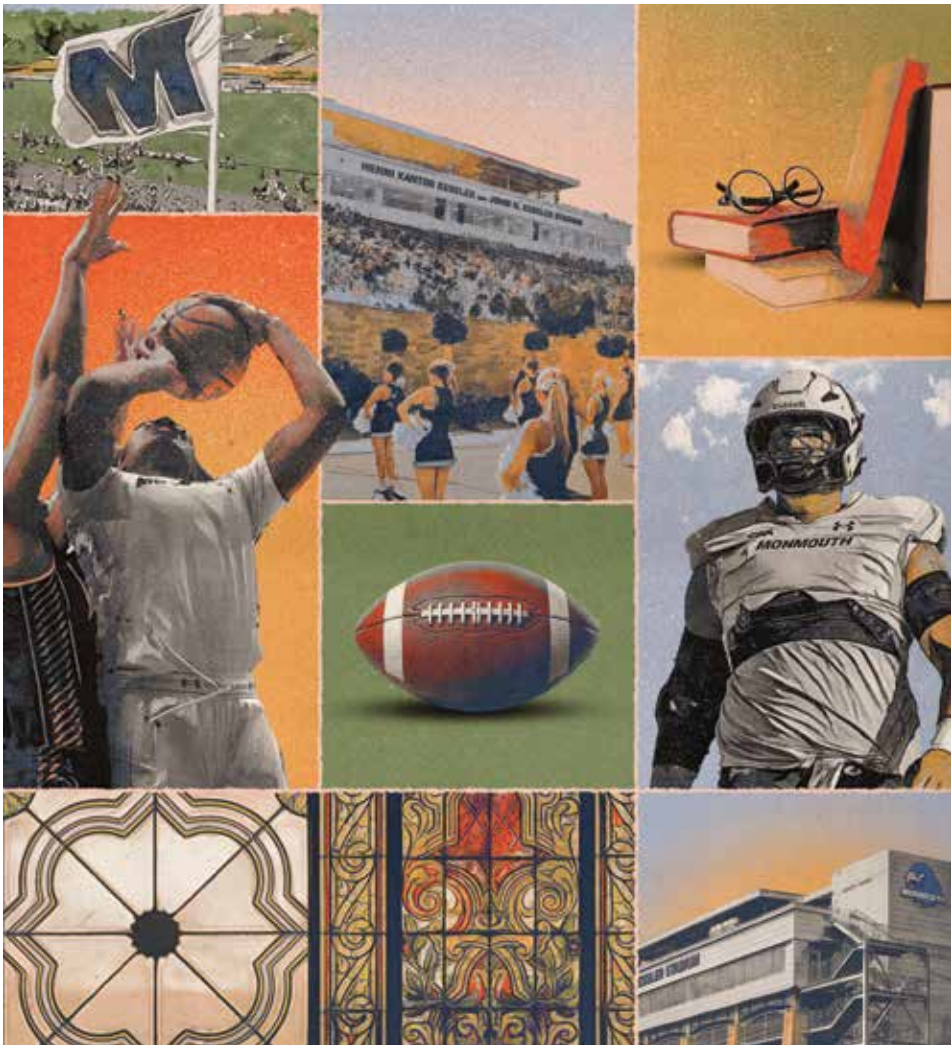
Part of our original purpose is to discover and develop champions in life. We now have a greater responsibility to educate and support our student-athletes in different ways.

We have instituted financial literacy requirements for any student-athlete who is participating in revenue sharing or receiving additional benefits. We are providing them with an NIL education—how to understand their personal brand, understand accounting and finance, and what are the tax consequences to earning money. I think Monmouth has risen to the challenge in providing a holistic, educational experience for students.

**You reference Monmouth being “in the game.” What if you decided to opt out?**

I don’t want to think about what would happen. We would have a really hard time recruiting competitive student-athletes who would allow us to be successful in the CAA. Monmouth would struggle to compete, no question.

But we are all in, and we’re going to do everything we can to continue to be competitive and build championship programs.



**Between NIL and the transfer portal, how have Monmouth coaches had to modify their recruiting practices?**

Coaches are no longer in a living room talking to parents and the recruit. They are talking to agents and a variety of individuals associated with prospects who may have a financial interest in prospects going to a specific school or signing for a specific amount. So, our coaches are adapting their recruiting practices and learning as we go forward.

They are also doubling down on building relationships with the recruits and their current roster. Our coaches have authentic and holistic relationships, and that is how Monmouth student-athletes buy into our culture. The transfer portal is a component that presents challenges, so the coaches now dedicate time to re-recruiting their own kids to retain their roster.

**You earned a Juris Doctor degree and practiced as a law clerk for five years. How has that degree and experience served you in your role as athletic director?**

I use it now more than ever. It helps with understanding legislation, negotiating, and working through some challenging conversations with coaches who are in contact with agents and families. The role of athletic director has essentially morphed into operating like a GM [general manager].

I cannot say enough about the collaborative efforts of our general counsel’s office and senior administrative teams. Given the legal complexities involved and partnering with our accounting and finance offices, along with the president’s office, we would not be able to compete in this new world without those entities supporting athletics. It’s a true team effort at Monmouth.

**How does the House v. NCAA settlement impact your general fundraising?**

We are exploring additional corporate sponsorships to generate new and different sources of revenue. We are scrutinizing our spending within the athletics department and reallocating resources where we can. It is a combination of reallocating resources and new streams of revenue. And then it’s asking our alumni, our community, and our donors to continue to contribute to support the endeavor.

Alumni have also been fantastic in helping provide education. We have former student-athletes in the accounting and finance fields who have been willing to give in the form of education. It’s important to steward and cultivate resources from our alumni and our community, because providing direct benefits to athletes is a new bucket to fill.

**This new model is having a profound impact on college athletics. What do you see on the horizon?**

For the near future, with regulations and some guardrails in place, I think the market is going to settle. Now that providing direct benefits to student-athletes is permissible, Division I programs have greater flexibility in navigating this new landscape to stay competitive.

With that, I do think there is going to be some collateral damage. Institutions may decide to cut programs or drop to Division III. Between mandatory reductions in roster size, enrollment challenges, and the current state of economics, operating a Division I program and staying competitive may be tough for some schools. In the next year or two, I do think there will be some collateral damage.

**Do you have a message you would like to share with the Monmouth athletics family?**

I just want to say thank you. I am grateful for the support from our alumni base, our fan base, and our community. And always feel free to come back to meet our teams, attend games, and visit our enhanced facilities. Monmouth is truly a special place.

College athletics has changed, and as long as we remain true to who we are, lead with integrity, and operate with high character, I think Monmouth has a really bright future. 🍎



# The View from Here


## “Born to Run” Turns 50

In September, Monmouth University hosted a multiday celebration of “Born to Run,” the album that cemented Bruce Springsteen’s place in rock-and-roll history.

Organized by the Bruce Springsteen Archives & Center for American Music, the weekend brought together fans, scholars, and a who’s who of Springsteen collaborators, including current and former bandmates, Columbia Records insiders, producers, photographers, and managers, for a mix of stories, laughs, and rare glimpses behind the scenes.

The centerpiece event featured Springsteen alongside longtime collaborators Jon Landau, Mike Appel, and Jimmy Iovine, plus E Street Band members Garry Tallent, Stevie Van Zandt, Max Weinberg, and Roy Bittan in conversation with Archives Executive Director Bob Santelli ’73, ’14HN. The day ended on an unforgettable note, when Springsteen and the E Street Band, joined by original players David Sancious and Ernest “Boom” Carter, took the stage for surprise performances of “Thunder Road” and “Born to Run.”

Other highlights included screenings of rare studio footage hosted by filmmaker Thom Zimny and walking tours of Springsteen’s old Long Branch neighborhood. An exhibit of Eric Meola’s iconic album-cover photography remains on view in Rechnitz Hall’s DiMattio Gallery through Dec. 18.



Monmouth FALL/WINTER 2025

## Best. Class. Ever.

Monmouth’s Class of 2029 arrived with record-breaking stats: a 3.67 GPA, 1225 SAT, and the largest Honors School cohort in University history. It’s also the most inclusive, with more than half identifying as first generation and/or low income. Proof that at Monmouth, excellence and access aren’t just buzzwords—they’re reality.

photos (from top) COURTESY OF JOHN CAVANAUGH, MATTHEW GELLER

### QUICK HITS

#### A LITTLE HELP FROM THEIR FRIENDS


When the “Miss O’Dell” documentary needed a Beatles-inspired track, the folks from Monmouth’s music industry program said, “Let it be ... us.” Students, faculty, and alumni, led by Specialist Professor George Wurzbach, wrote and recorded “Come Back,” an homage to “Get Back” that plays over the film’s animated rooftop finale. Pretty fab, indeed.

#### STRAIGHT A’S FROM MIDDLE STATES

Monmouth University aced its latest accreditation review by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, earning an eight-year reaffirmation with no requirements, no recommendations, and 12 commendations in such areas as academics, student support, and governance. In accreditation terms, that’s about as close to a perfect score as it gets.

#### RADIO LOVE IS IN THE AIR

Monmouth’s student-run station, WMCX 88.9 FM, hit a high note this year, landing at No. 23 on The Princeton Review’s 2026 list of Best College Radio Stations. The recognition, based on student voting, reflects the station’s mix of new-music spotlights, live shows, and political debates, said adviser and Associate Professor Aaron Furgason ’92.



## Gruden Goes Blue (and White)

Super Bowl-winning coach Jon Gruden has turned unboxing football swag into a social-media sport of its own, and this fall, Monmouth made the highlight reel. In a video viewed by more than half a million fans, Gruden unpacked a stash of Hawks gear (shipped in a box hand-painted by men’s basketball player Quinn Peters), sang the team’s praises, and gave Monmouth football a surprise viral spotlight. Chalk up another W for the Hawks.

## THE MONMOUTH BRAG BOARD

FALL IS COLLEGE RANKINGS SEASON, AND MONMOUTH CONTINUES ITS CLIMB. HERE’S HOW THE UNIVERSITY STACKS UP IN THE 2026 REPORTS.

13

Monmouth’s ranking on U.S. News’ Best Colleges, Regional Universities North list—its highest-ever position. Monmouth also notched Top 25 rankings in the Most Innovative Schools (18), Undergraduate Teaching Programs (20), and Top Performers in Social Mobility (23) categories.

21

Consecutive years that Monmouth has been named one of the nation’s best undergraduate institutions by The Princeton Review. The University also landed on the publication’s Green Colleges and Best Northeast schools lists.

11

Consecutive years Monmouth has been named one of the Best Colleges in America by Money magazine.

5

Consecutive years Monmouth has been named to Washington Monthly’s Best Bang for the Buck Colleges: Northeast list.

3

Monmouth’s ranking among New Jersey private universities on the Wall Street Journal/College Pulse 2026 Best Colleges list, behind only Princeton and Stevens. The University also earned its highest-ever national ranking on the list at 229.



# Human Performance Lab

Studying the science of movement.

Led by Tamara Rial-Faigenbaum, Ph.D. (pictured far right), a specialist professor in the Department of Health and Physical Education, the Human Performance Lab houses state-of-the-art, wireless technology for the study of human physiology and biomechanics. Its fully portable systems allow real-time movement analysis in both lab-based and real-world settings. »TONY MARCHETTI

## ELECTROMYOGRAPHY ANALYSIS

The display shows real-time neuromuscular activity for up to eight muscles simultaneously, allowing students and faculty to analyze muscle activation patterns and examine motor control, gait mechanics, rehabilitation progress, and training responses.

## WIRELESS MOTION TRACKER

This system measures 3D movement patterns during activities such as walking, running, and rehabilitation tasks, capturing data on gait, balance, posture, and joint mobility. Its wireless design enables off-site use, expanding applied biomechanics research into real-world and community-based settings.

## FORCE PLATES

These platforms measure ground reaction forces and movement mechanics during activities such as jumps, squats, and kettlebell swings. This data helps students and faculty analyze balance, power, and performance, supporting injury prevention and biomechanical research.

## WIRELESS OXYGEN UPTAKE ANALYZER

This portable system tracks oxygen use and cardiopulmonary response during exercise, offering real-time insights into heart and lung performance. It helps researchers evaluate aerobic fitness, monitor training adaptations, and apply exercise physiology beyond the lab.

## SYNCHRONIZED SOFTWARE SYSTEM

This software synchronizes data from force plates, motion sensors, cameras, and electromyography into a unified platform that visualizes human performance in real time, enhancing instruction and advancing research across the Department of Health and Physical Education.





# Making Software Safer

With support from an NSF grant, Assistant Professor Weihao Qu is developing a framework to help programmers more precisely verify software.

BY STEVE NEUMANN

Modern software often juggles sensitive data, user privacy, and performance demands, all while operating in unpredictable, real-world conditions. In that environment, verification—the process of ensuring a program works as intended—is a critical form of quality control. But for today's increasingly complex software systems, that control isn't always easy to achieve.

Earlier this year, Weihao Qu, Ph.D., received a two-year grant from the National Science Foundation to develop a new software verification framework—one that allows more detailed, accurate analysis, particularly in programs that use mutable arrays, a data structure that can be difficult to test.

We asked Qu, an assistant professor in the Department of Computer Science and Software Engineering, about the challenges of verification and what he hopes to achieve through this work.



## Why is software verification important?

Take a simple program like a login system, which people basically use for every application today. The danger is that it might leak your personal password information via side-channel attacks if the software is not written well.

But to verify that a login system doesn't leak information, analyzing just one run of the program isn't enough. That's why we use what's called relational reasoning—a method for comparing two different versions, or runs, of a program to see how they relate to each other. It's a way of checking relationships between programs or program states, such as whether two security-related processes handle information in a similar way.

So, for the example of the login system, if we can compare two runs of the same login software, we can make sure that, no matter what the input is, whether the password is 100 digits or just two digits, the difference between the running time of the two runs is always zero or small. That consistency means the software is invulnerable to side-channel attacks. In other words, it will not leak your personal information.

## How will you be using this grant to improve the software verification process?

There is already a lot of research in relation to software verification, and I have done some research work in this area. However, there is still one specific area that is particularly challenging, and that is programs that use mutable arrays.

Arrays are places that store data in a database in an ordered way. They're important for verification because many programs use them to hold and manipulate information like lists of numbers, names, or other records.

Once a regular array is created, it doesn't change, so it's easier for testers to check that the program works correctly. But mutable arrays can change as the program runs, which makes verification more challenging.

Software testers have to consider not just the initial setup of the array but also every possible way it might change over time. This means more scenarios to check, more chances for mistakes, and a greater need to carefully track how the data moves so that the program can be trusted to work correctly.

My framework captures the behavior of individual array elements instead of treating arrays as a whole, which leads to significantly more detailed and accurate verification results.

## What does that look like in practice?

When a programmer writes a program, we can add something to the programming language called a type system, which is like a set of rules that helps keep information organized and consistent so that a program runs smoothly. It makes sure numbers are treated like numbers, words are treated like text, and so on.

If a programmer uses mutable arrays and their program doesn't clearly state what kind of data belongs inside, the type system can suggest or automatically fill in the missing information. A type system is valuable because it guides the process of keeping data safe and consistent, reducing error and making complex programs easier to verify.

But I developed a type system where a programmer has to follow its rules as specified in the system. So, if they write something that does not follow my rule, then the program won't run. If they do follow the rules I define in the system, then the program will be verified, and it's safe to run.

## What is the end goal, or deliverable, of your project? Is it a product or a method that other organizations can use?

The end goal is a product, a piece of software, that people can buy. But it's also a theory that can guide people to explore relational software verification for aspects of programming beyond mutable arrays, which is just one aspect of software programming. ☯





# The Art of the Everyday

Kristin Bluemel's new book uncovers how women wood engravers in Depression-era Britain used a humble craft to carve out space for modern art—and for themselves.

BY BREANNE MCCARTHY

Over a decade ago, Kristin Bluemel found herself wandering down an unexpected rabbit hole. A professor of English who specializes in 20th-century British literature, children's literature, and book history, Bluemel had been curious about what children in Britain were reading during the interwar years of the Great Depression when she came across a book full of enchanting wood-engraved illustrations depicting quaint countryside scenes. While flipping through it, a short passage caught her attention. It credited three women wood engravers—Gwen Raverat, Agnes Miller Parker, and Joan Hassall—as leading innovators of the art form.

“It sparked my interest, because ... by the Depression, women had gone to college, had gone to art school, but it was very hard for women to launch professional careers. Yet here are these women who, for their generation, are mentioned in the literature as being the exemplars of a popular trend,” says Bluemel. “And I thought, ‘Women haven’t been acknowledged broadly as leading the forefront of any kind of art, ever.’”

The idea that these women were recognized in their own time as cultural leaders, using wood engravings in children's books, poetry collections, nature guides, and classic fiction to shape British culture, captured Bluemel's imagination. That spark grew into years of research, culminating this winter in her new book, “Enchanted Wood: Engraving a Place for Women Artists in Rural Britain.”

## REVIVING A LOST ART

Wood engraving—a painstaking process of carving images into the hard end grain of wood blocks, inking them, and pressing them onto paper—was perfected in the late 1700s by British artist Thomas Bewick. His breakthrough allowed for fine detailing and, more importantly, made it possible to print images and text together on the page at the same time. This made illustrated books dramatically cheaper and more accessible to the growing middle and lower classes.

By the late 1800s, however, his technique had nearly vanished with the rise of photography and industrial printing. Wood engraving retreated to elite private presses, valued mainly for its ornate, decorative qualities. Then, during the Depression, a curious thing happened: A new generation of rural women artists revived and popularized Bewick's technique. They turned away from the high-style aesthetic of the private presses and instead returned to a form that could reach a wider audience.

That accessibility, Bluemel says, made it a “surprisingly modern medium,” and one that allowed women living in rural areas to work professionally from home at a time when few female artists could earn a living. “They weren’t doing fancy portraits or oil paintings—they were doing these little, humble, everyday artworks for books ... and they were commercially successful,” says Bluemel. “They found

a way to do their art in mass-distributed, mass-marketed trade books, which were priced for the people.”

## THE ‘CULT OF THE COUNTRYSIDE’

What made this movement especially interesting was that these highly trained women lived scattered across rural Britain, far from metropolises like London. Their work began in small towns and villages and made its way into urban markets—the reverse of the usual artistic flow.

Not only that, their engravings—of birds, fields, and farmlands—were expressions of a shared and intentional effort to celebrate rural life at a time when industrialization was rampant and the pace of modern life seemed to be reshaping traditional values. “During the ‘cult of the countryside’ between the two world wars, people in England became fixated on anything having to do with the countryside,” says Bluemel. “Which is weird, because England was the first nation to industrialize ... so almost in reaction to that, in the ’30s, there was an idealization of the countryside.”

Bluemel argues that this revival also invites feminist interpretations like her own: By reclaiming an old technique and modernizing it, these women gave artistic value to ordinary life and the rural experience at a time of economic crisis and social upheaval. “It’s interesting that this kind of illustration is progressive or modern or experimental in the eyes of the art historians, and yet most people look at it and they say, ‘Oh, how quaint, how sweet, how old-fashioned,’” she says. “So, it’s both progressive and old-fashioned; it’s new and it’s old; it’s modern and it’s antique.”

## RECLAIMING RURAL MODERNITY

Bluemel's fascination with these engravers wasn't just academic. Raised in small-town New England, she understands the pull of the countryside and the misconceptions that often surround it. “I was trying to argue that there was a modern reality experienced by women artists living in the rural places that they loved,” she says. “Nobody gets it. It’s like, ‘You go to a rural area you’re stepping into the past.’ No!”

When Bluemel first began publishing articles on the engravers—including a fourth, Clare Leighton—she met resistance from reviewers who dismissed her premise. “My readers ... said, ‘These aren’t feminists, they’re old-fashioned,’” she recalls. “They couldn’t believe and wouldn’t see in the images of animals or fields and woods that there can be something modern about the countryside.”

But she persisted, co-editing “Rural Modernity in Britain: A Critical Intervention” in 2018 to lay the groundwork for her larger argument—that rural life could, in fact, be a birthplace of modern art and culture. Her perseverance paid off: In 2022, she was appointed Leverhulme Visiting Professor at Newcastle University in England, where she continued her research in the very landscapes in which Bewick once worked.

Soon after, she received a publication grant from the Leonard A. Lauder Research Center for Modern Art at The Metropoli-

tan Museum of Art. “I got a grant from the Met—they bought the argument. They believed it!” she says. “It’s significant.”

Bluemel now describes the engravers’ work as intermodernist, which is a bridge between high modernist art and post-war popular culture—and far from quaint. In other words, these artists proved that modern art didn’t have to come from big cities or avant-garde studios. It could come from women carving birds into boxwood at their kitchen tables.

For Bluemel, that realization still feels timely. “There’s a kind of connection between what was happening about 100 years ago and what’s going on now with AI and everything being so speedy and fast and electronic ... people are yearning for these real experiences,” she says. “Thinking about rural life and looking at pictures that are made of wood and paper ... it is a connection to nature, and I hope some people discover the art and find it enchanting.”



## Power in the Pastoral

Joan Hassall, one of Thomas Bewick's most devoted acolytes, enchanted readers with this delicate wood engraving from the Scottish fairy tale “Rashie Coat,” depicting the moment “the fairy cam again, and telt her to put on the coat o’ feathers.” The work exemplifies the expressive wood-engraving tradition that inspired Kristin Bluemel's forthcoming book, out this December.



# ATHLETICS

FALL/WINTER 2025

20

Student of the Game

22

Rituals: Derek Robinson

23

Sports Shorts

[WOMEN'S TENNIS]

## Forty Seasons, Still Serving

Monmouth women's tennis coach Patrice Murray reflects on four decades at the helm of the Hawks.

BY BREANNE MCCARTHY

When Patrice Murray '82, '89M was inducted into the Monmouth University Athletics Hall of Fame in 2011, she joked about her days as a three-sport standout: "I don't know if I'm a basketball player who plays tennis or a tennis player who plays basketball."

That line speaks to the balance that has defined Murray's life and career. She's always worn multiple hats, first as a student-athlete balancing basketball, tennis, and softball, and later as a full-time educator and longtime head coach. Her ability to achieve that balance, combined with her enduring love of sport, has fueled her remarkable staying power through 40 seasons with the Hawks.

### FINDING HER PLACE COURTSIDE

After graduating from Monmouth in 1982, Murray began teaching at Oak Hill Academy, a private school in Lincroft, New Jersey. While teaching had been her calling since childhood, she still craved competition and got her fix by coaching high school basketball—until the perfect opportunity came along: a full-time opening for head women's tennis coach at Monmouth. →



“My career at Oak Hill Academy is very important to me, and I knew I could still do that and coach tennis ... and it just turned into 40 seasons,” says Murray, who took over the team in 1985.

Over the past four decades, Murray has seen the sport, the University, and the NCAA landscape change. When she began coaching, Monmouth had just earned NCAA Division I status and was competing in the Northeast Conference (NEC). The Hawks then transitioned to the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference and, in 2022, entered the Coastal Athletic Association, where, Murray says, the “level of play has increased.”

Despite rising competition, Monmouth has continued to produce standout seasons and student-athletes. Murray’s teams captured back-to-back NEC consolation titles in 2008 and 2009, posted a 44–22–1 stretch from 1999 to 2002—the winningest four-year run in program history—and have earned NCAA Academic Progress Rate recognition for nine straight years, ranking among the top Division I programs nationwide for academic success.

Proud of her players for the way they balance school and sport, Murray says some of her most memorable moments came last spring. In February, the Hawks traveled to the University of California, Irvine, marking the first time in program history they’d traveled past Pittsburgh. Two months later, Monmouth upset Villanova, 4–3, in what Murray called “probably the biggest win of my career.”

But for Murray, success has never been measured solely in wins and losses. What she values most are the relation-

ships she’s built with her players and the lessons she hopes they’ll carry beyond the court.

“It’s such a privilege for these athletes to go to a great university, get a great education, and play a sport they love,” says Murray. “The experiences they have here help shape them into well-rounded people, and that’s what means the most to me ... seeing our alumni out in the world doing well, happy in their careers, and still looking back at their time at Monmouth with fond memories.”

**BEYOND THE COURT**

Murray continues to split her time between Monmouth and Oak Hill, where she serves as director of personnel and administration. She also runs the school’s Veterans Day Program, an annual event she started in 2001 following 9/11, which has grown into a meaningful schoolwide tribute to military service. In 2023, the Daughters of the American Revolution recognized Murray with the Ellen Hardin Walworth Medal for Patriotism for her work running the program.

From her Hall of Fame induction to the 2014 dedication of the Patrice Murray Tennis House on campus, Murray’s legacy at Monmouth is firmly in place. But when she reflects on the past four decades, it isn’t the milestones or accolades that stand out most—it’s the people, the lessons, and the chance to keep doing what she loves.

“You never stop learning. Every year brings different players, different personalities, and that’s what keeps it exciting. I still love it just as much as I did when I started,” she says. 🗨

# Student of the Game

Former Hawks forward Daniel James ’13 has forged a global coaching career, mentoring pros and rising stars alike.

**BY PETE CROATTO**

A career in professional basketball can be a game of global hopscotch, moving someone from opportunity to opportunity like a journeyman with a whistle. Daniel James ’13 knows the rhythm well. Since August, he has been an assistant coach with the Xinjiang Flying Tigers of the Chinese Basketball Association, the latest chapter in a career that has spanned continents.

Basketball at that level can be an unforgiving business, he says. Talent alone isn’t enough; relationships matter just as much. The ties he’s forged through the years, and his persistence, have helped him find his way back to the game through many twists and turns.

James came to Monmouth from Huddersfield, England, by way of Norton College (his high school) in Sheffield, where he played for the U18 England National Team and the Sheffield Junior Sharks, his club team. As James recalls, Monmouth’s then-head coach, Dave Calloway ’91, ’95M, saw enough of him on film to make the trip overseas to watch him in person, and soon after, offered him a scholarship.

Things didn’t go as planned. Two knee surgeries and a partial MCL tear limited James’ time on the court at Monmouth and eventually led him to question his passion for the game. New Head Coach King Rice sensed it too, and together they charted a new course for James. Rice made sure James could finish his degree on scholarship while staying close to the program. He spent his last year watching and listening to Monmouth’s coaching staff, observing how they operated and how they scouted, learning the game from a different perspective. Those experiences lodged deep in his subconscious. He graduated with a communications and media studies degree as well as a foundation that would resurface when he eventually found his way to coaching.

At first, though, James tried other paths—knocking on doors for a New Jersey–based home remodeling company and later working in hospitality in New York



City. At EMM Group, now Catch Hospitality, his job was to make VIP clients feel welcome and keep them coming back to the company’s clubs and restaurants. The roster included CEOs, musicians, actors, and NFL players, but James naturally gravitated toward NBA players. He liked them, and more importantly, they liked him. For a time, he even imagined a future as an agent, one focused not just on contracts but also skills, mental health, and overall development. That holistic mindset, he would find, translated perfectly to coaching once the opportunity came.

His break came when trainer Chris Johnson, whose clients included NBA All-Star Jimmy Butler, called him in to help after losing an assistant. James jumped at the chance, and the experience launched him into player development.

From New York to Shanghai, from the Bahamas to Spain, James forged connections that led to opportunities with elite players. He trained veterans like Luol Deng and Tomáš Satoranský and took on roles with Chinese Basketball Association teams in Shanghai, Liaoning, and Guangzhou. He also spent a season with the London Lions of the British Basketball League and EuroCup. Everywhere he went, James absorbed more about teaching the game. The stops added up to

a global education, one built on observing how different cultures approached the sport and how elite players refined their craft.

He also thought about what he wished he’d had as a young player in England: structure, opportunity, exposure. In 2024, he cofounded UK50 to provide that. The organization identifies and develops the top young players in the UK, pairing training with mentorship and competition. This past summer, his UK50 team stunned world No. 16–ranked China to win the Shanghai Future Star Tournament. For James, it was proof of concept: a pathway for British players that could lead to scholarships, careers, and lifelong confidence.

That philosophy crystallized several years ago, when James worked alongside longtime NBA assistant Phil Handy as he trained LeBron James. The NBA legend had achieved everything, but his hunger to continue improving was unmistakable.

Why, James asked Handy, is LeBron pushing himself? “He’s just a student of the game,” Handy told him.

That answer stuck. Today, Daniel James channels the same drive into his work with Xinjiang and UK50, helping pros and prospects chase their own potential. “It’s experience; it’s life,” he says. “For me, it’s always more than just X’s and O’s.” 🗨

This past summer, James’ UK50 team stunned world No. 16–ranked China to win the Shanghai Future Star Tournament.



# Game Face: On

A Q&A with All-American QB Derek Robertson on fame, family, and the future.

INTERVIEW BY MARK GOLLA

Derek Robertson rewrote the Monmouth record book last season, throwing for 3,937 yards and 31 touchdowns—both single-season highs for the program. Now back for his final year, the Preseason First Team All-American is leading with the same quiet confidence that’s become his trademark.

Case in point: In this season’s opener against Colgate, Robertson rallied the Hawks from a 31-7 deficit, throwing for 506 yards and four touchdowns in a 42-39 win, the biggest comeback in program history. His postgame take? Pure humility: “It’s really a credit to our receivers. ... I have to be a lot better moving forward.”

That’s Robertson in a nutshell: humble, appreciative, and always looking to improve. We caught up with him recently to talk old superstitions, new goals, and why he’s just as steady off the field as he is in the pocket.

**Editor’s note:** This interview was conducted before Robertson was injured in a game shortly before the magazine went to press. For the latest, visit [monmouthhawks.com](http://monmouthhawks.com).

**LOW PROFILE, HIGH PERFORMANCE.**

I don’t like being in the spotlight. I usually don’t even tell people I play football, and when I do, I definitely don’t mention that I’m a quarterback. I love everything about being a quarterback. Both my older brothers played the position, so it’s all I ever wanted to play. But outside of practices and games, I’d rather stay in the background.

I’m not a “rah-rah” type of player. I try to lead by example. My goal is to do everything right and set a standard for how we practice and play. If I’m doing that, I can make sure everyone commits to that standard and it sets us up for success.

**LESSONS FROM THE FAMILY PLAYBOOK.**

My dad always says that no matter the situation, if you put the work in and trust the process, everything will fall into place. “It’s all gonna be good,” he’ll say. I think it’s a great approach to both football and life.

My brothers have always stressed the importance of being a great teammate. They taught me that if you want to lead players, your teammates need to know that you’re all about them and winning. There are different leadership styles, but to be in command, you have to be a good teammate first.

**FAMILY TIES, ON AND OFF THE FIELD.**

Having my older brother Jimmy as the quarterbacks coach here at Monmouth makes what I do every day even more special. I get to learn from him, study the game with him, and prepare for each week together. Not many people get to experience that with family, so we’re both trying to take full advantage of it.

**A VERY PARTICULAR SET OF STREAMS.**

I’m on social media, but I don’t really post anything—I just follow. I’m a huge Barstool Sports guy; their content is hilarious, and I could watch their YouTube videos all day. When it comes to movies, I’m big on the “Taken” series. I can watch those Liam Neeson movies any time they’re on. Recently my roommates and I have been rewatching “Stranger Things” because one of our teammates has never seen it. I think it’s one of the best shows of all time.

**HOME IS WHERE THE HAWKS ARE.**

Entering the transfer portal never crossed my mind after last season. I love it here at Monmouth, and I want to win a championship here. At the end of the day, I want to play with guys I love who also love to play football. That’s what I have here at Monmouth.

**NO BEATS, JUST BALANCE.**

I’ve never been the type of player to do the same thing before every game. A lot of guys have their headphones on, getting hyped to music, but that’s not really me. I like to stay mellow and focus on what we’ve prepared for all week. I do have one superstition, though: I still wear the same girdle I’ve had since high school. It’s all ripped up, and some of the guys make fun of it, but I’ll never change it.

**GAME PLANNING FOR LIFE.**

After my playing days end, I want to be a college football coach. I’ve known that since high school. I love the preparation process Sunday through Friday just as much as I love playing on Saturday. I can’t really see myself doing anything else. 🏈

**SPORTS SHORTS**

**MILESTONE WINS**

Two of Monmouth’s longest-tenured coaches hit the 200-win mark this fall. Men’s soccer’s Robert McCourt reached the milestone with a 2–1 victory over Iona, while field hockey’s Carli Figlio followed days later as her squad rolled past Rider, 7–1.

**BRAINS AND GAME**

Field hockey and men’s golf took home the Coastal Athletic Association’s Team Academic Excellence Awards for 2024–25, recognizing programs with the highest GPAs in each sport. It marks a third straight win for field hockey and second straight for men’s golf.

**PASSING THE OAR**

Olivia Staff was named acting head coach of Monmouth rowing following the retirement of Scott Belford, who launched the program in 2022–23.

**RECORD RANKINGS**

At press time, field hockey was ranked No. 11 in the NFCA poll and football was No. 9 in the AFCA poll—all-time highs for both programs.





# PROFIT *with a* PURPOSE

Through Monmouth University's Center for Entrepreneurship, the next generation of innovators is learning that success can create value *and* drive change.

BY STEVE NEUMANN  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVIDE BONAZZI



The past 15 years have seen a fundamental shift in the business landscape. Young adults ages 18 to 24 now show the highest entrepreneurial activity in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, many of today's young founders are driven by more than profit: They want their work to make a difference.

This rising generation of entrepreneurs is balancing two bottom lines: financial success and impact. Increasingly, research shows those goals reinforce one another rather than compete. Studies of purpose-driven companies have found that they grow at more than three times the rate of their peers and report notably higher levels of innovation<sup>2</sup>—evidence that purpose is not a trade-off but a competitive advantage.



For Alison Gilbert, director of Monmouth University's Center for Entrepreneurship, this convergence of purpose and performance defines the future of entrepreneurship. It's what she calls "impact-driven entrepreneurship."

"At the center, we start by asking, 'What impact are you uniquely positioned to create? What authentically drives you?'" explains Gilbert. "When entrepreneurs answer those questions, they uncover two essential ingredients: their intrinsic motivation and their deeper sense of purpose—their 'why.' These become the fuel that sustains the ups and downs of the entrepreneurial journey. Ventures evolve, ideas pivot, and strategies shift, but when founders are grounded in purpose, they have what they need to adapt, persevere, and build something both impactful and sustainable."

For those who work with the center, the journey often begins with the E-Lab, a hands-on venture-development program that helps aspiring founders transform ideas into viable business opportunities. The program starts with the Leadership Compass, a guided process of learning and reflection that Gilbert developed to help entrepreneurs identify their personal mission, vision, and strengths.

"From this foundation of self-knowledge, the center helps founders translate their purpose into a viable business," she says.

Over time, that compass has guided many Monmouth entrepreneurs as they begin translating their ideas into action. For some, that means discovering where their passions meet real needs; for others, it's learning how purpose can strengthen a business idea. In every case, the process begins with reflection and a willingness to start.

#### A PIVOT REVEALS PURPOSE

For Alexandria Young '26, work in the E-Lab helped transform a vague interest into a clear calling.

Young, whose father owns a laundromat business, arrived at Monmouth with only a passing interest in entrepreneurship. But after her father encouraged her to listen to "Rich Dad, Poor Dad"—a book that challenges conventional ideas about work, wealth, and independence—she was inspired to create something of her own.

During the spring semester of her freshman year, she came up with the idea for a body care business and turned to Monmouth's Center for Entrepreneurship for guidance. After completing the foundational Leadership Compass work in the E-Lab, Young realized her concept didn't align with what really inspired her.

That self-discovery sparked a new idea: Dialeco, a virtual language-immersion platform that connects learners with native speakers to improve conversational skills through authentic practice. The inspiration was deeply personal. Although her mother is from Panama, Young and her sisters had never learned Spanish. "I wanted to connect with my family, to be able to speak to my grandparents," she says. "I've always been surrounded by the language, but I never actually knew what they were saying."

With the center's help, Young refined her concept while also collaborating with one of Associate Professor Amanda Stojanov's communications classes on the platform's user interface and experience design. Young later pitched Dialeco at HawkTank, the center's annual business pitch competition, where she was a finalist, and from there she was accepted into the National Science Foundation's Innovation Corps (I-Corps) program, which provides mentorship and funding for early-stage ventures to do customer discovery. Most recently, she completed a New York City accelerator program and is pursuing seed funding to bring her idea to market. Now in her senior year, Young is preparing to launch Dialeco upon graduation, the result of three years of sustained development and support since her freshman year.

"Alexandria's story is a great example of impact-driven entrepreneurship," says Gilbert. "Through reflection, she discovered

**"Ventures evolve, ideas pivot, and strategies shift, but when founders are grounded in purpose, they have what they need to adapt, persevere, and build something both impactful and sustainable."**

what truly drives her. Dialeco isn't just about language learning—it's also preserving cultures and connecting generations. She's starting with Spanish, and the platform can eventually expand to other languages and dialects. It has a scalable model, addresses a market opportunity, and creates impact."

#### A DETOUR LEADS TO DISCOVERY

Alexander Kalina '25, who graduated last May with a bachelor's degree in biology and molecular cell physiology, took a less direct route to entrepreneurship. He entered Monmouth planning to pursue a Ph.D. and a research career in pharmaceuticals, but midway through college, he began to rethink that path.

During a sophomore-year internship in global drug development with Novartis, Kalina gained firsthand insight into how new medicines move through clinical trials, discovering a major obstacle: patient recruitment. Roughly 80% of trials fail to meet their enrollment goals on time, costing companies millions and slowing the delivery of new treatments.

Kalina had identified a significant problem but lacked the entrepreneurial framework to address it. So, when he returned to campus for his junior year, he reached out to Gilbert to learn what resources the center could offer someone with an idea still in its early stages. Together, they mapped out a plan for exploring the issue further. That process led to LINK, a digital platform designed to match patients with clinical trials that align with their medical histories and needs.

What followed was progression through the center's development pipeline. Participating in HawkTank gave Kalina the opportunity to test his concept with mentors and judges who pushed him to build on his research thinking with entrepreneurial strategy. Winning first place solidified his confidence to keep building. He then applied to and was accepted into the NSF I-Corps program, where he spent a month interviewing more than 20 pharmaceutical professionals. Those conversations deepened his understanding of industry needs and helped him refine LINK's potential.

Beyond Monmouth, Kalina's venture earned statewide recognition when he



won first place at UPitchNJ, a competition judged by a panel of executives from Nokia Bell Labs, besting student teams from 13 New Jersey universities. The experience, he says, provided invaluable validation.

Now working in a leadership development program in global clinical trials at Johnson & Johnson, Kalina has temporarily stepped back from LINK to build industry experience. He says the long-term goal is still to relaunch the venture, potentially after completing an MBA, when he is better positioned to scale it. In the meantime, Gilbert remains a sounding board as he continues shaping the idea's future direction.

"Alex identified a real industry opportunity, validated the solution through competitions and customer discovery, and now he's setting the foundation for LINK, gaining expertise and experience for building this platform," says Gilbert.

#### DESIGNING FOR THE FRONT LINES

While Kalina is building industry experience before relaunching his start-up, Naja Morgan '24M has been managing both worlds simultaneously. A nurse practitioner with more than a decade of experience, Morgan juggles multiple roles—telehealth provider, crisis nurse, and clinician at both inpatient and outpatient facilities—while developing her health care apparel company, Dark Matter.

Her idea was born from long days on the job. After years of 12-hour shifts and countless wardrobe frustrations, she realized how limited most scrubs were: either functional or flattering, but never both. She wanted to change that by designing apparel that's comfortable, breathable, and moves with the wearer, yet still "looks cute," as she puts it. Nursing is hard work, she says, and even a small confidence boost can make a big difference.

Morgan connected with the center during her final year of earning her master's degree in nursing after discussing her idea with one of her professors, Cheryl Leiningen. Through the E-Lab program and later as a HawkTank finalist, Morgan refined her business plan and pitch deck



**“At the center, we start by asking, ‘What impact are you uniquely positioned to create?’”**

and began shaping a strategy for going to market.

These days, she's working with a New York designer on a second round of prototypes and, with Gilbert's continued guidance, preparing to fundraise for a 2026 launch. Gilbert meets regularly with her for coaching and accountability sessions—support that Morgan says has been crucial as she balances a demanding clinical career with business development.

Morgan's story illustrates how impact grows from front-line experience, turning daily frustrations in health care into product innovation.

"Naja is applying her domain expertise to create a business that supports the people who spend their days supporting everyone else," says Gilbert. "That's building for impact."

#### THE BIGGER PICTURE

What unites Young, Kalina, and Morgan is how they each used Monmouth's Center for Entrepreneurship to turn personal insight into purposeful innovation, and through the center's mentorship, found a way to turn that spark into something bigger: ventures that create both value and impact.

That balance is what the center strives to cultivate, says Gilbert. "What I'm seeing now is that most are already thinking about impact," she notes. "The center's role is helping entrepreneurs channel that intention into action to create the businesses they envision."

That approach works because it meets entrepreneurs where they are, whether they're still exploring an idea or actively building toward launch, and supports them through each stage of development. With entrepreneurs from across disciplines participating, the center is helping aspiring founders pair their purpose with entrepreneurial skills—and, in the process, positioning Monmouth as an emerging hub for impact-driven entrepreneurship. 📍



# CANCER PICKED THE WRONG GIRL

Twice diagnosed before age 22, Alayna Riozzi-Bodine refused to back down, transforming her fight into a mission that's reshaping care for other young patients.

BY MOLLY PETRILLA



**I**f you saw 17-year-old Alayna Riozzi-Bodine in the summer of 2021, she was probably running, swimming, or otherwise in motion.

Her days started with two hours of triathlon training at dawn. Then she clocked in for a 9-to-6 beach lifeguarding shift and two rigorous staff workouts, followed by varsity volleyball practice at night. →



Even the most seasoned athlete would have been exhausted. So, when Alayna felt depleted—worn out to a point she’d never experienced before—everyone assured her it was normal, and she just kept going.

She flew to Milwaukee that August for the USA Triathlon National Championships, but it wasn’t the fun trip she’d expected. She slept in her hotel room all day, emerging only to eat or train. After finishing the race, she turned to her dad, who had come to cheer her on. “I feel like I’m dying,” she told him.

“I just can’t explain the fatigue that I was feeling,” she remembers now. “I really felt like my body was shutting down.”

It was exactly one month later, the night before her senior year of high school began, that Alayna noticed the hard lump near her collarbone. Her first week of school turned into doctor’s visits and an emergency biopsy. Then came the diagnosis: stage 2 Hodgkin lymphoma. Cancer.

She was shocked. “My first thought was, ‘Am I going to live?’” she remembers. This wasn’t how her senior year was supposed to look. While her friends filled a group chat with outfit options for their upcoming school dance, Alayna was debating whether to freeze her eggs. Rounds of chemo bookended her 18th birthday.

But even in the toughest moments, she knew she had a choice. “In this situation—my mom and I would say this all the time—either you laugh or you cry,” she says. So, they cracked jokes whenever they could, raced wheelchairs down the hospital halls, and brought home a wiggly new puppy named Daisy.

When Alayna was declared cancer-free in early 2022, they were overjoyed. They had no idea the challenges that still lay ahead—or how many other lives she would impact in the next few years.

**EVERYONE NOTICED ALAYNA’S BEAUTIFUL** hair. It spilled down her back in soft waves or bouncy curls or straight strands, depending on the day. The sun lightened its honey-gold further, weaving in platinum streaks when she spent time on the beach—which, growing up in Shark River Hills, New Jersey, was often.

“My hair was a really big part of my identity,” she says. As soon as she received her cancer diagnosis in 2021, she worried

**“I could look in the mirror and see myself. You have no idea how much that means to someone going through cancer treatment. You don’t feel consumed by the cancer. You feel in control when everything feels out of control.”**

about losing it. This wasn’t about vanity. “I was so scared to lose myself through my treatment,” she says.

With her mom’s help, Alayna became Memorial Sloan Kettering’s first pediatric patient to use a cold cap—a device that chills the scalp to reduce hair loss from chemotherapy. It worked; her long blond hair stayed in place through all eight rounds of chemo. “I could look in the mirror and see myself,” she says. “You have no idea how much that means to someone going through cancer treatment. You don’t feel consumed by the cancer. You feel in control when everything feels out of control.”

As she documented her cancer battle on social media and talked to people at the hospital, many asked how she possibly had all her hair. Very few had heard of the cold cap, especially patients her own age. “My mom and I saw the need for change,” she says. They focused their new nonprofit, the Alayna Jayne Foundation, on donating cold caps to other young patients and spreading the word that this technology exists.

“There’s always a negative side that you can fall into, or there’s a positive side and a positive outlook that you can have,” Alayna says. She continually chose the positive—by sharing her journey, connecting with other patients, and launching her foundation. It has now funded cold caps for a dozen other girls, most of whom have kept all their hair, too.

With her treatments complete and cancer seemingly gone, “I jumped right back into the world,” she says. She went to her senior prom and graduated with the rest of her high school class. She continued to fundraise and advocate through her foundation. And that fall, she enrolled at Mon-

mouth University as a nursing major. It was a career she’d always considered, but her recent experience as a patient had cemented it.

“It made me fall more in love with the nursing community,” she says. “They saved my life. I really just want to go in and make a difference and impact the medical community the way they impacted me.”

But just as everything was settling back to normal, Alayna received her one-year post-treatment scans.

**IT WAS FEBRUARY 2023, THE SPRING** semester of her first year at Monmouth, and the scans picked up a small spot on her chest.

By the summer, it had grown. Alayna’s cancer was back, and this time, she couldn’t use the cold cap for her chemo. She lost her hair—and saw firsthand exactly how important her foundation work has been.

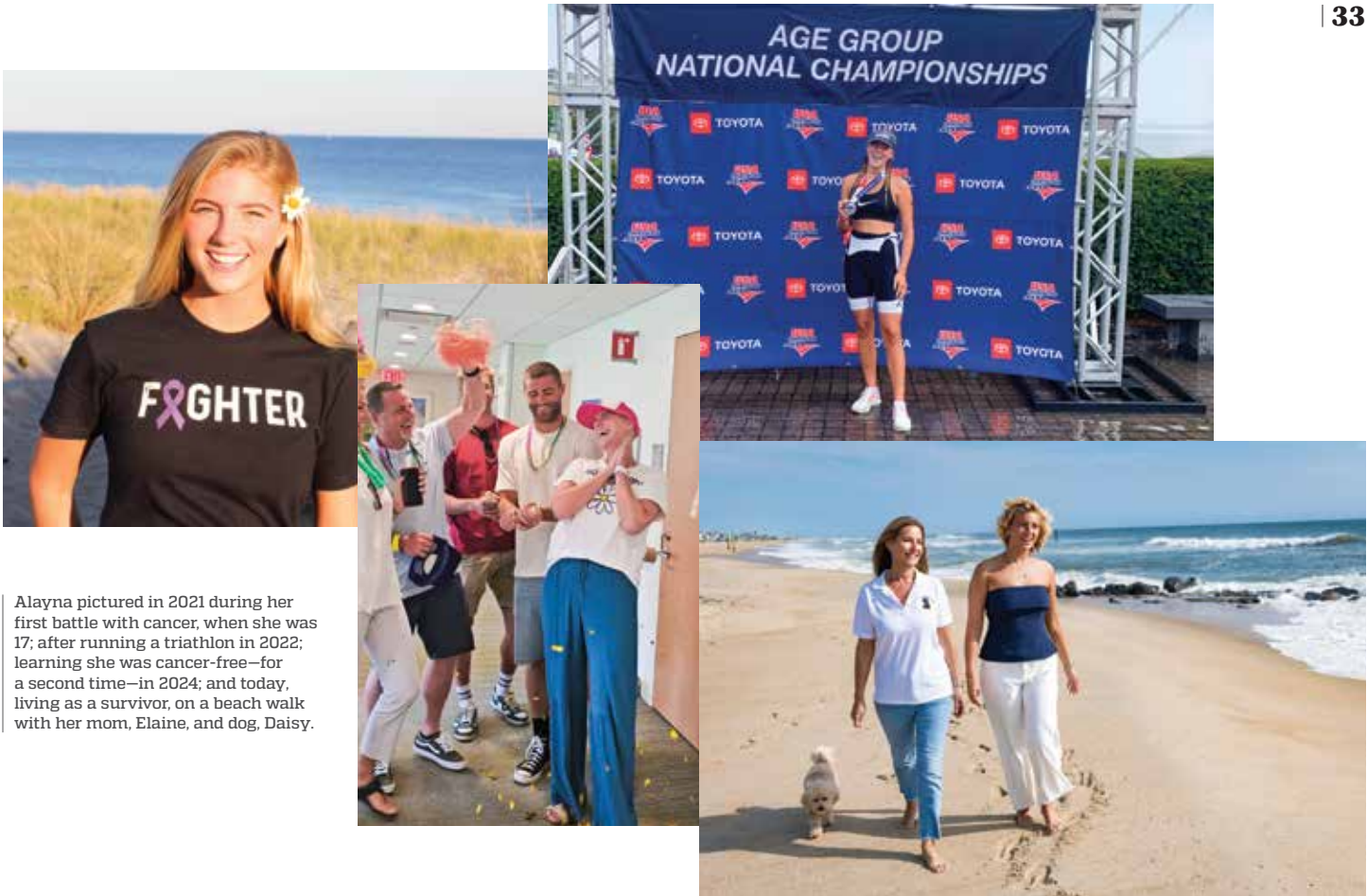
When she stopped responding to chemotherapy, her doctor recommended a bone marrow transplant using Alayna’s own stem cells. She spent five weeks in strict isolation at the hospital, confined to a single room, while her body endured its most grueling challenge yet.

Still, she and her mom grasped for any bright spots they could find. If Alayna had to live inside a hospital room, they would make that room lovely. They hung up color-changing LED lights, brought in custom bedding, and filled the walls with photos and inspirational messages.

Alayna wore pink socks that announced she was kicking cancer’s ass. After shaving off her rapidly shedding hair, she got a new novelty T-shirt: “My oncologist does my hair.”

She emerged from the experience with more ideas for her nonprofit. The Alayna Jayne Foundation now offers hospital room makeovers for other bone marrow transplant patients and sends teen patients and their caregivers on Daisy Retreats at a local cancer respite center. It also awards scholarships to students from Alayna’s high school and Monmouth’s nursing program, supporting individuals whose lives have been affected by cancer.

“Even at that moment in time that she



Alayna pictured in 2021 during her first battle with cancer, when she was 17; after running a triathlon in 2022; learning she was cancer-free—for a second time—in 2024; and today, living as a survivor, on a beach walk with her mom, Elaine, and dog, Daisy.

was so sick herself, she was still doing good and still giving back,” says her mom, Elaine Riozzi-Bodine.

“She has always had that positive energy,” Elaine continues. “She walks in and it’s just like a beam of sunshine enters the room. This has just taken it to a whole other level. There’s so much warmth that she exudes—loving warmth. As dark as some of those days were, we just took the negative and turned it into a positive.”

Things happen for a reason, Alayna says, and she believes she endured these battles to come out the other side and “spread awareness, spread positivity, and just help others. ... Being able to share my experience has really helped me heal.”

**NURSING PROFESSOR MARGIE MCDONALD** didn’t know any of that when Alayna joined her pediatric nursing clinical last year. Alayna’s strong clinical skills and hardworking nature stood out from early on (“I could tell she was going to be one of the great students,” McDonald says),

but otherwise she blended right in with her peers.

It wasn’t until the group headed to Jersey Shore University Medical Center one morning that Alayna mentioned the bell.

In many hospitals, it’s tradition for pediatric cancer patients to ring a wall-mounted bell when they finish their treatment—a tangible way to celebrate the unseeable. But on one of her visits to Jersey Shore UMC, Alayna had noticed that there wasn’t a bell. So, the Alayna Jayne Foundation donated one in 2023.

This past April, Alayna was back on that same hospital floor, a year out from her bone marrow transplant. It was the final day of her clinical rotation there. With her blond hair now short and curly as it grows back in—a different texture than before for a changed Alayna—she rang the bell, this time as a budding nurse rather than a patient.

She’d kept up with her coursework even as she battled cancer for a second time, and she’s still slated to graduate with her original nursing cohort next spring. “My schoolwork became an outlet for me look-

ing toward the future and seeing a life after cancer,” she says. “I know my future is going to be as a nurse helping others, and I’m so excited to be in that role soon.”

McDonald has no doubt that she’ll excel. “No one can understand the lived experience of a patient unless they’ve actually lived it themselves,” she says. “There’s just a different level of understanding and compassion that comes with that.”

In July, for the first time in four years, Alayna passed the one-year mark of being cancer-free. She was back to lifeguarding at the beach a few months after her transplant and spent this past summer there too. In May, she traveled across Italy, first with her family, and then as part of a six-week study abroad program through Monmouth. She’s even begun training for another triathlon.

“I am in a great place, but I do want people to know that cancer doesn’t end when you finish treatment or get the words that you’re cancer-free,” she says. “Cancer stays with you for the rest of your life. Every day is still a challenge for all patients. But every day, I’m just grateful to be here.” 🐾



# discovery in action

From AI breakthroughs to wildlife conservation, Monmouth’s students and faculty are driving a culture of discovery that connects learning with impact.

BY TONY MARCHETTI  
& BREANNE MCCARTHY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
PATRICK KIRCHNER

**MONMOUTH UNIVERSITY** is charting new territory in research—and earning recognition along the way. Recently reclassified as a research college and university, Monmouth now stands among a select group of institutions where discovery and scholarship drive innovation across disciplines.

At Monmouth, students and faculty work side by side to turn curiosity into discovery. The projects highlighted here offer a glimpse of what that looks like in practice, from developing AI tools to help clinicians detect sepsis, to decoding aggression in fruit flies, to pioneering methods for studying endangered wildlife. Together, Monmouth researchers are exploring questions that deepen our understanding—from the inner workings of the brain to the outer reaches of the universe.

## Decoding Aggression—One Fly Fight at a Time

**STUDENT RESEARCHERS**  
SARAH HENRY AND AISWARYA RAGHAVARAJU

**FACULTY MENTOR**  
SAHELI SENGUPTA, PH.D., ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY

Aggression is a fundamental behavior, as universal as sleeping, movement, and eating. Yet scientists still don’t fully understand how it takes shape in the brain. That’s a problem, since abnormal aggression plays a role in many neurological and psychiatric disorders for which there are no targeted treatments.

Because researchers can’t probe human neurons directly, they use models. One of the most useful is the fruit fly, which shares many genetic and neural similarities with humans. Fruit flies also fight, and males do so in predictable ways, the most predominant being lunging, when one rears up and strikes at another with its forelegs. In turn, those hardwired behaviors make it possible for researchers to measure and study aggression.

**TRACING DOPAMINE’S ROLE**  
As a postdoctoral researcher at Harvard Medical School, Sengupta began studying how dopamine, a brain chemical tied to movement, motivation, and mood, affects aggression. She has continued that work since joining Monmouth’s faculty last spring. This summer, her team analyzed recordings of fly fights and found a clear spike in lunging when dopamine-sensitive neurons were switched on, pointing to those neurons as key drivers of aggression.

**CODING THE CLASHES**  
To do their analysis, Sengupta’s students first learned to recognize and score distinct aggression patterns, discerning subtle moves so they could label them consistently. They then used R, a programming language for data analysis, to organize results, run statistics, and generate graphs. They also worked with Fiji, an imaging software, to process microscope images.

**WHAT’S NEXT**  
Sengupta and her team also mapped where these dopamine-sensitive neurons appear in the fly brain, finding clusters in several regions, including one called the fan-shaped body. This hub for motor control, sleep, and sensory processing hasn’t been tied to aggression before, making it a prime target for further study. The team used a brain map to chart possible connections among these neurons. The plan now is to further test those connections in the lab. The hope is that eventually, insights from these fruit fly fights could point to human genes worth exploring as therapeutic targets for calming abnormal aggression.





# Catching a Silent Killer—With AI

**STUDENT RESEARCHERS**

BROOKE TORTORELLI, MIRIAM ABECASIS, ISAAC SASSON, SOPHIA VELANDIA, AND THOMAS FARRELL

**FACULTY MENTORS**

JACUN WANG, PH.D., PROFESSOR OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AND SOFTWARE ENGINEERING, AND  
ARUP DAS, ADJUNCT PROFESSOR OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AND SOFTWARE ENGINEERING

Sepsis, the body’s life-threatening response to infection, is one of the leading causes of death in U.S. hospitals. Early detection is key to survival, but spotting the warning signs can be difficult, especially in high-pressure clinical environments where staff are stretched thin. To address that challenge, a group of Monmouth researchers is developing Sepsis Sentinel LLM, a clinical chatbot powered by a large language model (LLM), an artificial intelligence system trained to process and generate natural language. Unlike general-purpose LLMs like ChatGPT, Sepsis Sentinel will be trained exclusively on clinically vetted, sepsis-specific knowledge. The goal: Provide frontline health care workers with fast, reliable answers to urgent questions when every second counts.

**BUILT FOR ONE JOB**

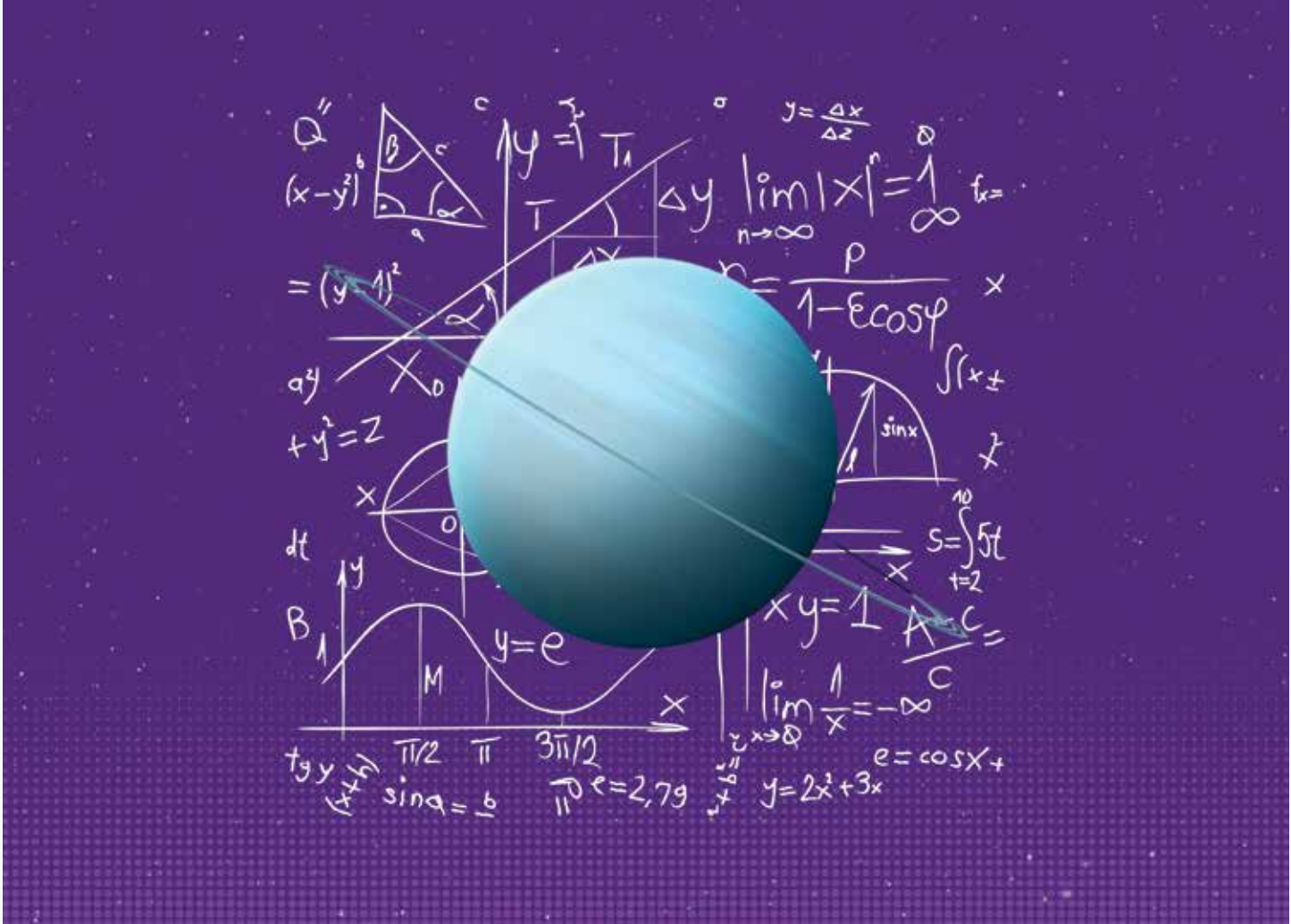
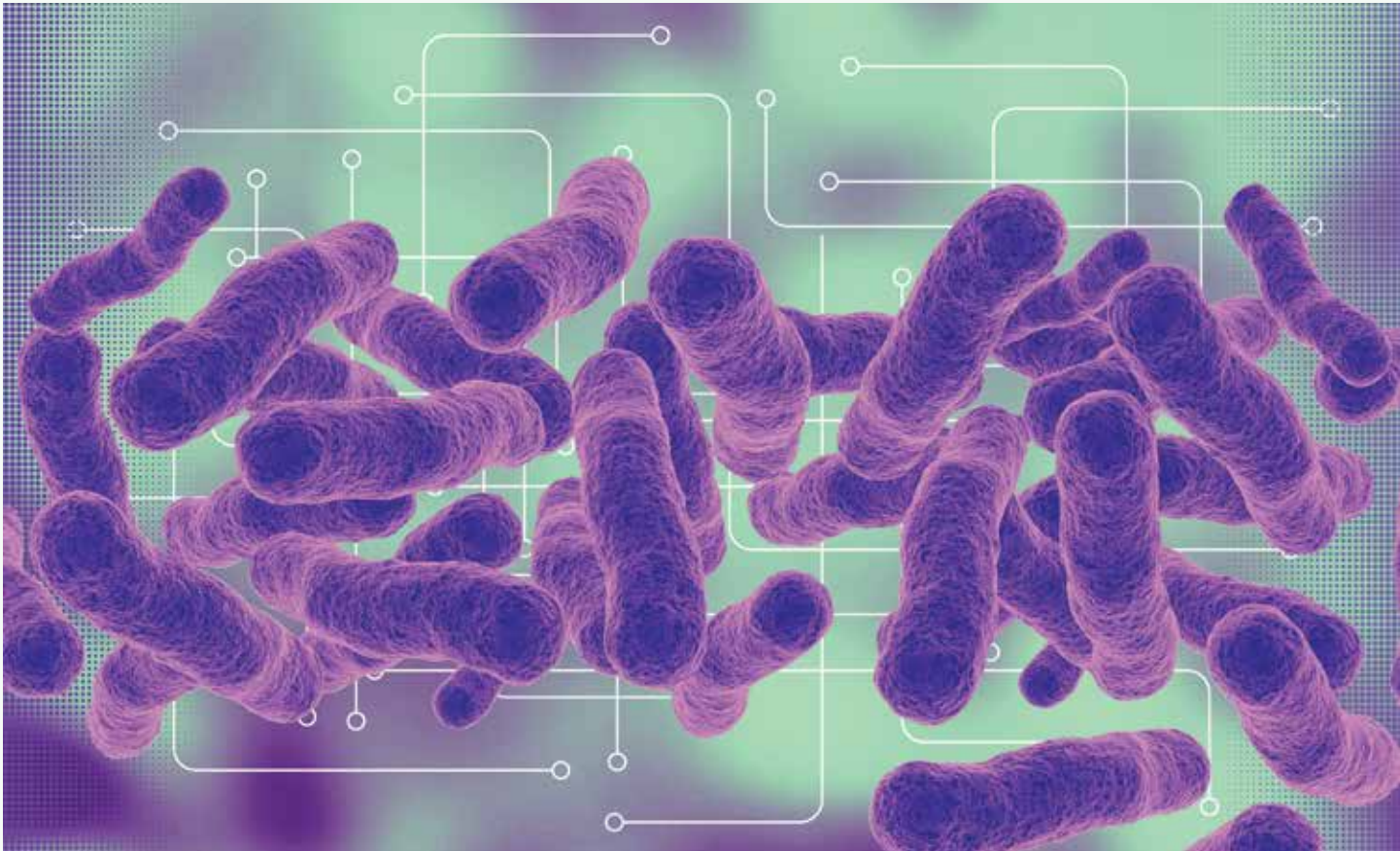
The team began by reviewing the latest medical literature and generating more than 2,500 sepsis-specific question-and-answer (QA) pairs to form the foundation of its training dataset. But before the team could train the model, the members needed to refine that content, eliminating duplicates, reducing noise, and ensuring each entry was accurate and relevant to clinical practice.

**MAKING THEIR MODEL SMARTER**

To do that, the team built a custom, three-step filtering pipeline to clean and improve its dataset. First, team members did a lexical analysis using ROUGE scoring and n-gram comparisons to find and remove duplicate QA pairs as well as pairs that used the same or nearly the same words. Next, they used an AI model trained on biomedical texts to do a higher-level semantic filtering, eliminating QA pairs that were worded differently but essentially asked the same thing. Lastly, they used a separate LLM to evaluate and score each remaining QA pair for clarity, fluency, and clinical relevance, ensuring their dataset was both clean and credible.

**TOWARD REAL-WORLD IMPACT**

Once their dataset is complete, the team will begin training and testing its chatbot. The team’s long-term goal is to provide a tool that can be deployed in hospital environments—ideally, installed right at nurses’ stations—to assist with real-time clinical questions. In the meantime, the team members are also preparing a paper detailing their custom data-filtering pipeline, with plans to submit it for publication.



# Finding a Mystery Planet—With Math

**STUDENT RESEARCHERS**

FELIPE MARCAL, JASON SULLIVAN, MATTHEW WALTER, AND ADINA KESTENBAUM  
(VISITING STUDENT FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN)

**FACULTY MENTOR**

TORREY GALLAGHER, PH.D., ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS

In the 1840s, astronomers noticed that Uranus wasn’t orbiting exactly as predicted. They deduced that some other unseen planet must be pulling on it, and after calculating where to look, they spotted Neptune. Inspired by that astronomical detective work, a team of Monmouth researchers is examining a similar question: If a planet’s path doesn’t match expectations, what can math reveal about what’s pulling it off course?

**BUILDING A MODEL UNIVERSE**

Instead of recreating the full solar system, the team built a simplified one with two orbiting planets, one known and one hidden. Using Python, the team simulated how the unseen planet’s gravity would shift the visible planet off course, then searched the data for clues to when and where the hidden body might appear.

**ZEROING IN ON DEVIATIONS**

The team focused on the moments when the known planet strayed furthest from its expected orbit. By plotting those peaks alongside the angles between the two planets, the team tested whether consistent patterns emerged, and how those patterns changed over time.

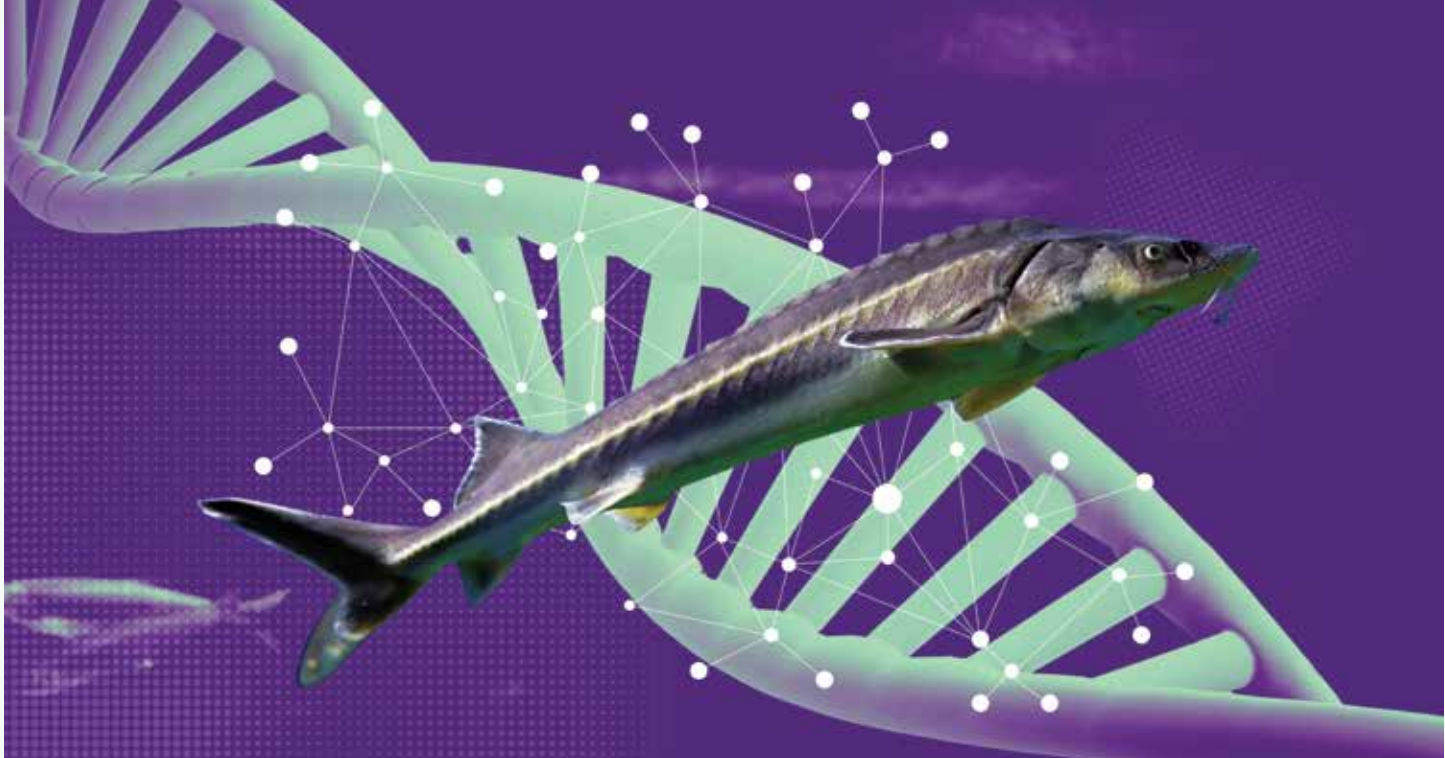
**WRESTLING WITH UNCERTAINTY**

One of the biggest challenges to their work was separating genuine orbital behavior from potential programming errors. Was a planet flying off course because of physics or because of a bug in the solver? Students described the work as a constant tug-of-war between math, physics, and code. That comes with the territory, says Gallagher: “Part of research is figuring out the right question to even ask.”

**STILL SEARCHING FOR ORDER IN THE ORBITS**

The researchers haven’t solved the puzzle yet, but the work is continuing this semester as part of a new math research course, giving more students the opportunity to refine the models, test new ideas, and apply the methods in different contexts. And while the project is theoretical at its core, Gallagher—who jokes that his background in pure math means “applications are literally the last thing I think of”—says that the techniques the students are using could be useful in fields like electrical systems or magnetism. In the meantime, the project is giving them hands-on experience in exploratory research, as well as a glimpse of how math opens windows onto the universe.





# Advancing Marine Research—With eDNA

**STUDENT RESEARCHERS**

HARMONY LIGHTY, EMMA OWENDOFF NAJARIAN (VISITING STUDENT FROM LEHIGH UNIVERSITY), CHRIS REIGEL

**FACULTY MENTOR**

JASON ADOLF, PH.D., ENDOWED PROFESSOR OF MARINE SCIENCE

Environmental DNA—or eDNA—is transforming the way scientists study aquatic life. By collecting water samples and analyzing genetic traces shed by organisms, researchers can uncover which species live in a given place without ever having to cast a net. This summer, Jason Adolf and his students put the method to work on three fronts: testing whether oyster reef restorations in New York are improving habitat, establishing a broader ecological baseline for New Jersey’s offshore wind development, and building a more sensitive eDNA probe to detect endangered Atlantic sturgeon. Together, the projects show how eDNA provides a faster, noninvasive, and more comprehensive view of biodiversity—one that can support conservation, guide restoration, and improve how we monitor ecosystems in a changing world.

**SHELLFISH SUCCESS STORY**

At Manhattan’s Gansevoort Peninsula, Adolf collaborated with Lighty and Owendoff Najarian to study recently restored oyster reefs. The team wanted to know whether the reefs were doing their job: creating habitat and boosting biodiversity. Water samples from reef and nonreef sites were analyzed and compared for eDNA. The samples showed the presence of oyster toadfish and skillefish—two species strongly associated with oyster reefs—offering clear proof that the reefs are working as intended. Since oyster restorations are costly and complex, having a reliable and noninvasive way to confirm success strengthens the case for expanding them in urban waters. The team plans to return in 2027 to see whether reef-associated species continue to increase as the restoration matures.

**CASTING A WIDER NET**

Closer to home, Lighty also led a project examining eDNA samples collected along New Jersey’s coast as part of offshore wind development planning. Traditional trawl nets capture mostly fish, but her analysis expanded the lens to include nonfish species often missed in standard surveys. The results showed DNA from bottlenose dolphins, fin whales, and seabirds alongside fish species, helping to build the baseline data that regulators and developers will rely on as turbines are built. This matters because once construction begins, trawling in turbine areas will no longer be feasible, making eDNA one of the only practical monitoring tools available. The team plans to keep collecting samples at different sites to track how species vary by season and location, building toward a long-term monitoring effort as wind energy expands—one that’s less disruptive and more inclusive than other traditional methods.

**STURGEON SIGNALS**

For Reigel, the challenge was a bit different: figuring out how to improve detection of Atlantic sturgeon, an endangered fish that’s tough to track once it’s done spawning in freshwater rivers and returns to the open ocean. Current DNA tests fail to pick up sturgeon DNA in ocean water, where genetic traces are scarce and diluted. Working with Monmouth’s Environmental DNA/Marine Fisheries Senior Scientist Liz Clark and Associate Professor of Biology Keith Dunton, Reigel redesigned the probe to better pick up those faint traces. Early results show the new probe can detect sturgeon at levels where older methods could not. This advancement could give conservationists a faster, noninvasive way to confirm sturgeon presence across their range—replacing costly gillnets or acoustic tagging with a simple water sample. The team is preparing the study for publication as it continues to test in the field, where its success could pave the way for broader use—and serve as a model for improving eDNA tools for other endangered species.

# Tracking Turtles—With Drones

**STUDENT RESEARCHER**

VICKY O’MALLEY ’25

**FACULTY MENTOR**

SEAN STERRETT, PH.D., ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF WILDLIFE ECOLOGY

Diamond-backed terrapins are declining across much of their range due to poaching, habitat loss, and road mortality. Traditionally, studying these turtles meant catching, handling, and measuring them—work that’s slow, invasive, and adds stress to animals that are already under pressure. Sterrett’s team wondered if there was a better way, and turned their focus skyward: studying terrapins from the air.

**FROM DECOYS TO DATA**

A few years ago, Sterrett’s team proved drones could help spot and count terrapins by running test flights over 3D-printed decoys. This summer, O’Malley advanced the project, asking a critical question: Could aerial photos taken by drones provide enough detail to measure turtles accurately? For her honors thesis, she compared shell lengths estimated from drone imagery with measurements taken by hand, drawing on surveys completed in Barnegat Bay, on lakes near Monmouth’s campus, and with partners in Cape Cod.

**MEASURING UP**

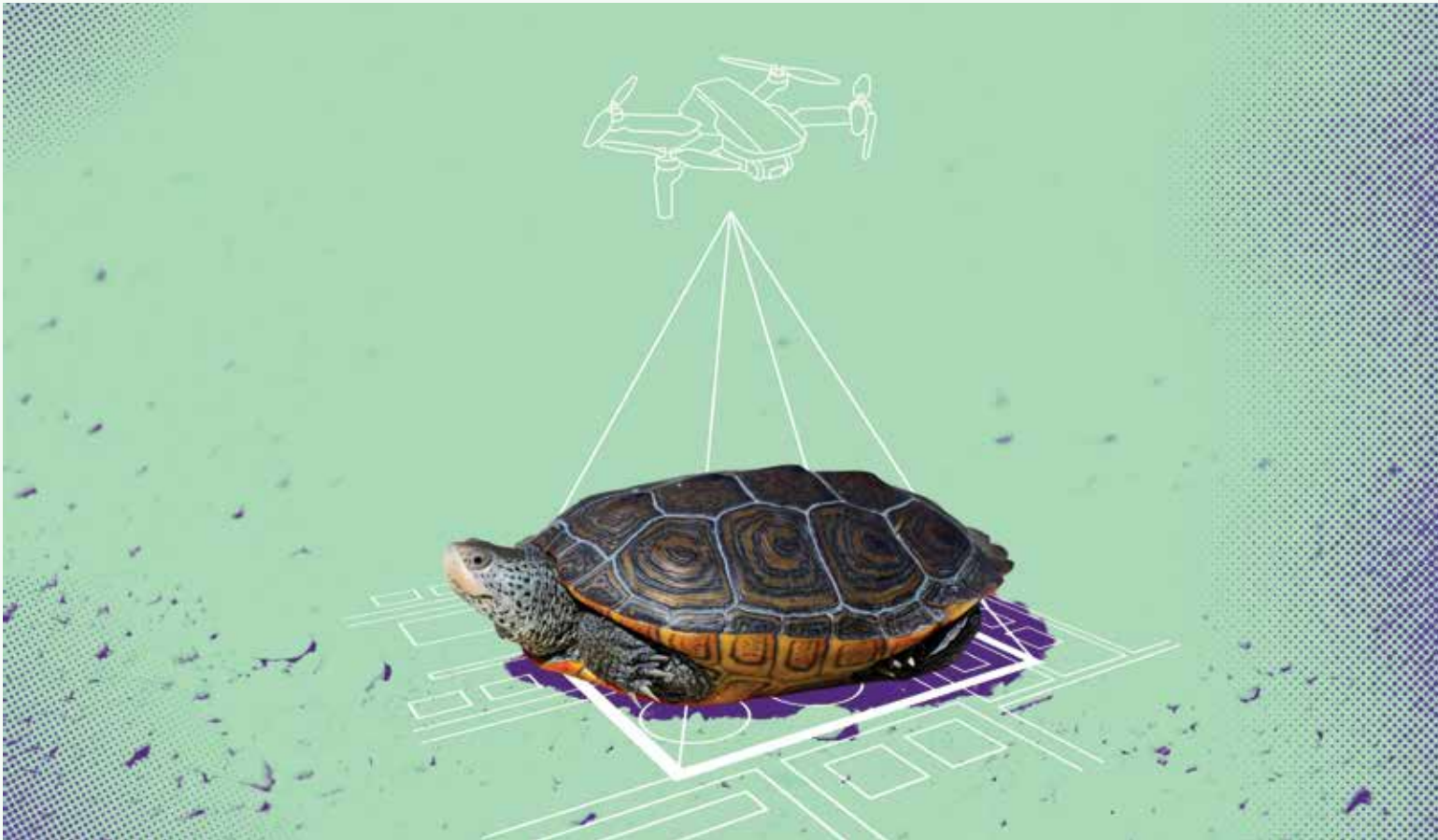
The results were promising. Drone-based measurements came within one centimeter of traditional methods, showing that researchers can gather size data—and, by extension, insights into population health—without ever having to handle the turtles. The team also tested different flight heights, showing how altitude can affect accuracy. Along the way, one drone image captured nearly 800 terrapins gathered at the water’s surface—likely the largest aggregation ever documented in a single drone shot.

**WHY IT MATTERS**

Terrapins are the only brackish-water turtle native to North America and play an important role in coastal ecosystems. With populations in decline, this method offers a faster, noninvasive tool that could be scaled up for terrapins and adapted for other vulnerable species.

**NEXT STEPS**

The team is preparing a manuscript and refining protocols so other scientists—and potentially citizen scientists—can adopt the method. Future plans include testing thermal imagery to improve detection and using repeated drone surveys to track population trends over time. As Sterrett puts it: “We have to learn faster. Drones give us a way to do that.”







# Still in the Game

Two decades after first competing on “Survivor,” Stephenie LaGrossa Kendrick ’02 is back for the show’s 50th season—and still ready for a challenge.

BY RYAN JONES  
PHOTOS BY YVONNE ALBINOWSKI

**I**t’s been a few years since Stephenie LaGrossa Kendrick ’02 came out of her self-described “reality-show retirement.” She was in her early 40s when she got a call from the producers of “Snake in the Grass,” a new reality TV series that debuted on the USA Network in 2023. It had been more than a decade since the last of her three appearances on “Survivor,” and with her kids in school and her husband retired at home, she finally had the flexibility to say yes. It was only a three-day commitment. She had no idea it would bring her all the way back into the game. →



Sometime in early 2026, LaGrossa will appear alongside 23 other “Survivor” alumni when the iconic series debuts its highly anticipated 50th season. It’s a fitting return for the former Hawks lacrosse standout, who has forged an on-and-off reality TV career from an abundant natural reserve of competitiveness, toughness, and willingness to embrace a challenge. Those traits were honed during a blue-collar upbringing in Delaware County, Pennsylvania, where LaGrossa grew up the youngest of five siblings. “With four older brothers,” she says with pride, “I’ve always been a fighter, and I have very thick skin.”

Long before her reality show days, those qualities served her well as an athlete. She was recruited to Temple for lacrosse and started for the Owls as a freshman but eventually decided the Philadelphia school wasn’t the right fit. Looking for a transfer destination, the girl who had spent summers growing up on the Jersey shore found her home in West Long Branch. Among her new Monmouth teammates was Rebekah “Beka” Immit ’02, who will never forget her first impression of LaGrossa.

“Our first preseason event was a timed mile,” Immit recalls. “She was rooming with the track and field girls, and she rolls up in this full-body spandex outfit. In true Steph fashion, she committed to it—she joked with us about it, she was confident, and of course she ran a great time. You knew right away she was just unstoppable.”

Today, LaGrossa calls her decision to transfer “the best move I ever made.” She would go on to captain the Hawks lacrosse team before graduating in 2002, leaving with a double major in marketing and management and a crew of life-long friends. (She and a half dozen or so of her former teammates maintain an active group text.) Pharmaceutical sales proved a good fit, but by 2004, with some money saved and a condo in Toms River, the lure of adventure led her to apply for a slot on “Survivor.” “I was always a huge fan,” she says of the show. “I remember watching and thinking, ‘I’m not a fisherman, I don’t go camping, but between my competitiveness and the social aspect of the game, I know I could kill it.’”

She was one of 20 competitors (out of roughly 800 applicants) to earn a spot on “Survivor: Palau,” the show’s 10th season, which was filmed in late 2004 and aired in

the spring of 2005. She resigned from her job, flew to the Micronesian island for filming, and made it to the show’s final seven; more important, she made an impression. She had just finished training for a new sales job a few months later when she got the call asking if she’d be interested in returning for the next season, set in Guatemala. In a move that she jokes got her “banned for life from the pharmaceutical industry,” she said yes, and she proved adept enough at the show’s array of schemes, alliances, and mental and physical challenges to finish as Season 11 runner-up.

“I knew that she was going to attack that game with the same fierceness that made her a successful Division I athlete,” Immit says. “It was a venue that really showcased her stamina and athleticism, but she’s also a really great communicator, and I think she reads a room really well.”

Reality TV fame led to more opportunities in the spotlight: modeling and event hosting, commercials, even a couple of soap opera cameos. But celebrity, LaGrossa insists, “was never why I did ‘Survivor,’” even though she wasn’t sure what might come next. After the end of LaGrossa’s brief marriage to her longtime boyfriend, one of her brothers offered something that felt like a fresh start: partnering with him to buy a small restaurant and lounge in Philadelphia, in which she invested some of her “Survivor” winnings. They owned the place for nearly seven years. “It was a hole-in-the-wall spot with good food and good music,” she says, and among the regulars were players from Philly sports teams—including a young Phillies pitcher named Kyle Kendrick, who quickly made it known he was smitten with her.

She was reluctant at first—“I was 27 and divorced; the last thing I need is to get into a relationship with a 23-year-old baseball player”—but eventually, love blossomed. Over the course of a few years, Kendrick won a World Series ring with the Phillies, LaGrossa made her third “Survivor” appearance with a short-lived turn on Season 20, and the couple married, moved to Florida (convenient for spring training), and had the first of their three kids. Marriage and motherhood suited her, but even then, she had a hunch she might not be done with her own competitive career.

“Even before we had kids,” she says, “I

**“The first time I was on [‘Survivor’], I was 24, a Division I athlete. Now ... I’m 45. I’ve had shoulder surgery. So, I trained like a lunatic. I thought, ‘If I’m going to blow out a knee, I want to do it now, not on the show.’”**



told Kyle, ‘I’m going to drop it all, reality TV and anything else, because I love you, your career comes first, and I’ll support you. But when you’re done playing and we’re at a point in our lives that something comes around for me, I’m going to take the opportunity.’”

Some of those opportunities came before she was ready: calls from shows like “The Amazing Race” and “Dancing with the Stars,” tempting offers that didn’t make sense while Kendrick was still pitching and their kids needed a parent at home. But Kendrick retired in 2017, the kids were busy with school and activities, and when the offer came in 2022 to join “Snake in the Grass,” the short commitment made it a relatively easy call. A few months later, she was asked to join the cast of “The Traitors,” which debuted on Peacock in early 2023 and quickly became a hit for the streaming platform. For LaGrossa, the show’s success was confirmation: The timing was right, and she was still up to the challenge.

Not long after, she was invited to join the cast for an upcoming season of “Australian Survivor,” an offer that was made moot when producers of the American version contacted her about a spot on “Survivor 50: In the Hands of the Fans.” She waited more than a year for confirmation that she’d be one of the two dozen contestants. “I didn’t find out for sure until probably six weeks before I was leaving, but I had worked out and trained and prepared as if I was going,” LaGrossa says. “The first time I was on, I was 24, a Division I athlete. Now, I’m in good shape for a 45-year-old mom, but I’m 45. I’ve had shoulder surgery. So, I trained like a lunatic. I thought, ‘If I’m going to blow out a knee, I want to do it now, not on the show.’”

She cannot, of course, share details from her time spent filming last summer in Fiji. What she can share is perspective on the very specific sort of celebrity that she’s experienced, largely on her terms, for more than 20 years. Receiving messages from viewers who’ve been inspired by her on-screen resilience. Learning how to handle online criticism from a fanbase that is deeply invested in the show’s participants and outcomes. And accepting what it means to age in the public eye, like when she met a fan on a recent “Survivor” cruise who was just 10 years old when she rooted for LaGrossa on her first season—or the fact that she’s now old enough to be some contestants’ mom.

Age aside, in some ways, she’s still the same woman she was 20 years ago—unsure of what comes next but open to whatever might prove a worthwhile challenge. She’s excited for her children to be able to see her compete, and she loves the idea of appearing on a show that might someday allow her to team up with one of them. Appearing with her husband most likely won’t happen—he’s not too fond of the idea of being on reality TV—but LaGrossa can easily imagine competing alongside her son, Kyle Jr., in the future. As for “Survivor?” She guesses she’s “probably done” with the show that gave her a start and her first taste of stardom. “This is my fourth time,” she says. “It’s like, ‘Come on, how many times are you going to do it?’”

After a pause, she adds, “But who knows? If they do a 60 and I’m still in good shape...” 🐾



Stephenie and Kyle Kendrick with their children—Sophie, 14; Kyle Jr., 12; and Sloane, 7—and their French Bulldog, Kona, and bulldog, Bam Bam.



# CLASS NOTES

FALL/WINTER 2025

47

Launchpad

52

Engineered for Endurance

54

What It's Like

58

Hawk Hacks

»PLUS: Alumni Roundup, p. 46 • Celebrations, p. 49 • Remembrances, p. 62 • In Memoriam, p. 63



[LOOKING BACK]

## The Original Upgrade

In 1969, computers were huge, and so were our expectations for them. This room-sized machine looked like something out of NASA and felt like the future landing right on campus.

What tech first blew your mind at Monmouth? The word processor that spelled the end of your typewriter? The floppy disks that made punch cards feel prehistoric? The Wi-Fi that turned Shadow Lawn into a study space?

Share the future as you first experienced it, and if you've got a photo to go with the memory, even better. Email us at [magazine@monmouth.edu](mailto:magazine@monmouth.edu) or write to Monmouth Magazine, 400 Cedar Ave., West Long Branch, NJ 07764.



# Alumni Roundup

Listed by graduation year.

## 1970S

» **Lucille Maddalena ’71** recently published her third book, “Moving On BY! Harnessing My Sled Dog Team’s Instinct to Win,” which draws on her experiences as a dog sledder to offer leadership insights and team-building strategies. The book uses the sled dog command “on by”—encouraging dogs to move past obstacles—as a metaphor for overcoming challenges and advancing in one’s career while maintaining work/life harmony. Maddalena, an executive coach, wrote the book to serve as a resource for leaders mentoring future leaders; it features a foreword by Peter Davoren, Chairman and CEO of Turner Construction. A portion of the book’s proceeds will be donated to the Osteogenesis Imperfecta Foundation in honor of her grandson, Noah, who is living with the condition.

» **Irene (Rodriguez) Gilman ’73** was elected in November 2024 to a third term on the Ocean Township Board of Education. After working in the district as an English teacher for 40 years, Gilman retired in 2016 and later ran for the board. She previously served as board president and will continue to serve on several action committees.

» **Ron Fazio ’74** recently published a memoir about his

time serving in the Vietnam War. Titled “Years Later About Vietnam,” the book draws from a daily journal he kept during his deployment from June 1970 to March 1971, as well as letters he wrote home and photographs he took. Fazio served in the jungles and mountains of the Central Highlands with the 199th Light Infantry Brigade before joining the 25th Infantry Division as a mortarman at a firebase and later as a headquarters clerk for the 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment. Available at Barnes & Noble and on Amazon, the book became a top new release within its first week. It offers a personal, journal-style account of the war—from the early days of training to frontline combat and, ultimately, helping fellow soldiers return home during the U.S. military withdrawal. Fazio was honored as “Veteran of the Game” at Yankee Stadium on Sept. 10, 2025.

» **Carl Blencke ’76M**, adjunct lecturer in the Department of Management at the University of Central Florida, led two UCF student teams to first-place wins in the 2024-25 Small Business Institute® national competition. Under Blencke’s mentorship, the teams earned top honors in both the “Graduate Specialized” and “Graduate Feasibility/Business Plan” categories for their consulting projects with Florida businesses. These wins mark the 20th and 21st national awards for UCF since the university began competing in 2009.

» **Barbara Hollander ’76** was the subject of a solo exhibition, “All My Life’s a Circle,” at the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art (SAMA) in Altoona, Pennsylvania, on view from July 26 through October 5, 2025. The show opened with a reception celebrating Hollander’s artistic legacy and her past service to the museum, where she previously served as both site coordinator and education coordinator.

» **William Kiss ’77** was inducted into the College Swimming & Diving Coaches Association of America (CSCAA) Division III Hall of Fame this spring. Kiss made an immediate impact on Monmouth’s swim program in 1974, earning 16 All-American honors over his career. At the inaugural NCAA Division III Championships in 1975, he won the 200-yard freestyle and set a national record that stood for eight years. He captured multiple individual titles and helped lead Monmouth to top team finishes nationally. Kiss still holds a place in the record books for his performances in freestyle events.

## 1980s

» **Frank Christian ’81** was honored this spring with induction into the College Swimming & Diving Coaches Association of America (CSCAA) Division III Hall of Fame. Christian earned 12 All-American honors during his Monmouth career and set NCAA national records in the 500-yard and 1,650-yard freestyle events in the late 1970s. His standout performances at the 1978 NCAA Championships helped Monmouth secure a runner-up team

finish and marked a milestone in the program’s history. One of his Monmouth records in the 1,650-yard freestyle stood for more than four decades.

» **Dan Lobdell ’81** was elected to the board of Northeast Arc, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering people of all abilities to reach their full potential. A senior vice president and senior relationship manager in the Middle Market Group for M&T Bank in New England, Lobdell has previously held similar positions with State Street Bank, HSBC, Silicon Valley Bank, and Morgan Stanley. Lobdell currently sits on the board of the International Business Council of the Associated Industries of Massachusetts. He is a volunteer with the New England Healing Sports Association, headquartered at Mount Sunapee, New Hampshire, where he serves on the board of trustees. Lobdell is also active with the Special Olympics of Massachusetts as a volunteer and coach. He previously served on the board of the New England chapter of Breakthrough T1D.

» **Evan Krachman ’85** recently published his first children’s book, “The Adventures of Beatrice Bubbles,” which tells the story of a young girl struggling with depression and loneliness who finds comfort in her imaginary best friend, Stanley—a Laparopicus. Krachman, a full-time product manager in the medical device industry, is also a writer, playwright, photographer, artist, and improv acting instructor. He collaborated with fellow alumna **Allison Posternock ’82**, who illustrated the book. A former human resources executive, Posternock has built a successful career as a working artist. She teaches art classes, creates hand-painted furniture, and works on art restoration and enrichment programs.



## Ashley Zingillioglu

GRADUATE STUDENT,  
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

When Ashley Zingillioglu ’25 entered Monmouth as a software engineering major, she realized technical skills alone wouldn’t get her to her goal of creating edtech tools to help students with autism build communication skills. She switched to English with a concentration in creative writing and added minors in business management, computer science, and communication sciences and disorders. That led to her building the prototype for “Talking with Friends,” a digital storytelling platform that helps students with autism practice socio-communication skills, which she is now advancing at Penn’s Learning Sciences and Technologies program.

### HOW I GOT HERE

When students with autism move from elementary to middle school, they often lose access to digital learning tools that help them practice social skills. I wanted to create something that addressed that gap. With my professors’ support, the idea became my honors thesis, which I pitched at HawkTank—winning first place and helping me gain acceptance into graduate programs at Harvard, Columbia, and Penn.

### CAREER GOALS

My ultimate goal is to launch an edtech company that develops customizable, interactive social stories for students with autism, accessible through websites and mobile apps. I chose Penn for its interdisciplinary focus, talented faculty, and strong entrepreneurial ecosystem.

### MY ADVICE TO FUTURE HAWKS

I would not be where I am today without my Monmouth mentors. An important part of the undergraduate experience is finding mentors you connect with and reaching out for help. They want to see you succeed.  
»BREANNE MCCARTHY





# Celebrations

## ENGAGEMENTS

1. **Victoria Nelli '16, '21M** is engaged to Natalia Amaya.
2. **Ashley Beneventine '18, '19M** is engaged to Timothy O'Donnell.
3. **Stefanie Bigler '19, '20M** is engaged to **Kyle Norman '19**.
4. **Kirsten Lawson '19** is engaged to **Michal Kalisz '20**.
5. **Stephen Boyce '20** is engaged to James Thompson.
6. **Maria Angelina Svinos '22** is engaged to Vincent DeCaro.

## WEDDINGS

7. **Casey Smith '13, '17M** and **Eric Kaighn '13, '16M** were married on Nov. 8, 2024.
8. **Lexi George '17** and Ryan Foll were married on June 13, 2025.
9. **Gabrielle Salvaggio '17** and **Phil DeAngelis '19** were married on June 22, 2025.

## BIRTHS

10. **Stacie (Lieberman) Griswold '06, '10M** and **Aaron Griswold '08** welcomed a daughter, Sadie Anne Griswold, on March 27, 2025. She joins her siblings Penelope and Brayden.
11. **Brittney Lauro '14, '15M** and Joseph Guido welcomed their second son, Liam Joseph Guido, on Jan. 8, 2025. He joins his older brother, Jason, born in November 2022.
12. **Lauren Neyhart '18** and **Brandon Neyhart '18** welcomed a daughter, Kennedy Neyhart, on Feb. 22, 2025.

» **Sue Bulanda '87M** earned first place in her category in the Dog Writers Association of America contest for her latest book, “The Business of Dog Training: How to Succeed as a Professional Dog Trainer.” A certified animal behavior consultant since 1961, Bulanda has worked as a search-and-rescue dog trainer and handler since 1981. She currently serves as head trainer of the Phoenixville Fire Department K-9 Search & Rescue Unit in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania.

» Pinnacle Associates, Ltd. recently announced that **Henry D. Mercer, III '87, '17HN** has been appointed chief investment officer of Withum Wealth Management, a firm co-founded by Pinnacle to provide personalized investment solutions and financial guidance to individuals, families, and institutions. Mercer brings more than 45 years of investment management experience to the role. He previously founded Mercer Capital Advisers, Inc., serving as president until 2022, and earlier in his career was president and founding partner of Mercer, Bokert, Buckman & Reid, Inc. His career began in 1979 at Tucker, Anthony, and R.L. Day in New York. A dedicated Monmouth University alumnus and longtime supporter, Mercer has served on the University’s Board of Trustees since 2011, was elected chairman from 2014 to 2017, and now holds the title of Trustee Emeritus.

» **Kathy L. Armstrong '88** retired after 46 years of service in nursing at Hackensack Meridian Health–Bayshore Medical Center.

» **Salvatore “Sal” Caccavale '88** has been elected to a two-year term as chair of the American Bus Association’s Bus Industry Safety Council (BISC), which

offers educational and networking opportunities to its 300 member companies in the motor coach industry. Caccavale is the corporate safety and training director for Martz Bus in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and has more than 38 years of experience in environmental, health, safety, and security. He is the author of “A Basic Guide to RCRA: Understanding Solid and Hazardous Waste Management,” and a recipient of the National Safety Council’s Distinguished Service to Safety Award.

» **Kim Cuny '88**, who taught at Monmouth from 1998 to 2003, has been honored with the 2025 University of North Carolina Thomas Undergraduate Research Mentor Award. A communication scholar whose work explores storytelling and disability activism, Cuny has guided numerous undergraduate students through coursework, independent studies, and internships. Cuny also received the University Teaching and Learning Commons’ 2021 Anna Maria Grove Award for Teaching Excellence and the 2018 College of the Arts and Sciences Teaching Award.

» **Sigalit “Siggy” Flicker '89** was recently appointed to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council. Flicker is a former television personality, influencer, and relationship expert.

## 1990s

» **Amy Bauer-Sinicin '91, '96M** recently earned her Doctor of Business Administration in Accounting from West Virginia University, fulfilling a lifelong



dream of achieving a terminal degree. Since January 2023, she has served as an assistant professor of accounting at Mercer County Community College following a 30-plus-year career in industry.

» **Tom Condone '94** was recently named chief executive officer of US Youth Soccer, the largest youth sports organization in the country. He had served as interim CEO since February and previously held senior roles within the organization, including chief soccer officer and director of sport development. Condone's extensive background in youth soccer includes leadership positions at the Alabama and Tennessee State Soccer Associations. In his new role, he will guide US Youth Soccer through a dynamic era of growth and innovation in the sport.

» **Al-Rahim Burke '98** is the founder and owner of Pro Sé Boxing & Athletics, a fast-growing boxing and fitness brand, and serves as head of the World Boxing Bureau (WBB), an international professional boxing sanctioning body. He also created the Pro Sé Mobile Boxing Unit, a one-of-a-kind mobile gym bringing boxing and fitness to underserved communities. Burke's entrepreneurial ventures are built on a mission to promote fitness, mental resilience, and empowerment through the sport of boxing.

» **Veronica Scarpellino '99** recently published her second book, "Second Draft: Rewrite Your Midlife Career With Creative Intelligence," a practical guide that helps midlife professionals harness creativity, emotional intelligence, and strategic action to navigate career transitions and design a more purposeful next chapter. A certified execu-

tive coach and creative thought partner, Scarpellino has more than 20 years of experience helping clients navigate transitions and bring their ideas to life. She developed the Creative Intelligence (CQ) framework to support professionals in managing complexity and thriving in times of change.

2000s

» **Daniel Gizzi '00** was recently honored for his achievements in technology services for higher education with inclusion in "Marquis Who's Who," announced April 19, 2024. Selection for this prestigious publication is based on career accomplishments, leadership, visibility, and prominence in a given field. Gizzi is currently owner and managing director of CyberGlobal North Carolina, a leading provider of advanced cybersecurity solutions. His 20+ year career spans sales and marketing leadership in both the education and corporate sectors. Prior to founding CyberGlobal, he served in leadership roles at Willo Labs, Magic EdTech, Fisher Technology, Learning Tribes, Partner in Publishing, McGraw-Hill Higher Education, and Pearson Education. He remains active in the field as a change agent in cybersecurity and a mentor to emerging professionals.

» **Craig Jeremiah '00** was recently promoted to chief of police for the Manville Police Department in Manville, New Jersey. He began his law enforcement career in 1998 and has held roles including patrol officer, field training officer, DARE officer, patrol sergeant,

administrative lieutenant, and deputy chief.

» **Melissa LaPlaga St. Angelo '00** was recently recognized as Teacher of the Year for the Freehold Regional High School District. A longtime English teacher at Freehold Township High School, LaPlaga has taught in the district since 2002 and now also teaches Theory of Knowledge in the International Baccalaureate program. Over the years, she has played an active role in shaping school life beyond the classroom—writing curriculum, teaching in the Extended School Year and summer programs, advising The Octagon Club since 2005, assisting with the Dance FTK fundraiser, and serving as a student government class advisor since 2014, including the past seven years as senior class advisor.

» **Dawn Mount '00** was recently appointed municipal clerk for the Municipality of Princeton. After earning her bachelor's degree in business administration from Monmouth, she began her career on Wall Street but transitioned to local government following a layoff. She joined the Princeton Borough Clerk's Office in 2002 and steadily advanced through the ranks to her current role.

» **Jacqueline-Ann Clark '01M** has joined the University at Buffalo as interim associate vice president of business operations for the health sciences. In this role, she serves as the principal liaison for financial planning and information exchange between the Office of the Vice President for Health Sciences and several key university and partner entities, including the UB Office of the Vice President for Finance and Administration, the Office of the Vice President and Chief Information Officer, the UBMD

practice plans, Graduate Medical Education, and affiliated health care partners. Clark also serves as chief administrative officer for the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, overseeing the school's Office of Resource Management, Facilities Planning and Management, and the Office of Medical Computing. Before joining the Jacobs School, Clark was vice president for administration and finance at SUNY Brockport. She previously spent more than 25 years at Monmouth, where she held roles including budget manager, assistant vice president, assistant vice provost, and director of academic finance.

» **Tony Maglio '03, '095M** has been named television editor at The Hollywood Reporter. He previously served as executive editor of news and business at IndieWire, where he led coverage of the television and film industries and contributed his own analysis. Maglio joined IndieWire from The Wrap, where he was TV editor and senior TV reporter. Earlier in his career, he worked as a senior financial analyst at General Motors Asset Management and as an accounting manager at State Street Corp. in Princeton, New Jersey.

» **Eric Wahl '03** has been named fire chief for the borough of Carteret, New Jersey. He is the borough's first chief to begin his local career in the Emergency Medical Services Division, joining in 2006. Prior to that, Wahl volunteered with first aid squads in Long Valley, Beach Haven, and Long Branch, and served as a volunteer firefighter in Long Branch. His professional EMS experience includes work with ambulance and rescue squads in West Long Branch, Woodbridge, and at Jersey City Medical Center. Wahl became a Carteret fire-

fighter in 2011, was promoted to lieutenant in 2020, and now leads the department.

» **Joe Lizza '05, Ed.D.,** was recently appointed to the Board of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). CAS is a consortium of 41 professional associations dedicated to promoting the use of standards to guide the development, assessment, and continuous improvement of student learning, programs, and services. Its standards and self-assessment guides are widely used in institutional, departmental, and programmatic reviews, as well as accreditation processes. Lizza was also recognized as the outgoing chair for Campus Safety & Violence Prevention at NASPA, a leading higher education association. As an administrator in Rowan University's Division of Student Life, Lizza is a recognized leader in emergency preparedness, planning, and response within the higher education community.

» **Stacie (Lieberman) Griswold '06, '10M** and **Aaron Griswold '08** welcomed their daughter, Sadie Anne Griswold, on March 27, 2025. She joins her siblings Penelope and Brayden.

» **Theodore "Ted" Nycz '06** has been named chief of police for the Carteret Police Department. He began his law enforcement career with the South Amboy Police Department in 2006 and joined the Carteret Police Department in 2009. Rising through the ranks from patrolman to detective lieutenant, Nycz became deputy chief in 2023. Over the years, he has served in the narcotics division, special investigations, and gang units. He holds a master's degree in public administration and policy management from Seton Hall University.



ACCOLADES

1. **Amy Bauer-Sinicin '91, '96M** recently earned her Doctor of Business Administration in Accounting from West Virginia University.
2. **Al-Rahim Burke '98** is the founder and owner of Pro Sé Boxing & Athletics, a fast-growing boxing and fitness brand.
3. Singer-songwriter **Francesca Fuentes '22** recently debuted the music video for her latest single, "I Just Wanna Be Your Lover Again," which earned a multi-week feature on MTV's *Spankin' New*.
4. Lt. Governor Tahesha Way (second, from left) presented the National Association of Secretaries of State 2024 John Lewis Youth Leadership Award for New Jersey to **Zach Dougherty '23**.





# Engineered for Endurance

From Cold War missions to radar systems to international regattas, Ken Boyle '68 is still moving forward.

BY TONY MARCHETTI

At 84, Ken Boyle still rows alongside teammates decades younger than he is. A longtime member of a masters rowing club in North Carolina, he's logged more than 25 million meters on the ergometer and raced in regattas around the world. He's medaled at indoor and outdoor events, including the British Indoor Rowing Championship, the U.S. Rowing Masters Nationals, and the Head of the Charles. "They like old people who can still row," he jokes. "It raises the average age."

Motion has been a constant in Boyle's life. Before Monmouth, he served in the Navy flying Cold War reconnaissance missions as part of a combat air crew, at one point tracking Russian submarines and cargo ships during the Cuban Missile Crisis. After his discharge, he hoped to build on his electronics training and design the systems he'd once operated. By then married with three young children, he realized that wouldn't be possible in North Carolina. His mother invited the family to live with her in New Jersey so Boyle could study electrical engineering at Monmouth.

The arrangement didn't last, and when his marriage ended, Boyle received custody of his two youngest children. Now a single father, he continued taking a full course load by day and working nights to support his family. When money ran out, one of his professors—Derek Barnes, Ph.D., then head of the physics department—secured him a scholarship and a campus job grading physics assignments so he could continue his studies.

After graduating, Boyle took an engineering job at Raytheon. ("They hired me for \$855 a month—more money than I had ever seen in my life!") It was the start of a 35-year career with the firm, during which he worked on radar and detection systems from the Kwajalein Atoll to London. Along the way, he earned a master's in electrical engineering from Northeastern University and rose to the role of principal engineer and deputy program manager.

One project he's particularly proud of is the Terminal Doppler Weather Radar, designed to detect dangerous microbursts near airports. Developed in response to a fatal crash in Texas, the system has since been deployed across the U.S. and, Boyle notes, has helped prevent similar tragedies.

Still, he remembers feeling some imposter syndrome early on. "The engineering world is full of MIT, Caltech, Carnegie Mellon graduates," he says. "And I'm thinking, 'Here I am from lowly old Monmouth.' But I realized quickly I was well prepared. I owe it all to that degree and my professors."

Retirement at age 60 didn't slow him down. A former distance runner—he's completed five Boston Marathons—Boyle

**Asked what keeps him going, Boyle doesn't miss a beat: "To live as long as possible. My children, who are in their 60s now. Health, pride, friendships. To keep my brain active."**

took up rowing in his 50s after a foot injury sidelined his running. What began as a recreational pursuit has become a full-time passion, and he's competed in events across the U.S. as well as in Switzerland, London, and Canada.

Rowing also keeps him connected to Monmouth. Boyle supports the women's crew program and is a member of the University's Legacy Society, which honors those who support Monmouth through their estate plans. "Whatever I've achieved," he says, "it all started with the degree I received from Monmouth in 1968. It provided me with the basis to proceed and succeed."

Asked what keeps him going, Boyle doesn't miss a beat: "To live as long as possible. My children, who are in their 60s now. Health, pride, friendships. To keep my brain active." He's witnessed more than a half-century of change—wars, upheaval, innovation, reinvention—and says he has no plans to stop anytime soon. ☼



» **Jenna Gaudio '09M**, co-president of Vydia, was recently named to New Jersey's 2024 Innovate100 Leaders list, recognizing top professionals driving innovation across the state. Honorees were celebrated at the annual Innovate100 event in New Brunswick, which highlights leaders from start-ups, corporations, universities, nonprofits, and government who contribute to New Jersey's innovation ecosystem. Gaudio was recognized for her visionary leadership at Vydia, a leading end-to-end music and video technology platform. The Innovate100 initiative is led by Innovation+ and supported by organizations including Nokia Bell Labs, Rutgers, and NJBIA.

» **Michael Regina '09** was named an equity partner at the New York City law firm Otterbourg. He represents banks, commercial finance companies, factors, and other institutional lenders in structuring and documenting loan transactions, including asset-based loans, term loans, and other structured finance arrangements, as well as portfolio acquisitions and dispositions. Regina has additional expertise in syndicated and single-lender deals, as well as multicurrency and cross-border transactions. He earned his J.D., summa cum laude, from the University of Miami School of Law.

» **Mike Slisz '09** has been appointed senior vice president and chief medical officer for the Charlotte region at Novant Health, a four-state network of physician clinics, outpatient centers, and hospitals across the Southeast. In this role, Slisz serves as a liaison between medical staff, hospital administration, and departments to help ensure consistent, high-quality care across the system.

» **Steven M Wendruff '09** has been promoted to the rank of sergeant with the Manchester Township Police Department. Wendruff began his law enforcement career with the Point Pleasant Borough and South Toms River police departments before joining the Manchester Township Police Department in 2012, where he became a founding member of the Narcotics Enforcement Team. A current K-9 handler, Wendruff has received numerous awards and accolades including four Life Saving Awards, the Drug Enforcement Award, a Meritorious Service Award, and an Administrative Commendation Award.

## 2010s

» **Gregory Montagnino '10** published the 10-year anniversary extended edition of his novel "Teddy Madison" under the pen name G.L. Montag, which is also the name of his writing and editing business. He began writing "Teddy Madison" as a short story while taking his first creative writing course at Monmouth, where the late Associate Professor of English Maggie Del Guercio called the piece "a gem," which Montagnino says "changed his life." He later workshopped the story as a graduate student in a 2011 creative writing seminar, also at Monmouth. Over time, the piece evolved into a literary historical fiction novel and queer tragicomedy. Outside of novel writing, Montagnino specializes in memoriam and memoir writing and is also an ordained minister who helps couples craft their wedding speeches.

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 56



# Life Behind the Mascot Mask

How four years as Monmouth's Shadow led me to trade the lab coat for a mascot suit and pursue a career in professional sports.

BY MATT FRANCIS '18



Mask On, Mask Off (clockwise from top): Matt Francis off duty, performing with the River Cats, and as Ripcord (left) with Ferrous.

I came to Monmouth as a marine biology major, figuring I'd end up in a lab coat, not a mascot suit. Science had always been my focus—I even worked at the National Aquarium in Baltimore during high school—so that seemed like the obvious next step after graduation. But donning the Shadow suit for four years changed that.

It wasn't my first time as a mascot. Back in middle school, my twin sister's cheer coach saw me hanging around practice and handed me a lion suit. But at Monmouth, the idea stuck. Looking for something different to do outside of class, I reached out to the Athletics Department almost on a whim to see if they needed a Shadow. My "tryout" turned out to be a dry run at an Open House. It went well, and I was hired.

Being Shadow was a blast, but of course I had to keep my identity secret. That made it even more fun and gave me cover for a few pranks. One of my favorites came during a basketball timeout, when I pulled a friend from my ballroom dance class out of the crowd and waltzed her across the court. She seemed to catch on that it was someone who'd been trained underneath the suit. Later, in class, she tried to guess who it was. But I never let on.

I had come into the Shadow job with no formal training, but after my first year, I began attending mascot camp each summer. That's where I learned how to project personality through movement, how to work a crowd, and how to improvise on the fly. More importantly, I met professionals who showed me that "mascotting" wasn't just a job for interns—for a lucky few, it could be a career.

The more I performed, the more I realized nothing made me happier. I still loved science and graduated with honors, but mascotting lit me up in a way the lab never did. Telling my family that I wanted to pursue it professionally was tough, but they understood.

After Monmouth, I set about turning my passion into a career. I interned with D.C. United, performed for the Maryland Black Bears junior hockey team, and suited up as a community college mascot. To pay the bills, I also worked jobs in horticulture, toxicology, and food production. Then came my big break: the Sacramento River Cats, Triple-A affiliate of the San Francisco Giants, hired me as their full-time mascot.

Moving across the country wasn't easy, but the three seasons I spent in Sacramento showed me what life as a full-time, professional mascot was really like. It included everything from school assemblies and community events to rehearsed skits and plenty of improv. Behind the scenes, I helped plan theme nights, manage giveaways, and train promotions staff. The hours were long and sometimes brutal—I once worked three straight games in 112-degree heat—but I learned more than I ever expected about what it takes to do the job well.

These days, I'm back home in Maryland, performing with the Aberdeen Iron-Birds, a minor league affiliate of the Bal-

**"I had to keep my identity secret. That made it even more fun and gave me cover for a few pranks."**

timore Orioles. I play Ripcord, one half of the team's mascot duo alongside Ferrous, a belly-forward comic foil. The two of us play off each other like siblings—he steals the spotlight; I play it cool—and that dynamic keeps it fun night after night.

People sometimes ask how I keep it fresh. The truth is, I wouldn't do this if it weren't fun. Yes, the suit is hot, the hours unpredictable, and fans can be tough. But when a kid lights up for a photo or a crowd bursts out laughing at some spur-of-the-moment bit, it's all worth it.

My dream is still to make it to the majors. With fewer than 100 full-time mascot jobs across professional sports, it's a tough field to crack. I've auditioned at that level and know it takes both skill and luck. Until I get the call, I'll keep suiting up, chasing the next opportunity, and enjoying the ride. »AS TOLD TO TONY MARCHETTI



## Game Day Glitch

Another former Shadow recalls the time things got a little screwy courtside.

Minutes before tipoff at a basketball game, just as "Who Are You" by The Who was about to play, I heard a loud pop and a rattle in the suit's head. I sprinted to one of my colleagues and whispered, "I need help—I think there's a screw loose in my head."

She laughed and said, "I know, Meg, you're wild and crazy! Now get on out there!"

I quickly explained that, no, really, there was a literal screw loose in the helmet. We ran into the wings of the arena, fixed it on the fly, and made it back just in time for my cue with the cheerleaders.

We nailed the entrance. No one in the crowd knew anything had gone wrong, but inside that giant Hawk head, I was grinning from ear to ear. »MEGAN VAN TINE '14, '16M

Read more at [monmouth.edu/magazine](http://monmouth.edu/magazine)



» **Jennifer Renson-Chiappetta ’10** recently self-published her third book, “The Poet and the Magician,” a fantasy-romance epic about two strangers who fall in love while trying to escape their pasts in a world of crumbling monarchies. Her previous works include the fantasy fairy tale “Carousel” and the historical fiction novel “Aoh.” In addition to her novels, Renson-Chiappetta has been a contributor to several FanSided websites, where she has interviewed figures such as “The Walking Dead: Dead City” composer Ian Hultquist and “Mermicorno: Starfall” executive producer and showrunner Shea Fontana.

» **Samantha DeAlmeida Roman ’12, ’14, ’18M**, president and CEO of Associated Builders and Contractors – New Jersey Chapter, has been named a 2025 Distinguished Citizens Award honoree by Scouting America’s Garden State Council. The award recognizes her leadership and commitment to community service. DeAlmeida Roman, the youngest ABC chapter president nationwide, has been a strong voice for merit shop construction firms and previously worked with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network and the New Jersey Hospital Association.

» **Rachel Durante ’13** was recently featured in 201 Magazine’s annual Arts Issue, which spotlighted Bergen County artists. Durante, a full-time advertising professional and artist, works in silk screen and acrylic/oil painting. Her latest collection, “Life in Plastic,” draws inspiration from vintage Barbie dolls and encourages authenticity and self-expression. She hosted her second solo show in New York this past year.

» **Casey Smith ’13, ’17M** and **Eric Kaighn ’13, ’16M** were married at the Hamilton Manor in Hamilton Township, New Jersey, on Nov. 8, 2024. The couple, who met at Monmouth during their sophomore year after being introduced by a mutual friend, both studied psychology, attended graduate school, and are now full-time therapists. They were engaged on Dec. 19, 2021, at the Great Hall, right before heading to Jack’s Goal Line Stand in Long Branch for lunch and to watch football. “We are so happy this university brought us together and we still get to be a part of it in such a huge way,” says Casey, noting that more than 30 alumni attended their wedding festivities.

» **Craig Dolan ’14M** serves as Vice President of Knowledge Management and Thought Leadership for McKesson Health Systems (MHS). In this role, he oversees the development and maintenance of professional and advisory services (P&AS) knowledge bases, as well as business development efforts for P&AS across MHS. He also ensures that MHS programs and services align with the strategic goals and evolving needs of health system clients. In addition to earning his MBA from Monmouth, Dolan holds both a bachelor’s and a doctorate in pharmacy from Duquesne University. He also serves on the board of the New Jersey Society of Health-System Pharmacists.

» **Brittney Lauro ’14, ’15M** and Joseph Guido welcomed their second son, Liam Joseph Guido, on Jan. 8, 2025. Lauro is a psychotherapist and clinical supervisor at Equip Health, where she specializes in the treatment, training, and man-

agement of eating disorders. She was recently featured by Wondermind, the mental health start-up co-founded by Selena Gomez, and appeared on the Full and Thriving podcast to discuss disordered eating and exercise in fitness culture.

» **Emily Smith-Sangster ’14** successfully defended her dissertation, “Think Globally, Identify Locally: An Examination of Identity Expression in Upper Egypt at the Dawn of the New Kingdom,” at Princeton University. In Fall 2025, she will join California State University, San Bernardino, as the W. Benson Harer Egyptologist in Residence.

» **Robert Arace ’15** was recently elected to the Ocean County Board of Commissioners, becoming the youngest person to hold the title since the role was renamed from “Freeholder.” Arace previously served as mayor of Manchester, New Jersey, and works as a principal consultant for a technical consulting firm in Red Bank, New Jersey. A longtime advocate for land preservation and infrastructure improvements, he also champions vocational education, veterans’ services, and civic engagement among young people.

» **Meghan Busch ’15M** was recently promoted to Group Vice President at The Bliss Group, a data-driven marketing communications firm serving clients in the financial, health care, technology, business, and professional sectors. Busch joined the company seven years ago and has steadily advanced through the ranks to her current leadership role.

» **Kristin (Waring) Qualiano ’15, ’22M** was named the 2024 Edu-

cational Services Professional of the Year for the Millstone Township Primary School located in Millstone Township, New Jersey.

» **Adam Young ’15** earned his B.A. in communication with a concentration in sports journalism and now writes and edits for the fantasy sports site FTN. Earlier this year, he was named the Fantasy Sports Writers Association’s Baseball Writer of the Year for 2024, a prestigious honor recognizing excellence in sports writing and analysis.

» **Sean Miele ’16** recently earned an M.S. in Occupational Therapy from Seton Hall University. While in the program, he co-developed an adaptive karate-based exercise program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and presented his work at the New Jersey Occupational Therapy Association’s 2024 conference. He plans to pursue a career in cognitive rehabilitation and hopes to one day open his own multidisciplinary rehabilitation clinic and eventually start a nonprofit organization focused on making occupational therapy services more accessible.

» **Victoria Nelli ’16, ’21M** is engaged to Natalia Amaya. The couple became engaged on April 16, 2025, during a recent trip to Colombia while visiting Amaya’s family. Together for nearly four years, they enjoy attending Gotham FC and New York Liberty games, movie nights, and spending time with their three cats—Millie, Betty, and Auggie. They plan to be married on Nov. 6, 2026, in Long Branch, New Jersey.

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 60



# Excellence. Access. Ambition.

THE CAMPAIGN FOR MONMOUTH UNIVERSITY

One year ago, Monmouth launched the most ambitious fundraising campaign in its history. Today, we are already 95% of the way to our \$175 million goal—proof of what our community can achieve when we come together.

But there is still more to do. Every gift between now and June 30, 2026, regardless of size, will help Monmouth open doors of opportunity, fuel academic excellence, and transform our campus for generations to come.

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*“I never thought college—or Monmouth—was possible for me, but thanks to donors like you, I now have hope, a future, and a chance to succeed.”*

— **KYLENSKY MIRACLE ’27**  
First-generation honors student and aspiring entertainment industry professional



*Learn more & make a gift*



*Save the Date*  
Make your impact during Monmouth’s Giving Days and be part of the momentum.



# The Business of Fun

Kureé Sheard founded Ninalem's Party, a thriving decor brand that's generating Beyoncé-level buzz.

BY MELISSA KVIDAHL REILLY

When Kureé Sheard '12 graduated from Monmouth University with dual degrees in history and political science, a future in party decor was the last thing on her mind.

"I took an unconventional path," Sheard recalls. Following graduation, she landed a job in financial services, ultimately rising to the position of trust administrative officer. But even as she navigated corporate America, Sheard had a side hustle brewing, a baking business called Sweetly Chic. "Baking was therapeutic for me," she says. "I am a talented baker, and it's something I keep in my back pocket." By 2017, she had left finance to open a kiosk in the Freehold Raceway Mall, where she ran a dessert bar and took orders for custom cakes and other treats.

The grind of 12-hour mall days was grueling, and by 2018, the kiosk had closed. But Sheard gained invaluable lessons from the experience that would come in handy later: hiring, payroll, and the ins and outs of running a business. "I'm glad I did it, and I live my life with no regrets," she says. "Everything is a learning experience."

Two years later, when her creativity struck again, she was ready. "I had this idea to do fun and raunchy party decor with a nod to pop culture, which I wasn't seeing in mainstream party stores," she says. "My

friends and I wanted decor that our inner 21-year-old college selves would love, but that would also speak to our experiences and interests now." In August 2019, Ninalem's Party—that's "melanin" spelled backward—launched on Etsy. The brand's ethos is simple: Joy should be unapologetic, inclusive, and reflected in decor that celebrates people as they truly are.

The shop's popularity exploded during the pandemic. "I thought it was a fluke because people were home and that after COVID, business would slow down," she says. But demand for her clever and fun banners, confetti, cupcake toppers, sashes, and more kept growing. For the past five years, Ninalem's Party has been a top 0.1 percent Etsy seller, and the company now sells on Amazon, TikTok Shop, its own website, and in stores such as Urban Outfitters and HomeGoods.

This year, the brand went viral with its Cowboy Carter sash, inspired by Beyoncé's newest album. "It went viral before I could even make a video about it," Sheard says. "The day Beyoncé announced the tour, we sold over 1,000 sashes." That was just the beginning. Sheard's team leveraged TikTok, Instagram Reels, paid advertisements, and "any marketing we could," she says, to grow sales. "There were others selling this type of sash," she adds, "but we were the best at marketing it. I still can't believe its success."

Sheard credits Monmouth—where she was active in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., on the debate team, and on the Black History Month planning committee—for building her confidence and leadership skills, both integral to her success as an entrepreneur. "Monmouth taught me how to be a leader," she says. "I had that spark inside me, but I needed someone to pull it out and hone my skills. If I never went to Monmouth, I never would have had the confidence to leave my corporate job and start my own business."

Sheard was elected to the Alumni Association Board of Directors in 2024.

## How to Throw a Party on a Budget

1 


**SET THE SCENE**  
A banner instantly sets the vibe and lets guests know exactly what they're celebrating. "You don't need to go overboard with decor," Sheard says. "One well-placed banner can transform a space and set the tone. Snap a few photos in front of it, and boom—you've also got a party backdrop."

2 


**DON'T OVERDO DESSERTS**  
"The truth is, people usually only try two or three treats from a dessert table," Sheard says. Instead of overspending (and ending up with a ton left over), focus on a few quality options presented beautifully. This not only saves money, but also provides for an intentional, elevated setup.

3 

**REPURPOSE WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE**  
Everyday items like vases, picture frames, candles, or even books can be styled to fit your party theme. A few DIY touches, like filling jars with candy or string lights, can make a big impact without costing extra.

4 

**MIX UP A SIGNATURE DRINK**  
Stocking a full bar can get expensive fast. Instead, simplify things with one signature cocktail or mocktail. This cost-effective approach adds a personal, thoughtful touch that makes your event feel more curated. Plus, you'll spend less time mixing and more time enjoying the celebration.

5 

**WHEN IN DOUBT, KARAOKE**  
A karaoke machine (or even a TV and YouTube) can turn any party into a memorable night. It's inexpensive entertainment that gets everyone involved. "Guests love the chance to let loose," Sheard says, "and it creates memories far better than anything you could buy."



» **Lexi George ’17** and **Ryan Foll** were married on June 13, 2025, at Highland Brewing in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Asheville, North Carolina. The celebration included several Monmouth alumni, including a few of Lexi’s Alpha Xi Delta sorority sisters. The couple described the day as “perfect.”

» **Gabrielle Salvaggio ’17** and **Phil DeAngelis ’19** were married on June 22, 2025, at Cescaphe Water Works in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The celebration was made even more special with several Monmouth alumni in attendance.

» **Jenn Urmston ’17** is engaged to **Chris Kogan ’17**. The couple, who met their freshman year through the Outdoors Club, quickly became friends and started dating in 2016. They are planning to marry on Aug. 21, 2026.

» **Ashley Beneventine ’18, ’19M** and **Timothy O’Donnell** were engaged on April 5, 2025. The couple met at a local restaurant about 15 minutes from Monmouth University through mutual friends, just eight months after COVID-19 restrictions began to ease. Once they discovered they’d both be spending the summer in Manasquan, “the rest was history.” Contrary to the usual saying, they say they *did* fall in love at the Jersey Shore. Tim, a Monmouth County native, works as an engineer. Ashley was part of the School of Social Work’s five-year master’s program and currently serves on the Monmouth University Alumni Board. She works full-time as Head of Guidance and Special Services at a private school in North Jersey.

» **Theresa Loconsolo’18** is an

audio producer at TechCrunch focusing on Equity, the network’s flagship podcast. Before joining TechCrunch in 2022, she was one of two producers at a four-station conglomerate where she wrote, recorded, voiced and edited content, and engineered live performances and interviews from guests like lovelytheband.

» **Lauren Neyhart ’18** and **Brandon Neyhart ’18** welcomed a daughter, Kennedy Neyhart, on Feb. 22, 2025.

» **Ralph Primavera ’18.** See note for **Brenna Doherty ’19.**

» **Bryce Wasserman ’18, ’19M** recently married Blanche Strunk, daughter of Tennessee Titans owner Amy Adams Strunk, in a stunning ceremony at Nissan Stadium in Nashville. The event featured custom touches reflecting the couple’s connection to the team—including Titans-blue dressing room décor and personalized jerseys for Wasserman and his groomsmen—and concluded with a midnight fireworks display. Wasserman, a former professional lacrosse player and Monmouth’s first athlete to appear in a Major League Lacrosse game, was named the league’s MVP in 2020. After completing law school in 2022 and passing the Tennessee bar exam, he joined the Titans organization as staff counsel. He now serves as the team’s chief of staff for operations.

» **Stefanie Bigler ’19, ’20M** is engaged to **Kyle Norman ’19**. The couple met during their junior year in 2017 and began dating in early 2018. Norman played on the baseball team, and Bigler was a member of the field hockey team. They were engaged on April 30, 2025, during a sunset

beach proposal in Sea Bright, New Jersey.

» **Phil DeAngelis ’19.** See note for **Gabrielle Salvaggio ’17.**

» **Brenna Doherty ’19** is engaged to **Ralph Primavera ’18**. The couple first met as students at Red Bank Catholic High School in Red Bank, New Jersey, before attending Monmouth together, where they enjoyed attending basketball games, spending time in the student center, and taking history classes. They got engaged at St. Catharine Church in Spring Lake, New Jersey, five years after graduating.

» **Kirsten Lawson ’19** and **Michal Kalisz ’20** were engaged on Dec. 13, 2024, while vacationing in Sint Maarten. The couple met through a mutual friend at the Inkwell Coffee House near Monmouth and began dating about a year later. Michal eventually transferred to Monmouth, where the two spent two years working together in Dr. Dorothy Lobo and Dr. Bernadette Jose’s research lab, presenting their findings at numerous academic conferences. Their engagement follows nearly eight years together.

## 2020s

» **Stephen Boyce ’20** is engaged to James Thompson. The couple met on Hinge and shared their first date in New York City, where they felt an instant connection. After three years together, Thompson proposed during a sailboat outing with the city skyline in the background. They are planning to marry on March 7, 2026, in Ridgewood, New Jersey.

» **Michal Kalisz ’20.** See note for **Kirsten Lawson ’19.**

» **Mustapha Traore ’20** recently signed with the New York Phoenix basketball team as a forward-center. Traore played in 123 games in four seasons for the Hawks, starting 83 of them. He netted 611 career points and grabbed 520 career rebounds while blocking 47 shots in his time.

» **Bella Alves ’21** co-owns Bellalicious, a growing chain of ice cream shops at the Jersey Shore with locations in Oakhurst, Monmouth Beach, and Ocean Grove. She launched the business with her mom in 2020 and has been serving up creative flavors, vegan options, and their popular Bella Blends ever since. Alves enjoys building connections with customers and creating fun, welcoming spaces for the community to enjoy.

» **Bryan Begane ’21M** was promoted to vice president of Naval Systems at Marotta Controls, a leading provider of aerospace and defense technologies. In this role, he will lead the strategic growth of the company’s naval division and expand its footprint in marine and industrial markets. Begane began his career in finance before moving into the defense sector with L3Harris Technologies, and has since contributed to Marotta’s financial planning, capital strategy, and long-term business development.

» **Aly Riley’s ’21M** new book “She Spies: Women of the American Revolution, Their Heroic Missions and Agent 355 Revealed” has reached No. 1 in Kindle’s U.S. Colonial Period New Releases category. The book delves into the lives of women before and during

the American Revolution, exploring their sacrifices and their covert espionage efforts that played a crucial role in aiding the Continental Army’s victory. “It was such a wonderful surprise to hit that rank,” says Riley.

» Singer-songwriter **Francesca Fuentes ’22** recently released a new music video, “I Just Wanna Be Your Lover Again,” which takes viewers on a nostalgic journey through the 1960s, ’70s, ’80s, and ’90s. The video was featured on MTV Spankin’ New and remained on the platform for several weeks. A former member of Blue Hawk Records, Fuentes performed frequently on campus and appeared on two compilation albums—“After Midnight” (Vol. 12) and “Phases” (Vol. 14). She also recently completed work on an animated singalong version of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” in both English and Spanish for indie publisher Barefoot Books. Fuentes performed both versions, with fellow alumnus **Max Adolf ’22** handling production, mixing, and mastering.

» **Maria Angelina Svinos ’22** is engaged to Vincent DeCaro. The couple, who began dating in 2017, recently celebrated their engagement after more than six years together. Their relationship has been marked by deep trust, shared memories, and a strong foundation of love as they look forward to their future together. They are planning to marry on Dec. 6, 2026.

» **Zach Dougherty ’23** is the director of the Robert C. Byrd Center for Congressional History and Education, where he leads civic education, public programming, and research initiatives to promote public understanding of the U.S. Congress. Previously, he worked as a community

organizer and registered lobbyist with the League of Women Voters of New Jersey, leading efforts on good government reform. Dougherty has experience in both chambers of Congress and the New Jersey State Legislature and helped lead the campaign to pass the New Jersey Legislative Youth Council Act. He co-founded and served as state political director of March for Our Lives New Jersey, where his work on gun safety legislation earned him a ceremonial signing pen from the governor. In recognition of his contributions to civic engagement at every level of government, he received the 2024 John Lewis Youth Leadership Award from the National Association of Secretaries of State and has been named to Insider NJ’s list of most effective young political leaders for seven consecutive years.

» **Carissa Civitello ’24**, a current MBA student and Ashley Bosonac, lecturer in the Department of Marketing and International Business, co-published an article in the peer-reviewed International Journal of Business and Social Science Research. The article, “Catering to the Quiet and the Sociable: A Proposal of Introversion and Extraversion as Emerging Market Segments,” expands on target marketing and how the method leverages human characteristics to persuade specific consumer groups.

» **Carolyn Davis Cid ’24M** recently celebrated the release of her debut novel, “A Mother’s Love,” which launched on June 26, 2025. The book explores themes of love, devotion, and resilience as one New Jersey family confronts a life-altering crisis during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Centered around school teacher Jeanette Remington, who is hospitalized



## SAVE THE DATE FOR WINE AND STEIN

Don’t miss our favorite alumni event of the spring! Mark your calendar for our annual wine and beer tasting event on **Saturday, June 13**, in the historic Great Hall. Join hundreds of alumni and friends to enjoy sampling, food pairings, and exclusive tasting experiences with experts—and take home this year’s commemorative glass.

[monmouth.edu/was](https://monmouth.edu/was)



Learn More





with the virus, the story follows her husband and adult children as they grapple with her illness and their own emotional distances. Davis Cid participated in a virtual book tour from June 27 to July 1 and appeared on two podcasts, including the Soul Confetti Podcast with Carrie Meyers. A longtime educator, Davis Cid is also a wife, mother of three, and grandmother of five. She lives in New Jersey with her husband, their chocolate lab Coco, and a tuxedo cat named Sofia.

» **Vincent Sedlmeir ’24** joined Getinge, a leading competitor in the medical device field, as an associate territory manager in medical device sales for the Infection Control and Surgical Workflows Division.

» Defender **Griffin Tomas ’24** has signed with professional soccer team Greenville Triumph SC for his first full professional season, the club recently announced. Tomas made his professional debut last season with Hartford Athletic in the USL Championship on a 25-day contract. A standout at Monmouth, Tomas tallied six goals and eight assists during his collegiate career from 2019 to 2023, playing alongside current Greenville midfielder **Ben Zakowski ’24**. The Seymour, Connecticut, native also competed for AC Connecticut in USL League Two and Hartford City FC in the NPSL.

» **Alex Van Name ’24** joined Bennett Realty & Development as an associate. He previously worked at Coldwell Banker as a real estate associate, gaining experience in commercial and residential transactions, business operations, and client relationship management. 📍

## Send Us Your News

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### BY EMAIL

classnotes@monmouth.edu

### BY MAIL

Class Notes, Monmouth Magazine 400 Cedar Ave., West Long Branch, NJ 07764-1898

Monmouth University encourages alumni to share news regarding career changes, awards and honors, marriages, anniversaries, births, and other life events for inclusion in Class Notes. All submissions are subject to editing for clarity and length. We welcome submissions of high-resolution digital images for possible inclusion with your class note; however, we reserve the right not to print submitted photos due to space limitations or issues with image resolution.

In addition to the news items sent by alumni, the University receives press releases from businesses and organizations announcing alumni achievements and subscribes to an online news clipping service that provides news items about alumni. These items are edited and placed in the appropriate class section.

Monmouth magazine staff members try to verify the accuracy of this information; however, the University cannot be responsible for incorrect information contained herein. If you would like us to correct any inaccuracies that have been printed, please contact the magazine at [magazine@monmouth.edu](mailto:magazine@monmouth.edu).

[REMEMBRANCES]

## Yudhishter Lal Mahajan, Ph.D.

Former Associate Professor, Leon Hess Business School

Yudhishter Lal Mahajan served Monmouth University for four decades, beginning his tenure in 1979 when it was still Monmouth College. A member of the Department of Business Administration—later Economics and Finance—he became a tenured faculty member in 1983 and was known for his warmth, rigor, and enthusiasm for teaching. Beyond the classroom, he contributed to numerous university committees and remained deeply engaged in his field through research and professional organizations. Mahajan was an immigrant from India who earned two doctorates in economics and finance, and his career reflected a lifelong dedication to learning and to inspiring the same passion in generations of Monmouth students.

## John “Jack” Demarest, Ph.D.

Former Professor, Department of Psychology

John “Jack” Demarest dedicated 44 years to Monmouth University, joining the Department of Psychology in 1976 and earning tenure and promotion to full professor in 1989. A scholar of animal behavior and neuroscience, he authored more than 30 journal articles, received 19 grants, and presented over 100 papers at professional conferences. As department chair, he helped shape a research-driven psychology curriculum that remains a hallmark of the program today. In recognition of his vision and commitment to the discipline, he received the department’s Visionary Award in 2009. A lifelong teacher, mentor, and innovator, Demarest left an enduring mark on generations of Monmouth students and colleagues.

## Waltraud “Wally” Hieslmair

Associate Professor Emerita of Physics

Waltraud “Wally” Hieslmair joined Monmouth College in 1964 and went on to spend more than three decades shaping the study of physics at the University. Known for her innovation and dedication, she developed and taught courses in thermodynamics, electromagnetism, and general physics, and was instrumental in creating Discovery Science classrooms to enhance laboratory learning. She managed the General Physics Lab, served on numerous faculty committees, and was among the first on campus to embrace digital tools, publishing the Department of Chemistry’s first webpage in 1997. On her retirement in 2000, she was named associate professor emerita, a fitting tribute to a career devoted to advancing science education at Monmouth.

## In Memoriam

### ALUMNI

» Louis A. Calabretta ’54A (Jan. 28, 2025)  
» Raymond G. Bauer ’55A (April 8, 2022)  
» Michael J. Lynch ’56 (Feb. 19, 2025)  
» Paul A. Huntsman Jr. ’58, ’70M (Nov. 26, 2020)  
» Dr. Gerald Kass ’59 (Feb. 3, 2025)  
» William S. King ’60A (April 28, 2025)  
» Rodney W. Kruse ’60 (Feb. 9, 2025)  
» Eugene J. Sconduto ’60 (Dec. 24, 2024)  
» Howard R. Smith ’60 (Dec. 31, 2024)  
» Rocco W. Christopher ’61A (Nov. 12, 2024)  
» Richard L. Hart ’61A (Dec. 29, 2024)  
» Richard E. Plunkett ’61 (Nov. 1, 2024)  
» Shirley Resnic ’61A (June 17, 2025)  
» William R. Cahill ’62 (June 27, 2024)  
» Donald C. Gahn ’62 (June 18, 2025)  
» George P. Gill Jr. ’62 (Feb. 4, 2025)  
» Stephen C. Rafe ’63 (Sept. 29, 2024)  
» Barbara M. Hudson ’64 (Dec. 1, 2024)  
» William J. Dempsey ’65 (Dec. 14, 2024)  
» Curtis C. Fausak ’65 (Dec. 2, 2024)  
» Jerrold Hart ’65 (Dec. 14, 2024)  
» Madeline Burns Hoffer ’65 (Oct. 30, 2024)  
» Dennis R. Hood ’65 (Feb. 23, 2025)  
» Susan F. Ryscavage ’65 (June 6, 2025)  
» George J. Abbott ’66 (March 8, 2025)  
» George O. Caldwell ’66 (Jan. 10, 2025)  
» Robert A. McCaffrey Jr. ’66, ’73M (Jan. 2, 2025)  
» Anthony W. Pellicane ’66 (Feb. 11, 2025)  
» Joseph R. Takach ’66 (Feb. 19, 2025)  
» Burton S. Aronoff ’67 (Dec. 16, 2024)  
» Donald A. Ciotta ’67 (March 21, 2025)  
» Peter H. Johnson ’67 (Nov. 28, 2024)  
» Richard K. Smith ’67 (March 6, 2025)  
» Richard R. Sturgeon ’67 (March 11, 2025)  
» Gary M. Falk ’68 (Feb. 24, 2025)  
» Rodney A. Hall ’68 (Jan. 21, 2025)  
» Meredith Luhrs ’68 (March 28, 2025)  
» Vito P. Perillo ’68 (Feb. 23, 2025)  
» Lois Turk Popkin ’68 (March 22, 2025)  
» Barbara J. Schatzman ’68 (June 19, 2025)  
» Sandra G. Solly ’68 (April 15, 2025)  
» Charles Bellavia ’69 (June 9, 2020)  
» Julianne B. DeSevo ’69 (Dec. 6, 2021)  
» Barbara A. Elliott ’69, ’73M (Dec. 14, 2024)  
» Dennis M. Brown ’70 (Feb. 26, 2025)  
» Robert F. Kautz ’70 (June 7, 2013)  
» Michael I. Langroth ’70 (Feb. 5, 2025)

» Carol T. Watson Roes ’70 (Oct. 26, 2024)  
» Lois V. Farley ’71M (Dec. 15, 2024)  
» Kenneth J. Kaufman ’71 (April 25, 2025)  
» Rosalie Mauro-Bennett ’71 (Feb. 4, 2024)  
» Dominic J. Palumbo ’71 (Feb. 17, 2025)  
» William E. South ’71 (March 6, 2023)  
» Barbara C. Horter ’72 (Feb. 20, 2025)  
» Marjorie Koharski ’72M (November 2024)  
» Sandra E. Mallozzi ’72 (April 12, 2025)  
» Richard J. Caccamise ’73M (Jan. 4, 2025)  
» Ralph C. Marra Sr. ’73 (Dec. 20, 2024)  
» Loren H. Michael ’73 (Nov. 16, 2024)  
» Nancy L. Farr ’74 (Oct. 20, 2024)  
» Harold L. Rassas ’74M (April 10, 2025)  
» Elaine F. Bell ’75 (Sept. 25 2014)  
» John H. Berta ’75 (Dec. 18, 2018)  
» Franklin J. Callano ’75 (Feb. 20, 2022)  
» Anthony P. Cappiello ’75 (May 19, 2025)  
» Diane K. Beger Devita ’75 (October 2014)  
» Shelley P. Gardner ’75 (Nov. 22, 2022)  
» Gary M. Greenberg ’75 (Feb. 4, 2025)  
» Maureen Hueglin ’75 (May 3, 2022)  
» Sidney Marshall ’75M (Dec. 14, 2021)  
» Peter B. McAllister ’75 (April 7, 2024)  
» Laura M. McFeat ’75 (Oct. 3, 2019)  
» Richard D. Nafziger ’75 (Sept. 28, 2024)  
» Dan S. Ross ’75A (April 2, 2012)  
» Jeffrey D. Salls ’75 (Aug. 3, 2024)  
» Richard J. Swiatkowski ’75M (June 28, 2023)  
» Peter L. Ahern ’76 (Feb. 20, 2025)  
» James J. Camoosa ’76 (Nov. 10, 2024)  
» Rosemary A. Dixon ’76 (Nov. 19, 2024)  
» Raymond M. Kimble Jr. ’76M (Jan. 19, 2025)  
» Martin R. Spernal ’76 (Dec. 20, 2024)  
» Marcia L. Anderson ’77 (March 16, 2025)  
» Bruce H. Houghtaling ’77 (April 5, 2025)  
» John W. Orr ’77, ’82M (March 29, 2006)  
» Paul M. Giblon ’78M (June 11, 2025)  
» Daniel A. Lynch ’78M (June 3, 2025)  
» Gregory C. Resch ’78 (Oct. 27, 2024)  
» Bradford D. Loucas ’79 (Feb. 28, 2025)  
» Richard J. Gross ’80 (Sept. 16, 2025)  
» Henry “Hank” J. Rakowski Jr. ’80 (Jan. 13, 2025)  
» Sharyn T. Cottrell Santel ’81M (May 4, 2025)  
» James D. Pope ’81M (June 14, 2013)  
» Patricia Foy Rice ’81 (Oct. 23, 2024)  
» Alan M. Smith ’81 (Jan. 19, 2025)  
» Holly A. Orr ’82M (April 3, 2025)  
» Diane C. Harz ’84 (May 13, 2025)  
» Patrick J. Heidenthal Sr. ’84M (Aug. 2, 2024)  
» Maureen D. Hintelmann ’86M (Jan. 12, 2025)

» Jennifer Dion ’87M (April 2024)  
» Rochelle B. Schwarz ’88 (Nov. 26, 2024)  
» William E. Stavola ’88 (Jan. 26, 2025)  
» Cheryl A. Johnston ’89 (April 18, 2025)  
» Michelle S. Steinberger ’89M (Jan. 28, 2024)  
» Robert F. Dilucchio ’93 (May 7, 2024)  
» Isis K. Draper ’93 (Dec. 1, 2024)  
» Karen Johnson Calabro ’93 (April 6, 2025)  
» Linda R. Corder ’94M (Feb. 4, 2025)  
» Barbara T. Palumbo ’94M (June 12, 2017)  
» Karen A. Bruno ’95M (Nov. 16, 2024)  
» Thomas J. Maglizzo ’95 (Nov. 23, 2024)  
» Janet M. Frampton ’95 (Oct. 12, 2024)  
» Lois J. Miller ’98, ’03M (Feb. 4, 2025)  
» Warren J. Kolendriski ’99, ’01M (April 28, 2025)  
» Allyson M. Wen ’99M (Nov. 18, 2024)  
» Leni D. Preston ’01 (Nov. 12, 2024)  
» Jose A. Nieves ’02 (Feb. 5, 2025)  
» Deborah A. Cioffi ’11M (April 2, 2025)  
» Michael Hallowich ’17 (Dec. 8, 2024)  
» John M. Neppel ’19 (July 10, 2022)  
» Kevin R. Hewitt ’23 (June 27, 2025)

## FACULTY & STAFF

» Charles E. Bazaz, former security officer with the Monmouth University Police Department (Dec. 20, 2024)  
» John “Jack” Demarest, former professor in the Department of Psychology (March 12, 2025)  
» Waltraud “Wally” Hieslmair, associate professor emerita of physics (May 1, 2025)  
» Glenn Jacobs, former adjunct professor (July 4, 2025)  
» Yudhishter Lal Mahajan, former associate professor in the Leon Hess Business School (Feb. 20, 2025)  
» Alicia Portuondo, professor emerita of foreign languages (May 17, 2025)  
» Gary E. Rosenberg, former telecommunications manager (Feb. 14, 2025)

## FRIENDS

» Jeff Boim (May 30, 2020)  
» Carolann Kane Cavaiola (Dec. 28, 2024)



LOCATION: ERLANGER GARDENS

# Looking Out



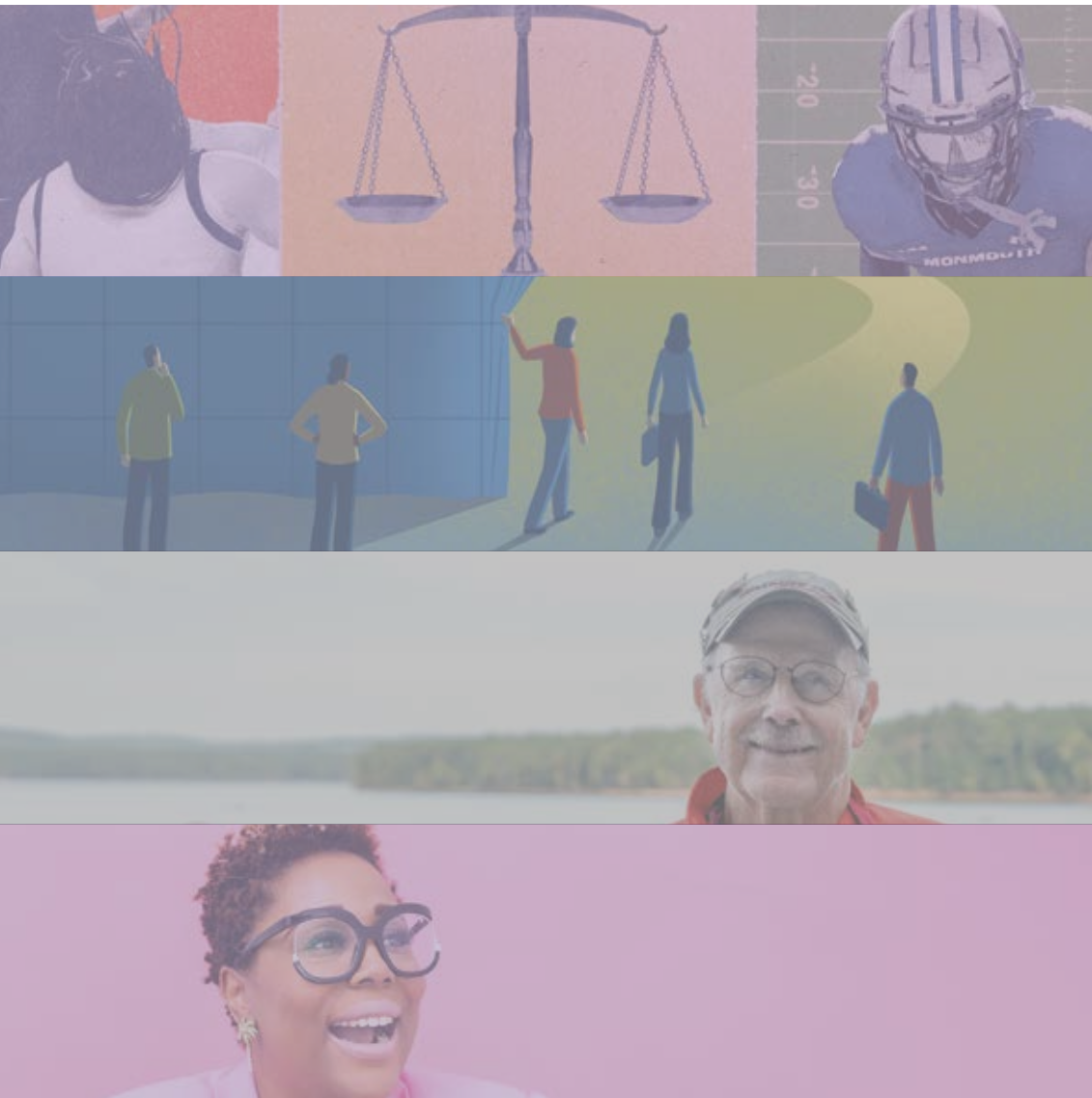




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FALL/WINTER 2025

## 4 Things You'll Learn From This Issue

1. What's changing in college sports—and how Monmouth is responding. **»P. 6**
2. Why impact is becoming a competitive advantage in today's startup scene. **»P. 24**
3. Which singular achievement sparked one alumnus's lifelong momentum. **»P. 52**
4. How fun turned into a full-time career for one alumna. **»P. 58**