St. Vincent’s College has built and maintained a reputation of high quality, compassionate nursing and allied health education. Many of you have benefited from a St. Vincent’s education, and many of you have been the recipients of care by St. Vincent’s graduates. We ask you to please consider helping us to carry on the proud heritage of the College and meet the urgent healthcare needs of our community.

To address the widely documented future shortage of healthcare professionals in our community in the near future, St. Vincent’s College has embarked on a $5 million Capital Campaign to update its current facilities and add classroom, laboratory, and student learning spaces to accommodate enrollment and program growth. The College expansion is desperately needed so we can provide continuing education opportunities to those already in the workforce, expand program offerings to meet identified healthcare workforce needs, and establish programs of study designed to meet the needs of the education of future healthcare workers to fill emerging roles.

To meet this growing need, it is essential that the College expand its footprint. By retrofitting the third floor of a newly acquired building at 2660 Main Street, just two blocks from the existing College, we can add 12,000 square feet. Project features will include: the addition and expansion of science and skills laboratories; critical classroom space; group and individual student study and work space; and work space for faculty and staff who will be employed to support growing enrollments.

The College is now in one of the more exciting phases of the planning process as we have architectural drawings for the space and we are awaiting approvals related to the site. St. Vincent’s Foundation has committed $2.2 million in funding to upgrade the infrastructure of the building including new heating and ventilation systems, and windows. Now we are in the process of raising $2.8 million for the renovation of the third floor of that building as well as updating the facilities of the Hunting Street building. To date, we have raised $1 million of that amount through private donations and fund-raising activities. The project is strongly supported by our faculty, staff, administrators, and Board of Trustee members who believe in investing in the future of St. Vincent’s College.

Please consider making a gift to our Campaign to support this much needed College expansion. Pledges may be made over a two-year period. If you would like information on ways to give and recognition opportunities, please call Janice Faye at (203) 576-6355.

Continued on Page 3
An Unwavering Commitment to the College and Community

Ronald J. Bianchi

Without the leadership and vision of Ron Bianchi, the SWIM Across the Sound would not be celebrating its 25th anniversary as an iconic symbol that provides cancer prevention and support services to over 20,000 people in Connecticut each year. Beyond that, Ron has led fund raising initiatives totaling over $350 million and enabling the St. Vincent’s System to grow and thrive, while providing access to the under served and bringing new technologies to the community.

Ron’s commitment to the College has never wavered. The first major endowment and capital campaign he directed in 1997 for the newly formed College was a major achievement. Ron continued his quiet and persuasive efforts to promote the College and its value to St. Vincent’s and the community at every opportunity.

He continues to spread the story of St. Vincent’s College, its graduates and the good works that they do in service to others. We have been extremely fortunate to have Ron Bianchi as our shining star as the College continued to grow to meet workforce needs. Ron has made an indelible mark on the citizens of Connecticut and beyond in a very personal and deeply satisfying way.

He has been a staunch advocate for patient care and nursing and allied health education. Ron has been an innovative and creative part of the Bridgeport community. It is only fitting that the St. Vincent’s College Community honor Ronald J. Bianchi for his service, vision and leadership as we dedicate this Summer 2012 issue of Alumni Report to him.

From the editors desk,
Janice N. Faye

In the short span of just more than 20 years we have grown tremendously. As you may know, the College’s Hunting Street building has undergone a number of transformations to bring it from a nursing school dormitory to a collegiate environment with classrooms for our nursing and allied health programs. We have continued to add programs, services, faculty and staff positions, scholarship and grant-in-aid programs so that we can meet the healthcare needs of the Greater Bridgeport region.

It has taken many hands, many talents and considerable time to build this legacy, but one man in particular has had a lasting impact on the College. Ron Bianchi, the St. Vincent’s Foundation President for 37 years has announced his planned retirement from the St. Vincent’s family on August 2, 2012. We count it as privilege to have known and worked with Ron during all the changes that have occurred at St. Vincent’s during this time.

The St. Vincent’s College Alumni Report is published by St. Vincent’s College to inform alumni about classmates, offer the latest news and information, and build support for the College. If you have story ideas, comments, or information about yourself or other alumni, please email: alumni@stvincentscollege.edu or call 203-576-6262.
St. Vincent’s College has received licensure from the Connecticut Board of Education to offer an online Bachelor of Science degree in Radiologic Sciences (BSRS) beginning in fall 2012.

The new online program will serve radiographers or other radiologic sciences professionals holding certificates or associate degrees, who wish to further their career development. It is the College’s second baccalaureate completion program since the RN to BSN program was started in January 2011.

“The offering of an online program allows radiologic professionals the flexibility to enroll in coursework while they continue to work as healthcare professionals. Through online learning, the College can provide an education that meets the scheduling needs of radiologic professionals,” said College President Martha K. Shouldis, Ed.D., in announcing the program.

As part of the new program, the College will also provide student support services online to assist the student from admission, financial aid, advisement, coursework, research capabilities, and counseling through to graduation.

Terry Hine, Associate Professor and Chair of Radiography, said the BSRS Completion Program complements the associate of science in radiography currently offered by the College.

“The extension of programming to offer the proposed BSRS is viewed by the College’s Board of Trustees, the faculty, staff and administrators of the College and the leadership of St. Vincent’s Medical Center as consistent with the Mission of the College. It supports lifetime learning and ongoing professional education by providing additional opportunities for our graduates and for certificate and associate degree prepared radiologic sciences professionals in Fairfield and New Haven Counties,” Hine said.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition) projects employment in the profession to grow at a faster rate than average, and those with knowledge of more than one diagnostic imaging procedure – such as Computerized Axial Tomography (CAT) Scan, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), and mammography will have the best employment opportunities.

Employment in radiologic imaging is expected to increase by about 17% from 2008 to 2018. Radiology administrative positions in healthcare settings often require a baccalaureate degree.

There are a number of possible donor recognition opportunities available including naming of a classroom or laboratory, donations toward the purchase of artwork, classroom furnishings or scholarship funds. Consider a class challenge gift. Challenge your classmates to raise a designated amount, or to match a gift you commit. Gifts of all sizes are gladly accepted. All donors or groups giving $500 or more will be recognized on the donor wall to be located in the 2660 Main Street College facility.

Thank you for your help in making this addition to the College a reality. May God continue to bless you and the work you do in His name.

Martha K. Shouldis, Ed.D., President/CEO
Grandma and Granddaughter Celebrate Graduation 60 Years Apart

When Jessica Andresen of Norwalk earned her LPN certificate, her grandmother, Barbara Andresen gave her the nursing cap she wore at her own graduation in 1952, and the scissors that she used as a nurse throughout her 54-year career.

Her grandmother completed that gift recently at the St. Vincent’s College commencement ceremony, when she presented Jessica with the nursing pin from her beloved Class of 1952 of St. Vincent’s Hospital School of Nursing.

Grandmother and granddaughter have a very special bond beyond graduating 60 years apart from St. Vincent’s nursing program. “I’m so proud of her and what she has achieved. She really persisted in her education and she was determined to complete her schooling. And it’s just great that we’re both going to be alumni of the same school.”

Twenty-six year old Jessica says her grandma has always been an inspiration to her because of her work as a nurse and her great love for the family.

“I knew I wanted a healthcare career, but I struggled at first and thought of giving up. One thing that kept me going was remembering that my grandmother went through the same thing. It made me feel like we were doing it together, and we both knew how hard it was to get there. I know it means a lot to her that I’m following in her footsteps.”

Barbara, who just turned 81, and her husband, a retired SNET employee, moved to New Hampshire seven years ago and their only regret is they don’t see their grandchildren enough. They’ve been married 58 years and look back on a good life in Norwalk, where they were also parishioners at St. Thomas the Apostle Church and later St. Matthew Parish.

Barbara worked as a nurse in Fairfield County until she retired at the age of 75, after serving at St. Vincent’s Medical Center in Bridgeport, St. Joseph Hospital in Stamford, and in group practice settings.

When she and Jessica talk about nursing, they often laugh about the differences in education between 1952 and 2012.

“Grandma was telling me how they worked year round and never had a vacation. They ate and slept and breathed nursing, and the Nuns watched like hawks,” says Jessica, who works with technology and computers that were unthinkable in 1952.

“Medicine is wonderful these days. There are so many cures for everything and hopefully even more to come. But I tell Jessica that with all the technical knowledge, patients still need your compassion.”

Jessica recently passed her boards and can proudly put RN after her name. She is currently working per diem at Soundview Medical Associates in Norwalk. She would like to go into Emergency Department nursing eventually but knows she has to earn her stripes by working on a medical-surgical floor for a couple of years to gain experience.
Social Media Growing at St. Vincent’s College

By: Anet Surrusco, Director of Information Technology

Social media technologies take on many forms – blogs, magazines, internet forums, wikis, podcasts, photographs, pictures and video. These networks provide an environment that promotes fun and exciting interaction and a broad array of options to connect with friends, family and others who share common interests.

The IT Department at the College has been busy with many initiatives including social media. A very exciting first step for the College in entering the social media arena was the creation of a Facebook fan page. The purpose of this site is to inform prospective and current students as well as friends and alumni about what is happening at the College.

Check out our Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/stvincentscollege.edu, “Like” us and keep up with what is going on. The College furthered its social media presence with the creation of a YouTube channel. Go to the College YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/stvincentscollege. View the 100th Anniversary video to learn some history about the College. “Subscribe” to our channel and be informed when a new video is available.

One of the current, larger projects the IT Department is working on is a website redesign. The College plans to debut its new website this summer. Some goals for the new website include a fresh new collegiate look, easier navigation and more information that all visitors will be interested in. Stay tuned and then visit us at www.stvincentscollege.edu.

We encourage you to take a look around the new site and let us know what you think. Are there any links not working or errors in content? Is it easy to navigate? What information is hard to find or missing? All suggestions are welcome. Email your comments to: ITdept@stvincentscollege.edu.
Giving the Gift of Education

Virginia O’Brien Fortin of Easton always wanted to be a nurse, but that was not possible when she was a young woman, so she has spent much of her life helping others to reach their dreams.

St. Vincent’s College recognized her commitment to education at this year’s commencement ceremony when the businesswoman was presented an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters on May 18th at the Fairfield University Regina A. Quick Center for the Arts.

“It was a real privilege and honor to receive the doctorate. I’m very proud,” says the mother of four children and the grandmother of nine.

Dr. Martha K. Shouldis, President of St. Vincent’s College, said that the primary objective in awarding an honorary doctoral degree is to recognize individuals whose lives and accomplishments serve as role models for our graduates.

“Mrs. Virginia Fortin is just such a role model as a business leader, volunteer and philanthropist. While she was active in the workforce and since retiring, she has taken the skills honed as a successful businesswoman and applied them to service in her community,” said Dr. Shouldis.

Dr. Shouldis said the College honored Mrs. Fortin for her many years of volunteer service to St. Vincent’s Health Services as well as the College, and her generosity to students.

“She has a passion for helping young people to succeed. Her sharing of her time and talents and her generous support of students exemplify the characteristics we hope to instill in every St. Vincent’s College graduate,” Dr. Shouldis said.

While volunteering for several years at St. Vincent’s Medical Center, Ginny became aware of the nursing program at the College. It was then that she met with the founding president of the College, Anne T. Avallone, and decided to establish scholarships for nursing students.

“I look for someone with life experience who really wants a healthcare career,” she says. “Candidates who are working and even raising a family while focusing on academics are often less likely to receive other sources of financial assistance.”

“Since I couldn’t go to college when I was young, I decided the next best thing was to give the gift of education to others,” she says. “It makes me very happy to see young people fulfill their dreams.”

She established the Virginia O’Brien Fortin Scholarship for students enrolled in the Nursing Program in 1996. The first recipient, a Bridgeport resident, graduated in 1998.

Ginny enjoys meeting the scholarship recipients and keeps an eye out for the type of student she wants to help. “I try to attend the graduation of the recipients. It is most rewarding to see them reach their goal and know that I may have had a small part in their achievement.”

While most of the recipients of her scholarship have been nursing majors, she understands the importance of encouraging all allied health workers and has recently extended a scholarship to a radiography student at the College.

Though her own formal education stopped after graduating from Milford High School and St. John Business School in New Haven, she knew how important an education was. “I believe people should learn as much as they can learn. It’s important throughout life.”

She credits success of the family business at Preferred Tool & Die to the leadership and talent of her husband, Denis Fortin who served as president, while she partnered with him as vice president and secretary of the corporation. They worked hard as a couple over the years and they are now enjoying retirement as their two sons manage the business they began in 1962.

It was a very special moment for her when she received the Honorary Doctorate because her children and grandchildren were on hand for the award.

She’s also very excited about the increasing enrollment at the College and its plan for growth including an expansion of facilities to 2660 Main Street which will provide much needed space for classrooms, labs, student spaces and faculty offices.

“The exciting plans for the future are really going to help the College to grow and meet the need for healthcare professionals in our area,” she says. “It’s an important step forward for St. Vincent’s.”
The Challenges of Financing an Education in Healthcare

By: Mary L. Rich, Director of Financial Aid

The Financial Aid Department today has grown out of a small one-person office (just me) where much of the activities of the department were performed manually. Today, the office has added an Assistant Director and is part of a college-wide student information system. From processing $195,000 in institutional scholarships for 475 students during the 2007-2008 academic year to processing $349,553 in institutional scholarships for the 2011-2012 academic year, you can see how funds have been given to over 600 students.

We assist as many students as possible to receive institutional aid each year. These awards are made through available interest earned from individual funds within the Foundation. Due to the downturn of the stock market three years ago and the plummeting of interest rates, there has been reduced availability of funds.

Costs continue to rise, including charges for tuition. In years past, many of our adult students were able to receive tuition assistance benefits from their employers. Today, this may not be an available option. With about 20% of our students unemployed, their best course of action until the job market again opens is to be going to school, which they have done, but unfortunately without a lot of financial assistance.

Eighty-five percent of our aid recipients borrow under the Federal Direct Loan program. Many of these students finish their programs with over $25,000 in loan debt. Repayment on many of these loans extends over 10-15 years.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Applied for Aid</th>
<th>Received Aid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>651 (78%)</td>
<td>626 (96%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>499 (87%)</td>
<td>456 (91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>410 (77%)</td>
<td>402 (98%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>360 (72%)</td>
<td>343 (95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>286 (66%)</td>
<td>277 (97%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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An additional one third of our student population is not eligible for federal grants. These students may already have a bachelor’s degree which makes them ineligible for further federal grants. These students may also have been employed before their enrollment in classes, and their incomes from the past year may be higher than the threshold for federal grants.

Not only do our students need to meet tuition costs, but they have additional expenses such as uniforms and commuting costs to go back and forth to school at least three times a week. There are personal costs for computers, printers, and smart phones. And, then there are book expenses. Have you looked at the cost of textbooks lately? Ten years ago, a Microbiology book cost $40. Today, that cost is over $200. Costs have quadrupled.

To help plan for new programming needs, St. Vincent’s College has initiated a new Educational Grant Program which will become effective in the fall of 2012. New students will be eligible to receive scholarships based on prior test scores and academic achievement. These grants will be given for both full and part-time status. If students have a remaining need to help pay tuition charges, the College will assist students with additional grant money.

It gives us great pride to see our graduates working out in the community. Many of them tell us how grateful they are not only for their education but also for the help the Financial Aid Office gave them in covering the cost of finishing school.

The generosity of our benefactors helps the College continue to bridge the financial gap for students to complete their educational program at St. Vincent’s and enter the nursing or allied health workforce.

Donate to the Student Scholarship Fund today! Use the envelope enclosed in this issue!
Life in the NICU

When Besty Golder Faraci retired in January 2012, she put the wraps on a 40-year nursing career, much of it spent in the Newborn Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Tufts Medical Center Floating Hospital for Children.

Her work at Tufts was a lifetime away from her studies at the St. Vincent’s Hospital School of Nursing, but this member of the class of 1972 says her formation at St. Vincent’s gave her the skill and confidence to continue to learn and develop professionally throughout her career.

“I got an absolutely great background from St. Vincent’s,” she says from her home in Northbridge, Massachusetts. “The hands-on experience gave us some in-depth knowledge and we learned many different ways to do things.”

When she first started her career, nurses wore caps and were instructed to stand when a doctor entered the room. By the time she retired, she worked as part of a team model of care where nurses and doctors work collaboratively.

Originally, Betsy thought she would like to work in a Delivery Room but a rotation in the NICU changed her mind.

“When I got to NICU, I stayed there. I liked it so much better. In Labor, Delivery and Recovery, you never got the end of the story. In NICU, you get them after delivery and really get to know them and follow their story.”

Betsy, 64, says she has seen many changes in her career, but the most remarkable is the ability to save and sustain life in premature babies. Babies born at 23 or 24 weeks, weighing just a couple of pounds, can eventually leave the hospital and lead full active lives.

She says that babies who wouldn’t even get out of the Delivery Room 39 years ago, now routinely go home with their parents. In the past, little effort could be made to save babies under 28 weeks, because we didn’t have the ability to sustain life.

Today, new technology and procedures have given physicians and nurses the tools to treat two of the main threats to premature infants, pneumonia in under-developed lungs and brain hemorrhaging that often took lives in the past.

Her experience working with premature infants has taught her that parents are often the key to the survival and health of the child. She has watched parents spend hours by the bedside of newborns struggling for their lives, and she believes that all of the talking and teaching done by parents helps the babies survive by engaging them in life.

Betsy remembers twins born at 27 weeks and at only two pounds. The prognosis was not good but the parents would not give up on them. They visited daily for three months and finally took the healthy twins homes.

Seeing premature babies leaving the hospital healthy and growing was one of the biggest thrills for Betsy. She and the other nurses also enjoyed the parties when the children and parents would return in a couple of years for a reunion.

“She looks back on her time at St. Vincent’s fondly and with a sense of humor. As one of the first married students allowed to enter the program, she remembers being called on the carpet for breaking curfew and missing a house meeting. It took some explaining on her part to convince the Sister in charge that she couldn’t stay the night in the dorm because she had to go home and cook for her husband.

This June marked the 40th anniversary of her graduation. Her life and the entire field of medicine have changed significantly over that time but she remains grateful for her time at St. Vincent’s and her career.

The mother of one son is also a proud grandmother of three and will probably do some per diem work in a local hospital. She says she won’t miss the one-hour drive to work each day, but that her career was a real love match.

“They say you should always love what you do, and I loved it, loved working with kids. It was a gift to be able to do it.”

Have you moved recently? Send your updated contact information to Alumni@stvincentscollege.edu
STRATFORD— “You can’t wait for a job to fall out of the sky. You have to be your own recruiter. When I realized that I could do something combining my computer skills and medical knowledge, it was very exciting for me,” says Carol Devitto.

The 58-year-old Stratford resident recently found a challenging new job by combining her background in computers with the knowledge she gained from completing a Medical Assistant Certificate program at St. Vincent’s College.

In May 2011, she began work as a Software Support Specialist at LibertasMD in East Norwalk. The company sells software for electronic medical records as many physicians offices and hospitals continue to convert from paper to electronic health records.

Devitto, who is a Fairfield University graduate, says the certificate program at St. Vincent’s College, which she completed in 2010, prepared her well for her new career.

“The Medical Assistant Certificate really positioned me in a unique way for this job because I have to know the workings of a doctor’s office and the kind of clinical as well as office/administrative tasks that medical assistants focus on.”

After years of getting outsourced from jobs as a computer help desk manager, Carol made the decision in 2010 to begin a career change.

“I knew I could beat my head against the wall and I wouldn’t find another job in my field. Medical Assisting looked like a good fit-half clinical and half office management skills.”

She briefly worked as a Medical Assistant in a local physician’s office but jumped at the chance to link her medical assistant training with skills she had acquired in the computer industry.

“On this job I really walk both sides of the street. It was a leap forward and a way to recreate myself in the market and it has totally changed me. I knew I had to do something new.”

Devitto, who had some apprehension about returning to school, soon learned that many of her fellow students were people in her situation—non traditional, older students looking for a second career. She said the faculty was supportive and formed great bonds with the other students.

“The St. Vincent’s Medical Assistant program allowed me to totally reinvent myself. I had to hit the ground running, but I’m glad it opened the door to a new career. I hope that over time I’ll be able to help the College and make a donation.”

Rewarding Career Change in Radiography

Mark Kurzela made a decision a few years back that he wanted to better himself. He was making a living as a beverage distributor, but wanted a career.

At first he thought he might like to be a fireman, but a visit to the Emergency Room of St. Vincent’s opened up a new life for him.

“I was in EMT school and had to do a rotation for a week in Emergency. A guy came in with a dislocated elbow and I watched a technician do a portable x-ray on the patient. He took x-rays before and after the doctor put the cast on and I thought that was real cool, something I could really do,” Kurzela says. I decided to get into the field there and then.”

Kurzela graduated from St. Vincent’s College in 2003 with an Associate in Science Degree with a major in Radiography. He has been working since that time as a Diagnostic Technologist at St. Vincent’s Medical Center.

Mark’s search to learn more about a career working with x-rays led him to St. Vincent’s College, which offers a degree in Radiography as well as a bachelors completion program with advanced imaging options. It also offered the flexibility he needed to support his family while returning to school.

“St. Vincent’s gave me the opportunity to pursue my studies because it had the hours I needed so I could work and study full-time,” says Mark, the father of three teens.

St. Vincent’s College also gave him the confidence that he could succeed. The Harding High School graduate had not been in class for years and like many non-traditional students, had some apprehension about going back to school.

“I think you’re always uncertain during a transition, but I decided to take it one day at a time,” says Kurzela, who enrolled in the program in 2000. “The College gave me great support. All the faculty helped and encouraged me. Everyone is pulling together to get you through the program.”

Since graduating he has added an advanced certificate in CT Scanning from St. Vincent’s College and is now working on a certificate in MRI. He loves his job and the variety of assignments throughout the Medical Center.
Based on information published by the U.S. Government, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 3.2 million new wage and salary jobs will be added in healthcare between 2008 and 2018. This is more than any other American industry. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services forecasts a shortage in Connecticut of almost 22,000 nurses by 2020. In looking specifically for the impact of such shortages in southwest Connecticut, the authors of a recent Health Care Industry Cluster study concluded that the predictions of the nursing shortages along with other identified healthcare workforce shortages in the state will be the most important issue affecting the future of healthcare in this region.

Armed with this information, St. Vincent’s College has made a commitment to be a key player in addressing these shortages by expanding its program offerings to meet current and emerging nursing and allied health workforce needs. In order to do so the College must expand its facilities to accommodate growing enrollments in programs traditionally delivered in an on-site environment:

- Add an additional learning space in a separate building on campus to accommodate growing enrollments by retrofitting the 3rd level of 2660 Main Street.
- Update the current Hunting Street Campus building.
- Add and/or expand science and skills laboratories to provide state-of-the-art technology to enhance hands-on application and simulation experiences.
- Expand group and individual student study and work space. Design gathering spaces that support team activities.
- Provide workspace for the additional faculty and staff who will be employed to support growing enrollments.

Today, St. Vincent’s plans a $5 million investment project, of which $2.8 million will be raised through philanthropy, that will address the education of nurses and other allied health professionals in the community for generations to come. The enhancement of the College’s first campus building, and the construction and renovation of existing facilities are key elements of the College’s strategic plan. This approach will provide a student-focused learning environment with state-of-the-art technology and a collegiate campus facility.
A World of Opportunity Close to Home

Preliminary floor plan is still in design phase and subject to change.
Inspiring Others to Serve

Betsy Smith was standing in a cloud when she was struck by lightning. Fortunately, it’s something most people never have to deal with, but the experience changed her life and set her more intently on a healthcare career. The 27-year-old Fairfield resident began her nursing courses at St. Vincent’s College in fall 2011 and is well on her way to a healthcare career.

On July 21, 2010, she and her boyfriend Alan were part of a small group ascending Grand Teton, the high point of the Teton Range in Wyoming. They were just 100 feet below the summit of the 13,775 foot mountain, standing in the clouds when lightning struck. Two storm systems had quickly come together accelerating the weather front.

She recalls that suddenly the cloud was filled with a static buzz, and then it seemed as if the lightning was bouncing and flashing off everything. The climbing party immediately separated themselves from the metal gear they were carrying and sought to take cover in the cleft of a rock face.

In all they may have been struck six or seven times, either direct hits or ricochets. “It was the most painful experience in my life,” Betsy recalls. “It’s not something I like to relive.”

The lightning strike temporarily paralyzed her, so that she could hardly move her body for over an hour. Eventually, with the help of her boyfriend Alan, she and her group slowly dragged themselves toward a rescue party.

When the storm passed, she could hardly use her arm and she had no sense of touch in her fingers. The lightning had also found the wristwatch she was wearing and seared her left wrist. She had burns on her elbow, shoulder and foot and lost her right index finger to amputation due to the full thickness burn. The nerve damage was excruciating.

The accident occurred at 10:30 in the morning but given the limited medical capabilities of the search and rescue team, she did not get to the hospital until 11 that night. Because the nearest burn unit was a long way off in Salt Lake City, she was airlifted by helicopter off the mountain and driven to a hospital in Jackson, Wyoming.

She was in the hospital for three days where she had skin grafts and other treatments, followed by a few months of physical therapy. She now has full use of both hands and has returned to good health, but she hasn’t forgotten the trauma or the feeling of helplessness.

The first hospital stay involved the amputation of her right index finger and a large incision on the left forearm to allow circulation to return to her hand. Doctors also monitored her for potential cardiac and kidney problems for three days. A week later, she was readmitted for severe pain and anxiety, while she was there they did the skin graft and sutured the other burns.

During her ordeal she received good medical treatment, but she also experienced “examples of both good and bad care” from the standpoint of compassion and the personal care that helps a patient retain a sense of dignity and wellbeing.

“When three days after the injury, they hadn’t even taken the burnt clothing out of the room,” she recalls. Nor did anyone really help her with taking a bath or washing her hair, which meant so much to her as she struggled to begin recovery.

She says the clothing and bathing had such a big impact because she and others in her group smelled of burned flesh and were having nightmares. The hospital staff didn’t make the connection that the dreams may have been triggered by the smells.

She vowed that if she became a nurse, she would take care of the “whole” person by being attentive to their emotional and spiritual dimensions.

“It’s already their worst day when someone is admitted to a hospital. They don’t want to be there and we have to try to make it better. I want to be the kind of nurse who will take the time to wash somebody’s hair when they need it and be there for them as a person. I learned that simple things like helping a patient with a bath or changing a dressing can change the entire experience.”

When Betsy and her boyfriend moved to Fairfield to be closer to his family during recovery, she was really happy to learn that St. Vincent’s College was nearby.
She already had a degree in Outdoor Recreation from the University of North Texas, and had worked as an EMT and nurse’s aide. She knew she wanted a healthcare career, but also wondered what it would be like going back to school. “I had to take algebra and chemistry as part of my pre-requisites and it had been 11 years since I had taken those courses in high school. It was a little scary going back, and I wondered how I would function given what I had gone through. Memory loss is a problem associated with lightning strikes. I was pretty nervous.”

But she calmed down quickly after visiting St. Vincent’s and meeting with faculty and students. “You feel really welcome and they cater to non-traditional students,” she says. “I was surprised to see that many students are older than me, already have one or two degrees and also have jobs and families. The professors really understand that students are dealing with family and job issues.”

She began her Nursing 101 course in the fall of 2011 and enjoyed her clinical rotations. The adventurous spirit that has guided her life outdoors and mountain climbing is also pushing her forward in her studies.

“A big part of climbing is self-efficacy, telling yourself, ‘Let me try and see if I can do this.’ It’s empowering,” she says. Now that she’s strong again, Betsy has resumed climbing. In her free time, she and Alan go ice climbing in the Catskills and summer rock climbing in the Adirondacks. They also enjoy rock climbing in the challenging New Paltz, N.Y. Shawangunks, but she’s quick to admit that she’s “picky about weather” and will not go climbing into the rumble of thunder.

When Betsy graduates in 2013, she hopes to return out west where her heart is, and perhaps work in an Emergency Room or Burn Unit. She enjoyed the hands-on experience at St. Vincent’s which gave her an inside look at different patient settings.

She believes that having gone through the lightning strikes, she has much to offer patients who need care after an accident. In the meantime, she is pleased with her choice of College and for the opportunity to learn. “I’m in real good company at St. Vincent’s. So many students here have a strong passion for becoming a nurse, and most of them are here after having done other things in their lives. The college really supports that attitude.”

For a retired Navy serviceman who has always worn a buzz cut, it wasn’t easy for Keith Prazeres to let his hair down, but he jumped at the chance when he read about “Beautiful Lengths.”

He and his 9-year old daughter, Mia, a 4th grader in Johnson Elementary School in Bethel, recently donated their locks to make wigs for women who are undergoing chemotherapy as part of the Pantene Beautiful Lengths project.

The 36-year-old Assistant Director of Financial Aid at St. Vincent’s College teaches Math and is working on a degree in Nursing.

He first got the idea for the project on his way to work. In the short distance from his car to the medical center, he began to notice women walking into St. Vincent’s with hats, bandanas and wigs while they were undergoing cancer treatment. “It was noticeable they had lost their hair, but they walked with great dignity and beauty,” he said, and that made him want to reach out.

Classmate Kerri Rees, was quick to join him at the event. “I had been planning on donating my hair for a while, so when Keith sent out the email to donate I jumped at the opportunity. I decided to donate because my mom passed away from cancer in 2004. She never lost her hair during treatment, but I accompanied her during many chemotherapy treatments and got to see how so many others did with the same disease. I felt it was just a simple way to support someone who has cancer,” says Rees.

Prazeres, who worked on a nuclear submarine, is more than happy to say goodbye to the conditioners and pony tails and have his own buzz cut back. Shampooing in the morning is a lot quicker and easier. Kerri Rees is happy she did it but misses her long locks at times.

“It has been a change, but I know that I’m fortunate enough to be able to grow it back,” she says. “It was a great experience, and it was so awesome to have the support of the school. I hope that it also inspires others to get involved and reach out to someone who needs the help.”

Going Great Lengths for Others
Living the Mission in Service to Others

Over 250 stuffed animals were collected at the College in support of a project the Girl Scouts of Housatonic Council Troop 60053 coordinated to benefit children at Yale Children’s Hospital.

St. Vincent’s first year radiography students and “Be The Match” teamed up for a bone marrow registry supporting those in immediate need of a transplant.

Faculty, staff and students joined together in a spring cleanup project to help beautify the campus and the neighborhood.

The first year Radiography students participated in a beautification event at the historic South Pavilion of Seaside Park in Bridgeport this spring, planting trees and cleaning up the beach.

The Radiography Class of 2012 organized a project to collect duffel bags, overnight bags and luggage of new or slightly used quality to donate to the Bridgeport chapter of the Department of Children and Families (DCF).
Interest Grows in Online Nursing Program

More than 102 Registered Nurses throughout the state are now at work in the RN to BSN online program offered by St. Vincent's College. This program is designed to support the American Nurses Association initiative to have all nurses earn a bachelors of science degree within ten years of RN licensure.

Flexibility, the opportunity to learn at your own pace and the support of online instructors have helped to create a growing interest and enthusiasm about the new program, says Sharon Makowski, DNP, RN, program chair.

"Adult learners are really pleased with the flexible nature of our program," she says. "Nurses work a variety of shifts that would make attending a traditional class impossible. The online nature of the program gets over that hurdle."

She said some nurse students are posting their assignments at 2 in the morning (after they finish their evening shifts), while others are working online at various times during the day, depending on their work and family schedules.

A fourth cohort or online class for the RN to BSN program will be launched in August. The first group of 25 students that began studies in January of last year is now halfway through the program that enables working nurses to complete a bachelors degree.

"The response has been great. We find that students are performing very well academically and they're really comfortable with setting their own pace through online learning," says Makowski.

While many St. Vincent's Medical Center nurses jumped at the chance to enter the program, enrollment also includes nurses from Bridgeport, Yale-New Haven and Waterbury Hospitals and many skilled nursing facilities across the state.

Students include recent grads who have just started a career after earning an associate degree along with nurses who have been out of school for 15 to 20 years or more.

Dr. Makowski says that several hundred men and women graduate from two-year degree and diploma programs each year in the state of Connecticut. Many, like Karen Ospina, RN, of Milford have always wanted to complete a degree but simply haven't had the time or opportunity.

Ospina has been a nurse for 14 years and has always wanted to earn her bachelors degree, but the 41-year-old mother of five children works full-time in the electrophysiology lab at St. Vincent’s Medical Center and hasn't had a moment to spare.

"I come from a family of nurses. My mother, grandmother and aunt were all nurses," says Ospina, who is a member of the first online class going through the program. "One thing my mother always regretted was that she didn’t get a degree. I’m lucky. I’m in the right place at the right time. It’s a great course and the Medical Center supports it. I feel lucky that I’ve been able to enroll in the program."

Ospina says she does a lot of her course work later in the day and on weekends. It’s a relief to know that the online program enables her to learn when she has the time and presence of mind to move ahead. It would not be possible if she had to get to class at a fixed time.

Dr. Makowski says the individualized nature of the RN to BSN completion program has helped students to succeed.

“One thing we do that is really unique for the program is to develop an individualized plan for each student. From the beginning, we get a good handle on what students need to take and to plan out a progression that also factors in work schedules and family commitments.”

St. Vincent's College formalized an agreement with the Connecticut Community College Nursing Program (CT-CCNP) that promotes ongoing learning among nursing professionals and makes the transition from any of the CCNP programs to the RN to BSN program a smooth, clear and concise process. Students can transfer existing college credits in General Education and Nursing toward the estimated 125-127 credits needed to complete the program.

For more information on the new online RN to BSN completion program, call 800-873-1013 or apply online at www.stvincentscollege.edu.
Vincent Cataudella (MS Central Connecticut State University, BS University of Connecticut) joined St. Vincent’s as the admissions counselor. His prior work experience includes working as an Intervention Associate for Rehabilitation Associates of Connecticut. Vinny is no stranger to the College; he was an intern for the admissions department from 2008 through 2009.

Christopher Given (MBA Quinnipiac University) was appointed as the College Chief Financial Officer in fall 2011. He previously served as the Director of Budget & Business Intelligence within the St. Vincent’s Health System. Prior to coming to St. Vincent’s Chris worked in the finance departments of both Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation and American Medical Response.

Kostas “Gus” Petrakos (DA Adelphi University, MA Adelphi University, BA Columbia University) was appointed full-time Associate Professor of Mathematics during the 2011-2012 academic year. His most recent experience in teaching was at Adelphi University in Garden City, NY where he was an instructor in Calculus I-III and Probability & Statistics.

Mary Porter (MS Sacred Heart University) joined the nursing faculty in 2011 as an Assistant Professor. She is also currently employed at St. Vincent’s Medical Center as a staff nurse in the post-anesthesia care unit where she has been working since 2002. Mary is an alumni of St. Vincent’s College.

Sharon Simon (Southern Connecticut State University) is the new admissions tele-counselor. She comes from a customer service background including spending six years at HealthNet of the Northeast in Shelton, CT. Prior to HealthNet she spent five years in a personal service representative position at the Wachovia Bank in Shelton.

Brian Sorrells (M.A. Yale University, B.A. University of Virginia) was appointed in spring 2012 as an Assistant Professor of Humanities. He recently was employed at Yale University as a lecturer in Christian Ethics. He has also spent time at Amherst College as a visiting lecturer in religion and as an adjunct professor at the University of Bridgeport.

Sister Denise Williams, DC (MS, State University of New York, BA St. Joseph College) is a new addition to the team beginning her role as executive assistant to the president of the college. Sister relocated from Albany to Bridgeport to join the SVC Team. Previously she served as provincial secretary for the Daughters of Charity, Northeast Province. She has a long history working in the education field.

Maureen Wright (MSN Western Connecticut State University, MPH New York Medical College, BS Pace University) was appointed Assistant Professor for the RN to BSN Completion program this January. She has been part of the nursing faculty at the College since 2006. Prior to coming to St. Vincent’s she was an adjunct clinical professor at Fairfield University. Mimi is also a nursing graduate from St. Vincent’s.
Find Joy and Serve Others Susan Davis Tells St. Vincent’s Graduates

In her commencement address to graduates who will soon begin working in the nursing and allied health fields, Susan L. Davis, Ed.D., CEO of St. Vincent’s Health Services, put talk of healthcare aside and focused on the importance of character and integrity in their personal and professional lives.

“Today is the day you dreamed of,” she told the 112 graduates of St. Vincent’s College at the 2012 Commencement ceremony held on May 18, in the Quick Center of Fairfield University. “God has your back,” she said, adding that the healthcare calling is “a life force that drives you to make a difference in life.”

In an honest and heartfelt talk, she reminded graduates that even when they get their “dream job,” they’re going to face adversity and challenges that they can’t predict. “Even if you follow your passion, you’re not going to love it every day,” she said, urging the new healthcare workers to be hard working, humble, self-aware and put service before self. Dr. Davis told the men and women graduates that they must be prepared to make decisions in the face of adversity, and “to reach inside and move forward in spite of disappointments.”

During her commencement talk, she praised Virginia O’Brien Fortin of Easton, retired Vice President of Preferred Tool & Die Company (which she owns with her husband, Denis in Shelton) who was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters in recognition of her many years of service and support for St. Vincent’s College and the Medical Center.

Noting that Mrs. Fortin’s own dreams of becoming a nurse were never realized, Dr. Davis said she passed that dream along to others by funding nursing scholarships and providing innumerable “acts of kindness and compassion.”

Dr. Davis concluded her talk by asking graduates to find true joy in life by reveling in the moment, being kind to others, and being courageous. “Nothing happens in the future,” she said, “It happens now. Be fearless, take risks.”

St. Vincent’s College President/CEO Martha K. Shouldis, Ed.D. and Marianne Laska, RN, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees presented diplomas to 96 graduates who received Associate of Science degrees in Nursing; 14 receiving degrees in Radiography and two who earned Associate of Science degrees in Medical Assisting, making it the largest graduating class in 21 years.

“Earning a healthcare degree will change your life forever and change the lives of those you care for,” said Dr. Shouldis, who reminded graduates that the health profession calls for “lifetime learning.”

The new Frank Scifo, MD Award for Excellence was presented to radiography graduate Rachel N. Levy of Derby, and the Rafael Squitieri, MD Award for Excellence went to nursing graduate Ralph J. Behlok of Bridgeport. The Pasquariello Memorial Award for caring was awarded to Stacy Plaskowitz of Orange (Nursing), and Meredith L. Toth of Stratford (Radiography); The Connecticut General Assembly Citation of Merit was awarded to Priscilla Soberal of Shelton (Nursing).

During the ceremony, the College also presented the Vincentian Award to Ronald J. Bianchi of Trumbull, who retired after 37 years of service to St. Vincent’s Health Services as President of the St. Vincent’s Medical Center Foundation and Corporate Senior Vice President. Mr. Bianchi was also instrumental in the creation and growth of Swim Across the Sound, a leading provider of cancer prevention and patient support services in the region.
Alumni Cocktail Reception

Everyone in attendance enjoyed an evening of reminiscing and reconnecting with old friends and new. This was the first time that some alumni have come back to the college since graduation. Tours of the college were given with fun stories being shared by all. Next year’s Annual Alumni Day Cocktail Reception is scheduled for Thursday, April 4, 2013 – we hope to see you there!

Thank you for giving…

Annually the College has printed this giving report as one of our ways to thank you. Each gift, regardless of amount, has a major impact on our students and the wider community. Let us applaud you for what you have done to help St. Vincent’s College fulfill its mission and strategic vision. Please accept our thanks for your continued support of our current and future students.

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