50 Years of Growth

Then and now

RIT/NTID’s growth and success over the first 50 years of its existence can be seen in this comparison between the entering classes of 1968 (top) and 2017 (bottom). RIT/NTID’s current student body is larger, more diverse, and more likely to experience professional success, all thanks to the trails blazed by RIT/NTID’s first class of deaf and hard-of-hearing students.
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**About the Cover**  More than 3,000 people attended NTID’s 50th Anniversary Reunion Weekend June 28 – July 1, 2018. See photos and more information from the reunion on pp. 3-9 in this issue.
Celebrating transformation

We were thrilled to welcome back to campus more than 3,000 alumni and friends, along with current and former faculty, staff and administrators, for NTID’s 50th Anniversary Reunion Weekend June 28 – July 1, 2018. It was a wonderful celebration of 50 years of education, transformation and Tiger spirit.

The festivities began with an alumni golf tournament and continued with an opening ceremony hosted by alumni and actor CJ Jones. Other activities during the reunion weekend included a barbeque dinner; mini-reunions for current and former faculty, staff and organizations, including fraternities and sororities; and entertainment by popular alumni such as Sean Forbes, Rosa Lee Timm, Amber Zion, Kris Pumphrey and Daniel Durant. (See photos and more information from the reunion on pp. 3-9 in this issue.)

In addition to alumni from NTID’s “pioneer” class and founding faculty members, we were honored to welcome back four of NTID’s past leaders: Dr. D. Robert Frisina, founding director; Dr. Robert Davila, NTID’s first deaf leader; Dr. James J. Hurwitz. (See more about NTID’s past leaders on the inside back cover of this issue and in the timeline on pp. 10-11, which is being rerun from the Spring/Spring 2018 issue of FOCUS with corrections.)

The Dyer Arts Center hosted an outstanding exhibition, 50 Artists, 50 Years, featuring works by 50 RIT/NTID alumni artists (see pp. 14-15). The center also hosted the unveiling of a triptych entitled Together, created by alumna Susan Dupor and commissioned for the 50th anniversary. The work portrays the flourishing life and history of NTID over 50 years (see back cover of this issue).

The reunion kicked off a year-long celebration of NTID’s 50-year history, which coincides with RIT’s move to the Henrietta, New York, campus. It was an opportunity for many to return “home,” reconnect and marvel at the transformation of our campus, our college and the greater university.

Following the reunion, RIT made a major announcement about the university’s future—a $1 billion blended campaign, the largest fundraising effort in the university’s history. NTID has a significant role in the campaign, which is titled Transforming RIT: The Campaign for Greatness, as we seek support from a variety of investors, including alumni, government and corporate partners, and research foundations and agencies. (Learn more about the campaign at rit.edu/transformingrit, and visit NTID’s website for more information on ways you can be part of this historic campaign: ntid.rit.edu/giving.)

This fall, RIT launched a new brand strategy that focuses on how RIT is using the power of technology, the arts and design to shape the future and improve the world. The purpose is to showcase RIT and enable the university to continue its growth and transformation. You can see some of the graphic elements of the new brand, including the new logo, in this issue of FOCUS. Future issues will incorporate more elements of the brand.

As we celebrate NTID’s 50th anniversary and the 50th anniversary of RIT’s move to the Henrietta campus, we pause to reflect on all who have helped lay the foundation on which we are continuing to build as NTID and RIT move into an exciting future of making a positive difference in the lives of students and in the world.

Gerard J. Buckley, SVP ’74, ’78
NTID President
RIT Vice President and Dean
When NTID admitted its first class in 1968, the number of people in the world who knew about the new college was very small. An optimist might put that number at around 500. This past summer, the 50th Anniversary Reunion boasted more than 3,000 official registrations and saw hundreds more pass through LBJ Hall’s front doors. That number doesn’t include the more than 1,000 alumni who participated in the Reunion Roadshow events across the United States in the months leading up to the Reunion Weekend, or the thousands more who, for one reason or another, were not able to participate, but sent their best wishes and shared their fond memories on social media.

By every objective—and subjective—measure, the Reunion Weekend was a resounding success. We want to share that success with you, so over the next few pages, please enjoy a very small selection of photos from what is possibly the largest alumni event ever hosted by RIT or NTID.

WEB EXTRA:
To see more photos, visit bit.ly/NTID50photos.

A warm welcome  This decal, on the front windows of the Dyer Arts Center, welcomed alumni to the lobby of Lyndon Baines Johnson Hall.

Getting reacquainted  Kevin Nolan (’68, ’71) greets fellow alumni during the first day of registration in the CSD Student Development Center.

Checking in  Student and alumni volunteers turned out in large numbers to handle the monumental task of checking in more than 3,000 alumni in only two days.

A hearty meal  Tom (’68, ’72) and Carol Virnig enjoy a barbecue meal provided by the NTID Alumni Association on Saturday afternoon.
NTID’s 50th Anniversary Reunion: A look back

Days with friends

The days of the Reunion Weekend offered a variety of activities. Alumni were able to reunite with their enrollment-year cohort to take a group photo on the track field and attend mini-reunions focused on their major, group affiliation, fraternity or sorority, or topic of general interest. Workshops, demonstrations and panels discussed topics ranging from new tax-preparation information to deaf women’s issues.

Overall feedback was positive, and most events saw standing-room-only crowds. Temperatures also rose into the 90s on the day all 3,000 attendees were expected to walk to the track field and take photos with their enrollment-year groups, but spirits were just as high as the temperatures.

What’s old is new again After a welcome-home celebration led by NTID President Gerry Buckley and his wife Judy and alumni Christopher (SVP ’86, ’94) and Staci (’92) Wagner, classmates reunited for photos with their enrollment-year cohort. Many of the classes remembered their departed peers, including the class of 1971, who lost Carmen Sciandra (SVP ’71, ’74) just weeks before the reunion opened.
Discussing and learning  Reunion attendees were offered a wide variety of workshops, panels and demonstration activities during the mornings. Alumni like Sam Holcomb (SVP ’74, ’77) and Tim (SVP ’91, ’98, ’00) and the late Stephanie Smith (SVP ’85, ’88) Albert led workshops focused on topics like deaf history and the lives of people of color within the Deaf community.

Reuniting, recollecting and reflecting  Around 25 different groups hosted mini-reunions during the weekend, remembering their years on campus while appreciating a common bond. African American alumni met in the Commons to see Fred Beam (SVP ’81, ’85), one of the founders of the Ebony Club, and NTID’s Greek organizations enjoyed seeing their group across the generations. Mini-reunions were also more intimate and personal, including those friends and family of Dr. James DeCaro, dean emeritus and former interim NTID president.
Each evening during the Reunion Weekend, alumni had the option to attend an event at the Gene Polisseni Center. Each event featured multiple performers, honored speakers and dozens of alumni working together to create an unforgettable show.

On the first night, an opening ceremony was orchestrated by CJ Jones, alumnus and award-winning actor, and featured current and past presidents of NTID, an appearance by reunion core team co-chairs Christopher and Staci Wagner and a look at the team of alumni responsible for pulling it all together. The next two nights were devoted to Tiger Night Out, events featuring a variety of alumni storytellers, performers and entertainers. Attendees were able to enjoy the talents of performers, including Rosa Lee Timm (SVP ’95, ’00), a renowned storyteller; the nationally famous deaf hip-hop artist Sean Forbes (SVP ’00, ’04, ’08); and JJ Jones (SVP ’74, ’77), a mime. Attendees could view the Performing Arts program’s production of The Wonderful World of Oz, an entirely alumni-run and -produced show.

All of it added up to one unforgettable weekend.

**Talent on display**  The Reunion Weekend saw dozens of talented alumni take the stage. Some, like Ruthie Jordan (SVP ’77, ’01, ’02, ’08) and Perseus McDaniel (SVP ’13, ’18), did double duty as MCs and performers, while others showed off their well-honed craft, like longtime entertainers Peter Cook (SVP ’81, ’86) and Kenny Lerner. For some, like PRISM, this represented their return to the stage after many years away, and the audience loved every minute.

A hard-working team  Christopher and Staci Wagner brought the team of alumni volunteers, who had arranged the entire weekend, up on stage to thank them for all of their hard work.

**A masterful greeting**  Alumus CJ Jones (’69, ’73) served as master of ceremonies for the opening ceremony.

**A row of leaders**  RIT/NTID’s leaders, both past and present, enjoyed the Reunion Weekend’s opening ceremony: (left to right) David Munson, president of RIT; Gerry Buckley, president of NTID; Judy Buckley; T. Alan Hurwitz; James DeCaro; Robert Davila; D. Robert Frisina.
A friendly contest

A group of around 80 alumni participated in the golf tournament, a reunion tradition. The golf tournament is an opportunity for participants to spend some time together in a more intimate setting, compete against one another and win prizes for various feats, such as making the longest drive.

Hosted at Mill Creek Golf Club in Churchville, the golf tournament was an enjoyable event with plenty of bragging rights to go around. The morning might have been foggy, but the delight felt by attendees was clear.

A good team
A foursome, including the NTID Center on Employment’s John Macko, far right (SVP ’85, ’91, ’98), Department of Business Studies’ W. Scot Atkins, far left, retired Business Studies chair Mary Lou Basile, and retired NTID Counselor Bill Moore enjoy a leisurely round of golf before entering the hubbub of the Reunion Weekend.

A good time
Kathleen Szczepanek (SVP ’87, ’90, ’92), a faculty member in NTID’s Business Studies Department, celebrates after a particularly good shot.
Each summer, deaf and hard-of-hearing students entering the National Technical Institute for the Deaf attend an orientation called the Summer Vestibule Program. Students who attend SVP strongly identify with their SVP cohort. So, when more than 3,000 alumni returned to campus this past June to celebrate NTID’s 50th anniversary, one of the most eagerly awaited events was SVP class photos on Tiger Field. Capturing the individual class photos was not an easy task and would not have been successful without the talents of NTID photographer Mark Benjamin, RIT photographer Sue Weisler, and Amelia Hamilton, an RIT/NTID student photographer. The photo event was another great opportunity for alumni to reconnect and make new memories with their fellow classmates.

WEB EXTRA:
Alumni may acquire their free SVP photo from NTID’s 50th Anniversary reunion weekend using this easy method:
2. To download and save an image, right click and select “save image as.” Click this to save the photo to a computer, tablet or phone.
In 50 years, RIT/NTID has seen its fair share of change. Having gone from a group of 70 deaf and hard-of-hearing students who didn’t have a building to call their own to more than 1,100 students spread across a functional and attractive complex of buildings, backed by a worldwide population of more than 8,500 alumni, “transformation” could be considered an understatement for NTID.

Here, we review only a few of the high points in the past 50 years, paying attention to common themes of leadership and growth in pursuit of NTID’s mission of ensuring employment for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Running through Dr. Frisina’s appointment as NTID’s first director to Greg Pollock’s second election as president of RIT’s Student Government, overseeing the campus activities of over 16,000 students, we can almost glimpse the road that RIT/NTID has been—and still is—traveling, as an institution and a community.

Editor’s Note: This timeline is a corrected version of one that ran in the Spring/Summer 2018 issue of FOCUS.

UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, ALL PHOTOS ARE ARCHIVE IMAGES.

1967
Dr. D. Robert Frisina begins his first year leading NTID.

1968
NTID’s first class of admitted students—known as the “Charter Class”—begin classes.

1971
The groundbreaking ceremony for the NTID complex is held.

1972
The first NTID Student Congress Board of Directors is elected; clockwise from bottom left: Mark Feder (SVP ’71, ’74, ’76), vice president; Miriam Sotomayor (’72), secretary; Jerry Nelson, president; and John Swan (SVP ’70, ’74, ’76), treasurer.

1974
Lady Bird Johnson, widow of President Lyndon Baines Johnson, kneels next to a plaque at the dedication of LBJ Hall.

1976
Dr. William Castle is appointed NTID’s dean.
1978
The NTID Center on Employment is established, solidifying NTID’s commitment to job placement for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

1978
John “JT” Reid graduates as the first deaf captain of an RIT varsity team (wrestling).

1978
The theater in LBJ Hall is named “Robert F. Panara Theatre” after Dr. Panara, pictured above with his wife, Shirley.

1988
Dr. James DeCaro, who served as NTID dean 1985-1998, is named dean and interim director of NTID. He served as interim president and dean of NTID in 2010.

1995
Dr. Robert Davila is appointed NTID’s first deaf—and Latino—vice president.

1996
Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz, who was named first deaf dean of NTID in 1998, is appointed vice president and dean of NTID. In 2008, he was named NTID’s first president.

2003
Elizabeth Sorkin (SVP ’99, ’07) is elected the first deaf president of RIT Student Government.

2006
Greg Pollock (’12) is the second deaf president of RIT Student Government—and the first to win a second term.

2010
Dr. Gerard J. Buckley (’78) becomes the first alumnus to be appointed leader of NTID.
As part of the NTID 50th Reunion celebration, the Dyer Art Center featured two special exhibitions. One focused on 50 artists across 50 years (see article on pp. 14-15) and another focused on NTID’s history.

The history exhibition featured banners along with physical items, such as the orange blazer of Greg Pollock, the second deaf RIT Student Government president; FOCUS magazines through the years; older school spirit outfits, publications made by former students; and much more. It was a small glimpse into the history of life at NTID over the years. 

"This project took so much work and effort, but I loved learning about NTID history and the impact it has had on deaf people everywhere. I’m grateful for the opportunity to have done the research and to be able to put together the text panels."

Tabitha Jacques
Director of NTID’s Joseph F. and Helen C. Dyer Arts Center

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National Technical Institute for the Deaf

The Grand Experiment

During the 20th Century, experiences in being deaf meant a strenuous, challenging life. Communicating through sign language or written English was often a barrier to education and career advancement. It was not until 1969 that a deaf education philosophy, known as the “total communication” approach, emerged at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID). Under the leadership of Dr. Bevins and other early pioneers, students and staff embraced the idea that deaf students could learn and succeed in higher education. The “Grand Experiment” was born, and it transformed the landscape of deaf education.

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Pioneers of Innovation

NTID was founded by Andrew W. Brimmer in 1968 with the goal of creating a world-class educational and training program for deaf students. The program, which included sign language, English, and American Sign Language (ASL), was designed to provide a comprehensive education that would prepare students for successful careers. Over time, the program evolved to include a wide range of academic and vocational offerings, and its impact has been felt across the world. Today, NTID continues to be a leader in deaf education and is committed to ensuring that deaf students have access to the same opportunities as their hearing peers.

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Mark Benjamin
Throughout history, art has been a way for individuals and societies to express their views and interpret the world around them. This is particularly true for the Deaf community, and was one of the driving forces behind the 50 Artists, 50 Years exhibition that was on display June 22 and ran through Oct. 20, 2018, in RIT/NTID's Dyer Arts Center.

As part of NTID's 50th anniversary, the exhibition showcased 50 alumni artists, and more than 100 works of art, including mediums such as painting, photography, mixed media, wood, textile, watercolors and more. Works by well-known artists such as the late Chuck Baird, along with local Rochester artists including Laural Hartman and many others, were included in the exhibition.

Locating the art and curating the exhibit was the job of Dyer Arts Center Director Tabitha Jacques, who worked with NTID Director of Alumni and Constituent Relations Loriann Macko. They put out a call for submissions, and established a committee of jurors to help select artworks.

"It was a real challenge because we got so many great submissions and had to sort through them all," says Jacques. "Members of the committee had to think about the artists' history at RIT/NTID, the quality of their work and how many we could select so that other artists were well represented as well."

Along with the 50 Artists, 50 Years exhibition, the center hosted an NTID history exhibition in the Milton H. and Ray B. Ohringer Gallery, displaying a variety of memorabilia and highlighting the contributions made by RIT/NTID alumni, faculty, staff and students (see p. 12 for more on the history exhibition).

As part of the reunion festivities, NTID commissioned a triptych—or three-paneled work—called Together by deaf artist and alumna Susan Dupor. "Together honors the people of our past who have aspired to create a better future for us; we now take the time to look back and give appreciation and gratitude for their efforts," Dupor says. Together portrays the flourishing life and history of NTID over 50 years. In the painting, 50 people are gathered together on the Frisina...
Quad, which is central to NTID. Surrounded by the Dining Commons, Lyndon Baines Johnson Hall and Tower A, figures from five decades are juxtaposed by a color scheme and fashion trends of their eras (see back cover).

“NTID is a palette of people from all walks of life, which makes it an extraordinarily global community,” Dupor says. “Figures are conversing in sign language; each signed word has a special connection and meaning representing NTID. The figures symbolize everyday people who elicit long-lost memories of people we have known in the past who have been buried in the deepest recesses of our minds.”

Approximately half of the works in 50 Artists, 50 Years were from RIT/NTID’s permanent collection, thought to be one of the largest permanent collections of works by deaf and hard-of-hearing artists in the world.

“The oldest artwork included was actually made in 1968, and the newest piece was made in 2018,” Jacques says. “I loved that the exhibition covered all of RIT/NTID’s 50 years and had something for everyone.”
For 50 years, FOCUS magazine has reported on and helped advance the visibility of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf—keeping readers informed about what makes NTID unique.

The magazine began in 1968 with the establishment of the college. NTID’s founding director, Dr. D. Robert Frisina, wanted to develop a publication that could be shared with NTID’s National Advisory Group, government officials and others to show the progress of what he called “The Grand Experiment.”

With that charge in mind, FOCUS magazine has spent the past 50 years bringing friends of NTID, parents of current students, donors, alumni, corporations, schools, organizations, and other audiences around the world coverage of the college’s growth and transformation. From highlighting achievements of students, alumni, and faculty and staff, to covering new institutional initiatives and cutting-edge research, FOCUS magazine aims to inspire and educate its readers, and promote NTID’s world-class offerings for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

Today, FOCUS magazine is published biannually by NTID’s Communications, Marketing and Multimedia Services Department, and is distributed internationally to more than 20,000 subscribers.

“With every issue, FOCUS magazine strives to strengthen the important bond between the college and our readers by sharing noteworthy accomplishments and compelling stories about members of our community who are making an impact on RIT, NTID, and out in the world,” says FOCUS editor Pamela Carmichael, assistant vice president of NTID Communications, Marketing, and Multimedia Services.

Gerry Buckley, SVP ’74, ’78, NTID president and RIT vice president and dean, says the magazine is a significant piece in NTID’s history for reporting on NTID’s successes.

“Fifty amazing years later we are still producing inspirational and educational content in every issue, showing how The Grand Experiment is a grand success,” he says.

Past issues of FOCUS magazine are available at rit.edu/FOCUS.
Five of the individuals who have led NTID during its 50-year history were together for the college’s 50th Anniversary Reunion Weekend. Pictured here on June 29, 2018, are: top row, L to R: Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz, Dr. Gerard J. Buckley. Bottom row, L to R: Dr. James J. DeCaro, Dr. D. Robert Frisina, Dr. Robert R. Davila.

Dr. D. Robert Frisina was NTID’s founding director. He led NTID January 1, 1967 through December 31, 1976.

Not pictured in the photo above is Dr. William Castle, who led NTID January 1, 1977 through December 31, 1994.

Dr. James J. DeCaro led NTID on an interim basis January 1, 1995 through December 31, 1995, and again as president and dean January 1, 2010, through December 31, 2010. He also served as NTID dean 1985-1998 and was founding director of NTID’s PEN-International and Center on Access Technology.

Dr. Robert R. Davila led NTID January 1, 1996, through November 30, 2003. He was the first Latino vice president of NTID.

Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz led NTID December 1, 2003, through December 31, 2009, and served as dean 1998-2009. He was the first deaf dean of NTID and was named the first president of NTID in 2008.

Dr. Gerard J. Buckley has led NTID since January 1, 2011. He is the first RIT/NTID alumnus to lead the college.
Susan Dupor, an RIT/NTID alumna and acclaimed deaf artist, was commissioned to create an artwork to commemorate 50 years of NTID. A portion of the triptych she created was featured in the Spring/Summer 2018 issue of FOCUS. The full work, which was unveiled during the “Welcome Home” Celebration at NTID’s 50th Anniversary Reunion Weekend, June 28-July 1, 2018, is pictured here.