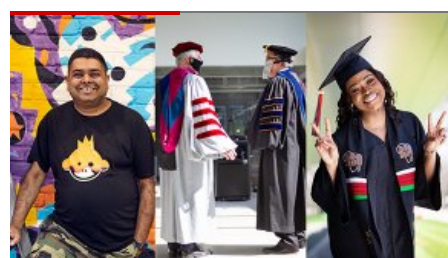




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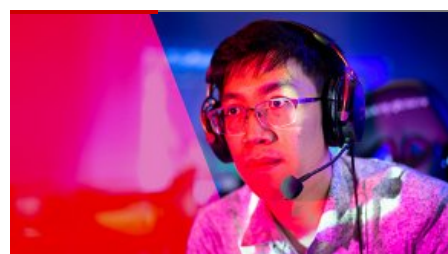
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Graduates Join 152 Years of Academic History

By Marcia Faye

Nearly 2,000 strong—undergraduates and graduate students from every college and institute comprising Illinois Institute of Technology—moved their tassels to the left in spirit as they became members of the Class of 2021 at the 152nd Commencement Ceremony, held virtually on May 15. Alan W. Cramb, in his final Commencement as Illinois Tech president, and Peter Kilpatrick, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, awarded the degrees in a pre-recorded **event** from the Ed Kaplan Family Institute for Innovation and Tech Entrepreneurship.

The Commencement also featured messages from special guests: keynote speaker **Ankur Jain** (CS '03), founder and chief executive officer of B9 Beverages/Bira 91; student speaker Priscilla Akpabio (ME '21); and honorary degree recipients **Arlene Harris**, the president and co-founder of Dyna LLC, and **John Anderson**, president emeritus of Illinois Tech. (Fay Clayton (LAW '79), not present in the pre-recorded event, also received an honorary degree.) Jain, speaking from his homeland of India, told the graduates that the global pandemic has taught the world three uniquely important lessons.



The Class of 2021 is going to have a leg up because you've had that additional stimulation of being faced with not only your curriculum, but also with the adversity that came with the last year of our difficult times," — Arlene Harris

"First, it has taught us the importance of flexibility... Flexibility lets us remain humble and it ensures that we remain curious and keep on learning. Second, it has taught us the lesson of empathy.... We also became more aware of the shared struggles that we face in this generation... Third, and most importantly, it has renewed our optimism in technology and human ingenuity... And [with] this optimism—that no matter how grave the challenge—we can find a way out of it through courage and innovation is your superpower," Jain said from across continents.

Harris, whose husband is cell phone pioneer **Martin "Marty" Cooper** (EE '50, M.S. '57), is referred to as the "first lady of wireless" because of her significant accomplishments in the field of telecommunications. She told the graduates that they each should be receiving an honorary degree in perseverance.

"The Class of 2021 is going to have a leg up because you've had that additional stimulation of being faced with not only your curriculum, but also with the adversity that came with the last year of our difficult times," said Harris, before sending the graduates off with a confident flourish. "I appreciate and am humbled by the honorary degree I am getting today. It is an honor to be a party to a graduation with you all. I hope that you will see that this year has set you up to go on to solve a whole bunch of the problems that we will have to face in the future."

From Issue: **Summer 2021**

🚩 **Category:** On Campus

Raj Echambadi Is New Illinois Institute of Technology President

By unanimous decision from the Illinois Institute of Technology Board of Trustees, Raj Echambadi, a noted innovation researcher, was **named** the 10th president of the university and began his new role on Monday, August 16. The former Dunton Family Dean at D’Amore-McKim School of Business at Northeastern University will be inaugurated in a Mies Campus ceremony on Friday, September 17, as part of Illinois Tech’s Homecoming & Alumni Awards Weekend.



In a video prepared for the university community, Echambadi spoke of Frank Wakeley Gunsaulus’s “Million Dollar Sermon” and its timeless message of establishing an academic institution that would provide an education for the city’s diverse population.

“Illinois Tech has been an opportunity engine enabling our students’ economic mobility by offering exceptional and world-class technology and innovation across multiple disciplines. Never has this mission been more relevant as we rise out of this global pandemic in order to meet the challenges and opportunities of this unprecedented moment,” he said. “Illinois Tech, through its multidisciplinary and entrepreneurial ethos, is well prepared to lead into the future of abundant and thriving opportunities. A future that creates pathways and offers incredible possibilities is essential for extraordinary innovation, for an inclusive economy, and for our long-run social equity.”

Learn more about Echambadi’s vision for the university in this WTTW **Chicago Tonight** presentation. You can also look forward to reading about the new president in the fall 2021 edition of Illinois Tech Magazine.

From Issue: **Summer 2021**

Category: On Campus

Beginning the Conversation About AI in Ag

By Marcia Faye

When she was a child growing up in the small farming community of Tracy, Minnesota, Monika Sziron (THUM Ph.D. Candidate) recalls that her mom used a rather unconventional yardstick to measure her height each year: a corn stalk. As the duo drove down country roads lined by soybean, corn, and other crop fields, Sziron’s mom would pull over and stand her daughter next to a mature stalk to compare her new height to the previous year.

“It’s just a small memory, but I’ve always loved watching the fields grow,” says Sziron, who now lives in Montgomery, Illinois, and maintains a quarter-acre home garden plot that yields fruits and vegetables ranging from kale and peppers to raspberries and grapes, and even a cherry tree. Sziron commutes from her pastoral setting to Chicago, where she is combining her lifelong interest in agriculture with a paired interest in computer science and emerging technologies at Illinois Institute of Technology’s [Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions](#).

For her dissertation, Sziron created a [survey](#) this spring querying the use of artificial intelligence in agriculture today and is distributing it to farmers in the greater Midwest region (Illinois, Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Minnesota, and Iowa). Sziron is hopeful that by the project’s conclusion in April 2022, her findings can be shared with state agriculture policymakers and can play a role in assisting how developers can incorporate AI into agricultural devices while keeping ethical, practical, and human-centric considerations in mind.



“I believe many farmers are using AI in some way, shape, or form, whether it’s AI implemented within their combines via upgrades or via applications that they are using on their smart phones or computers,” says Sziron.

“I believe many farmers are using AI in some way, shape, or form, whether it’s AI implemented within their combines via upgrades or via applications that they are using on their smart phones or computers,” says Sziron. “And with my findings so far, there is a general positivity, optimism, and willingness to implement AI within farming practices.”

She says that while AI can make farming more efficient in terms of both labor and costs, and tries to make farming more predictable even in the midst of a changing climate, Sziron believes that it is critical that the traditional human element of farming not be lost in an attempt to incorporate new technologies in the industry.

“Technology and farming have a complex history. I like the example of the threshing machine. The threshing machine was a useful machine but it also required a number of people to operate. When the threshing machine arrived on the farm or in the community, everyone knew that there was going to be some kind of social element,” Sziron explains. “The threshing machine was a sign and symbol for the community that people would be coming together and seeing one another. As technology advanced and continues to advance, there are more instances of less community. One memoir I’ve been reading mentions how a farmer’s wife wished that headlights would never have been put on tractors because it allowed her husband to work late into the night. She wished she could see him more, as it meant that work hours could go beyond sunrise to sunset.”

As Sziron’s surveys continue to come in via her networking connections and social media, and through word-of-mouth efforts, she looks forward to bringing awareness to the discussion of AI ethics in farming, a niche that right now, she says, seems overlooked.

“Within the academic landscape and even within the general public, we often forget where our food comes from and who is behind our food resources,” says Sziron. “This is an area that hasn’t had a lot of scholarship—and I had to ask, why not? There are families behind those corn and soybean fields, and I think that is really important to remember.”

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📌 **Category:** Research Briefs

Learning Through Gaming

By Andrew Wyder



There are moments that, some six years later, still stand out to Elvin Moy.

Moy (ME, EMGT, M.Eng. MAE '18) can recall the first group gaming event, one where students gathered to play video games online together, that he and his Illinois Institute of Technology gaming organization held on campus. Specifically, he recalls how they forgot to tape the master ethernet cable down and that it was pulled out when someone tripped on it, putting a pause to the 50-plus players participating in the event for a full hour. Then there was the time he decided to host a gaming event and only two people showed up—but he had ordered the pizza, a great deal of it, without asking for anyone to RSVP.

It was through these moments, and others he experienced during his time at Illinois Tech as a student and as one of the leaders of the university's gaming community, that Moy came to develop a maxim that he continues to live by in his personal and professional lives.

"It's always about learning," Moy says. "I think that's kind of the Illinois Tech training, where learning never stops—even after graduation."

That gaming was a forum though which Moy gained these insights is no coincidence.

His interest began with Pokémon, on Game Boy Color, his first game and video game device, which his father bought for him when he was in elementary school. His passion for what was still just a hobby started to burrow in, and to expand, when Moy arrived at Illinois Tech.

An activity that once focused on consoles—devices such as the Game Boy Color, or an Xbox or PlayStation—expanded into personal computer-based games that were built around the idea of connection, to games such as League of Legends that emphasize building relationships and working with other players in a virtual environment.

In playing these games, Moy built a network of people he now considers lifelong friends. But as he got more involved in the informal gaming community at Illinois Tech, he recognized that there was an opportunity to expand and build upon that shared interest in gaming in a meaningful way.

"The niche that I saw, or the need that I saw, was trying to create an organized community," Moy says. "People get to know each other, people get to create connections because, on campus, you have professional engineering societies, right? It's a similar kind of knowledge, or community, that you build within gaming."

Three years after graduating from Illinois Tech and firmly established as an engineering associate with **Sargent & Lundy** in Chicago, Moy remains, as Illinois Tech Esports Executive Director April Welch (M.S. TCOM '09) says, "the heart of the program."

"The [gaming] scene before Elvin was very casual and very disparate, and I was the faculty liaison for multiple different little clubs that never paid any attention to each other," says Welch, who is also the associate vice president for strategic initiatives at Illinois Tech. "When Elvin came, his technical skills, his ability to rally, and his ability to organize and run tournaments and run events...he's the glue that brought all the other clubs together and elevated [Illinois Tech's gaming community] to a higher level."



"When Elvin came, his technical skills, his ability to rally, and his ability to organize and run tournaments and run events...he's the glue that brought all the other clubs together and elevated [Illinois Tech's gaming community] to a higher level."

—April Welch

Illinois Tech Esports is the university-backed gaming organization that Moy has helped build and grow. The organization now has more than 100 students who compete against other colleges and universities across North America in competitions. It also now provides scholarships to incoming Illinois Tech students and will play a key role in upcoming university gaming initiatives.

But while Moy still remains a gamer—with remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, he says that his focus was on his engineering projects from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and once the day was over, he could put the work laptop away, switch his computer monitor's input, and start playing games—he is involved in different ways.

Now he finds ways to include gaming in his life as an engineer. His job involves working with clients around the United States—people at places like power plants and companies within industries such as mining—to help them better navigate their current projects. When he's on a trip to visit a work site or even when he's on vacation, Moy says he tries to meet with local gaming contacts or visit internet cafes to learn about that particular city's setup and talk to those involved in it to get an idea what the esports scene is like there.

"Whenever I can make time for it, I like to see how [esports and gaming] can affect what I'm doing right now," Moy says. "Whether it's mixing it with education, collegiate esports, or maybe it's an underrepresented community and trying to say, 'Hey, we should try to create a league here or try to provide equipment.'"

Moy has backed those words with actions. Through Illinois Tech Esports, he helped refurbish Xboxes and gave them to local hospitals for children to play with during their stay. He's also a mentor for high school students through a program called **ACE**, where Moy is paired with a student for one academic year and serves as a resource while teaching them about engineering.

That passion for teaching others and a continuing quest to learn—a skill he says he developed through the ups and downs of helping to build Illinois Tech Esports—has made an impact on Moy in a significant way, one that he believes still resonates today.

"I had a similar conversation with a friend that's from Ohio. He's also an alumni of the school that was very involved in esports, and we both came to the same conclusion," Moy says. "I would still be graduating with an engineering degree, sure, but I'd be just a completely different person in terms of the experiences that esports gave me."

Growth Through Gaming: Illinois Tech Esports Has Grown into Valuable Campus Asset

While it took time and a great deal of effort since its precursors' founding in 2013, **Illinois Tech Esports** has been a successful venture for the university—and its continued growth seems inevitable after **becoming a partner in the Surge facility**, Chicago's first esports-specific facility. Among the opportunities the partnership will provide includes establishing, with the support of Chicago Alderman Pat Dowell, the Bronzeville Esports League to provide opportunities for competition and creativity to students in the broader community.

While Elvin Moy (ME, EMGT, M.Eng. MAE '18) was among its chief student drivers, the more formal organization came about also because of the work of April Welch, the associate vice president for strategic initiatives at Illinois Tech, and at the suggestion of Jennifer Agosto, the former coordinator of compliance and student-athlete services for Illinois Tech Athletics, who championed a formal esports organization.

Over the course of what Moy says was a six- or seven-month process, the group put together a **proposal book** for the creation of an official university esports program. Illinois Tech Esports received funding to open the Esports and Digital Arts Center, located in The McCormick Tribune Campus Center, in 2018. The center, the organization's home base, features the equipment and space needed for gaming and design opportunities.

Illinois Tech Esports now sponsors competitive teams across eight games—Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, Hearthstone, League of Legends, Overwatch, Rainbow Six Siege, Rocket League, Smash Brothers, and Valorant. While the esports organization does not have a varsity team, Moy has made sure it is run as though it does, setting up an application process, grade-point average requirements, and holding tryouts for Illinois Tech students to earn a spot on teams that compete against other colleges or universities. Other members take part more casually, building relationships and networks with like-minded peers.

Like Moy before them, the students still lead the organization's day-to-day operations.

"They are conducting the tryouts, performing the evaluations, deciding the recipients of the awards—in conjunction with undergraduate admission," Moy says. "This gives a real opportunity for students to develop their leadership skills by interacting with different departments and offices on campus, just like what they'll be doing with their future full-time careers."

From Issue: **Summer 2021**

📌 **Category:** Features

Building for Community

By Andrew Connor



When Claudette Soto (ARCH '02, M.S. STE '05) was a young girl, she saw the hidden world within walls. Her father, in the process of renovating an apartment building in her Chicago neighborhood, took a hammer to a wall, exposing the network of pipes, wires, and support beams behind the Sheetrock. Soto says this new perspective was “mind-blowing.” From that point on, she dreamed about making buildings.

Soto, however, didn’t know exactly how she could do that. Growing up in **Gage Park**, a Chicago community beset by violence and disinvestment, she never felt that she had any meaningful exposure to architecture or to engineering. So, when she came across a recruitment brochure for Illinois Institute of Technology in her high school cafeteria that had been left behind from a recruiting event, she found a path forward and enrolled.

But it was far from easy.

“I had a lot of ups and downs in college; I doubted myself a lot,” says Soto. “I wondered, why was it so hard for me? The simple reason is exposure. The community that I grew up in didn’t have those peers that were visual, so I never learned what architecture was or what it meant. It was the same case for engineering.”

That realization helped lead Soto to the creation of **VAMOS** (Volunteer and Mentor One Summer) during the fourth year of her undergraduate program. At its beginning, VAMOS coached Gage Park middle school students in the STEM fields. The organization is still active today and now mentors first-generation university students as well. Soto remains involved as a mentor.

Following graduation, Soto began work at d’Escoto, Inc., one of the Midwest’s largest Hispanic-run professional engineering service firms. There she had the opportunity to work on what would become a pivotal project: the construction of a new high school, today known as **Victoria Soto** High School, a Modernist glass-paneled **school** in Gage Park.

"As an architect and engineer, [I felt] it was like a dream come true to work on a project in my community."

—Claudette Soto

“I told the president of our company that it has to be my project,” says Soto. “As an architect and engineer, [I felt] it was like a dream come true to work on a project in my community. As a minority and a woman, you’re often overlooked and ignored, the same way as the community is overlooked and ignored.”

After her time at d’Escoto, Soto started her own construction management firm, **baso, Ltd.**, in 2016. A small but growing company, baso focuses on the management and owner representation of community-centric projects in often overlooked areas. As an owner’s representative, Soto helps bring designs to life by finding the best possible teams to build them.



“What a lot of people don’t know is that the architects, engineers, and general contractors that work on these projects don’t usually send their A-teams to work on them,” she says. “I make sure that we find partners that have a mission to support my clients who don’t believe that this is just another job.”

Some of baso’s current and most recently completed projects include the **Chatham Education and Workforce Center**, the adaptive reuse of a building on 95th Street into a coffee shop, and the headquarters for **PODER** in Gage Park, which will serve as a learning and job center for adult Spanish-speaking immigrants. When it is completed, it will offer 7,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor space for education and events.

Additionally, Soto is working on the redevelopment of **Neal Math & Science Academy** in the predominantly Black and Latinx suburb of North Chicago, funded by the pharmaceutical company AbbVie. The building, Soto says, is poised to be one of the tallest in the city, offering views of the lake. Ground broke this past May.

“The magnitude of this structure is super-impactful,” says Soto. “You would be amazed as to how, on a certain level, kids perceive things in a different way. As soon as you start elevating the structure, you can see beyond that community, and the perspective changes so much. I am really excited to see that building come up, and to see those kids in there and what they dream about and think about from their new vantage point.”

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🚩 **Category:** Features

Volcanologist at Work

Calculating What Makes Volcanoes Blow

By Simon Morrow



As a young chemical engineer in Italy, a country riddled with active volcanoes, Augusto Neri (Ph.D. CHE '98) was offered the opportunity to work with Franco Barberi, a leading Italian volcanologist and family friend, to calculate the hazard of volcanic eruptions with new and innovative methods. Now Neri is a leading volcanologist in his own right, carrying on the work of simulating volcanoes that has proven critical to the field.

Neri climbed his first volcano, Mount Vesuvius, in high school, which he's now gone on to study as a researcher.

"It is always a great emotion to look at it in the background of the city of Naples. And, also a main concern," he says.

With the 2021 eruption of La Soufrière on the Caribbean island of Saint Vincent, the importance of assessing volcanic risk is starkly clear. While a similar eruption in 1902 caused about 1,600 fatalities, in 2021 the advanced detection of seismic activity and slow growth of the volcanic dome allowed more than 16,000 people to evacuate early enough that there were no fatalities.

"Such difference reflects per se the major progress made by volcanology in the last century," says Neri.

Learn what one Illinois Institute of Technology alumnus is doing to uncover the mysteries inside volcanoes.

WHO: Augusto Neri, director of the Volcanoes Department, Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia, Italy

WHAT HE DOES: Neri develops numerical simulation models to describe the dynamics of explosive volcano eruptions and applies those models to real-life risk assessments.

WHY HE CAME TO ILLINOIS TECH: He was impressed by Illinois Tech Distinguished Professor Emeritus Dimitri Gidaspo's pioneering methods for modeling multiphase fluids. "At Illinois Tech I was particularly attracted to the possibility to develop new modeling codes and, at the same time, to test and validate them through laboratory experiments," says Neri.



Augusto at INGV Headquarters in Rome (Italy, 2019)



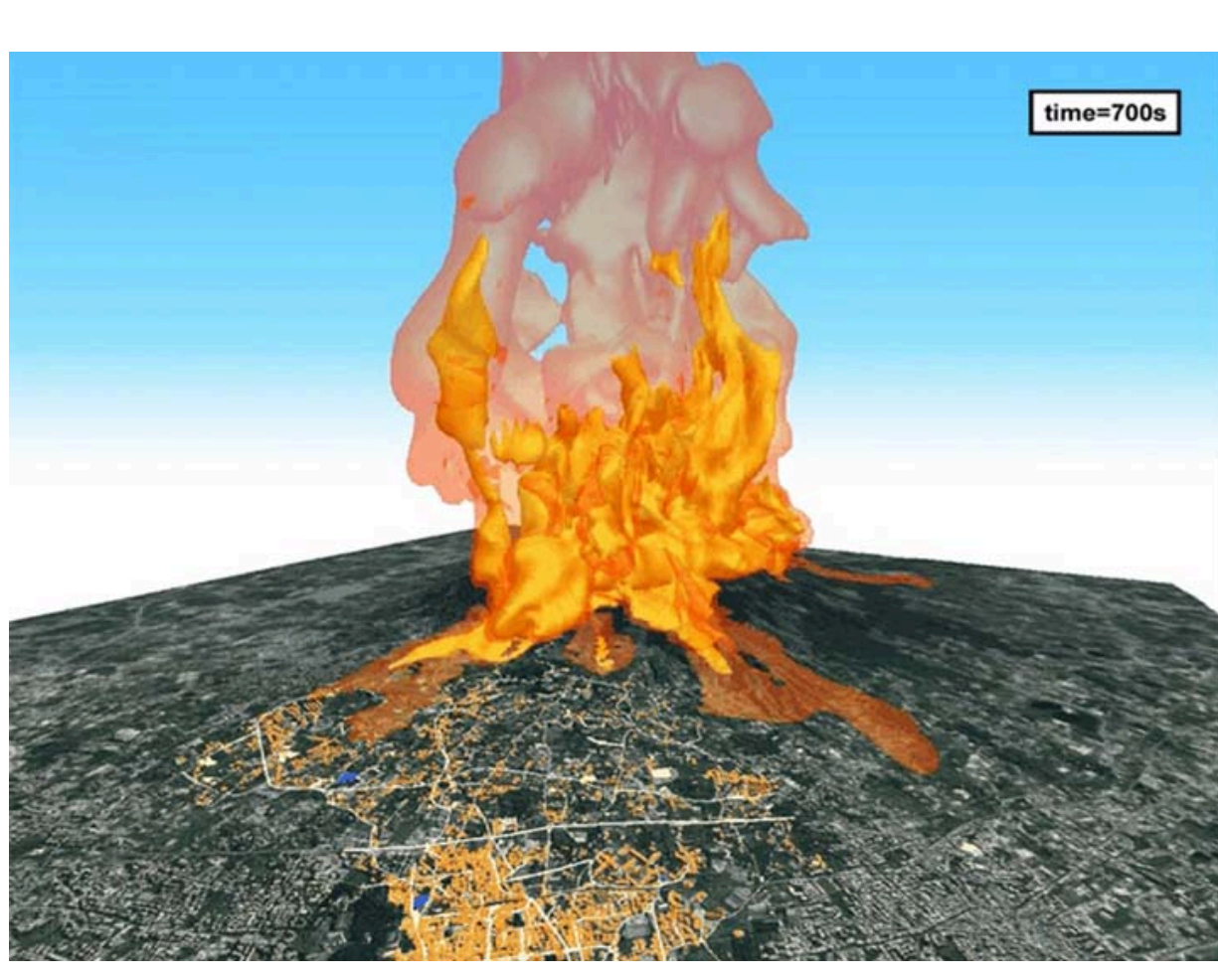
Augusto in Island (2015)

NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Neri has been among the trailblazers who have shown the volcanology community that computational work is applicable and useful to the field, helping unfold complex volcano processes that are difficult to understand just from observation.

He has also assisted in volcanic emergencies including the eruption of Mount Etna from 1991 to 1993. "This is a quite famous event due to the successful attempt to stop the propagation of some lava flows that were directly threatening a nearby town," says Neri. "I was very impressed at that time by the power of the phenomenon but also by the intelligence and audacity of volcanologists."

"Augusto masterminded the ambitious **EXPLORIS project** on Vesuvius and three other European volcanoes, which he very successfully led and managed across multidisciplinary research groups in all four countries," says Peter Baxter, research fellow at the University of Cambridge who works on the public health considerations related to natural disasters. The EXPLORIS project developed state-of-the-art numerical simulations and probabilistic risk procedures for eruptions. "It was unprecedented in volcanic-disaster risk reduction, advancing eruption scenario planning and probabilistic decision making in future crises at all four volcanoes," he says.

In 2020 Neri became an **American Geophysical Union fellow** and was honored with the organization's **Gilbert F. White Distinguished Award and Lecture**.



Numerical simulation output at Vesuvius for column collapse in a sub-Plinian eruption scenario. Colors represent isosurfaces of pyroclastic mixture temperature corresponding to 100 °C (light pink) and 350 °C (orange), 700 s after the beginning of the simulation.

GREATEST CHALLENGE: "For many volcanoes of the world, although some exceptions exist, it is possible to have a quite good idea of where a volcanic crater could form and when this could happen, although the anticipation time is often only of the order of just a few hours or days; vice versa, it is much more difficult to predict the scale and type of the upcoming eruption based on the knowledge of the data recorded by the monitoring networks," Neri says. "So right now, emergency plans for eruptions foresee the evacuation, in some cases as Vesuvius and Campi Flegrei in Italy, of up to several hundred thousand people based on statistical or precautionary approaches."

WHAT'S NEXT: As he continues the work of making numerical models of volcanoes more realistic and testing those models against data, Neri says he's especially interested in further developing the process for determining risk assessment based on the modeling results.

"This is a very complex goal that requires a strongly quantitative and multidisciplinary effort. As current director of the Volcanoes Department of Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia, I am trying to promote such developments through new research projects and innovative operational tools able to contribute to the mitigation of volcanic risk in Italy and abroad," he says.

Helping Those Left Behind

Syrian Alumni Create Initiative to Give Back

By Tad Vezner



[Left to right] Syrian Youth Empowerment Initiative co-founders Majed Abdulsamad (ARCH '16), George Batah (BA '15), and Toufik Simo (BA '16) enjoy an evening out in Chicago. (Co-founder Abed Arnaout (EE '14) is not in the photo.)

Majed Abdulsamad’s last day as a student in Syria ended with his assault and arrest, after he took part in an anti-government protest that was violently suppressed.

Other students, loyal to the country’s ruling party, had been given guns and the authority to stop the hundreds-strong protest that Damascus University later pretended had never happened. They put Abdulsamad in a holding pen. After he was released and sent home, Abdulsamad received notice that he was being expelled for “disrupting the order” on campus. He would soon be required to enlist in Syria’s army, his name registered at transit checkpoints as someone who should be immediately detained.

With less than a month to spare, and with the help of a scholarship program, he left for the United States to enroll at Illinois Institute of Technology.

“There were students who had to leave at once or they’d be captured and put in jail. I was able to get out,” Abdulsamad (ARCH ’16) says.

He wasn’t alone: Abdulsamad was one of 40 Illinois Tech students who received a Presidential Scholarship (now expanded into the undergraduate **Transfer Leadership Scholarship**), which paid for their tuition, room, and board. The program—a joint effort with **Jusoor**, a U.S.-based nonprofit advocating for furthering Syrian education—focused on individuals fleeing conflict overseas.

But Abdulsamad thought about the others left behind. He knew that, in the aftermath of the Syrian revolution and later, in its civil war, millions had been impacted, with many institutions of higher learning there in literal ruin. He and three other Syrian students at Illinois Tech talked about this frequently as they gathered in an apartment in Chicago’s Bridgeport neighborhood to play **Trex**, a card game they knew from back home.

"As someone whose life was transformed through education, I wanted to empower others to have the same opportunities."

—George Batah

Finally, one night in 2015, the four—Abdulsamad, George Batah (BA ’15), Toufik Simo (BA ’16), and Abed Arnaout (EE ’14)—set the cards aside, and after hours of lively discussion, committed themselves to help. The joint scholarship program that had brought them there had enough funding to last for only a couple of years. So, they founded the **Syrian Youth Empowerment Initiative** to at least partially address the gap, seeking out Syrian students who hoped to study abroad—particularly those who had been displaced or were living under troubling conditions.

“It was a great opportunity made available to us, and we wanted to do the same for others,” Abdulsamad says. “Access to education, especially higher education, became a luxury in Syria after thousands of schools and universities were bombed and reduced to rubble. Despite the helplessness that the war brings, we were in a place to contribute to a better future through access to education, and so we went for it.”

Batah, who is now SYE’s executive director, adds, “As someone whose life was transformed through education, I wanted to empower others to have the same opportunities.

“More importantly, we at SYE wanted to contribute to the development of the human capital of the conflict countries we serve, so they can build their countries when the time comes,” Batah says.

Knowing how many Syrians used Facebook, the group started a **page** that has since been viewed hundreds of thousands of times. They didn’t have grant money to squander, so they started out by helping with logistics. They advised students on how to choose schools, apply for them, and find outside financial aid. Over the years, they garnered some donations, enough to cover students’ examination fees.

But more importantly, they accumulated volunteers. At first, fellow Syrian nationals wanted to help; then, colleagues and friends from Illinois Tech and elsewhere stepped up. To date, they’ve had more than 100 mentors volunteer since 2015—including 15 from Illinois Tech—and have helped more than 350 students apply to college. Currently, they are working with approximately 120 of them.

“SYE has changed my life in every way and was there to help me achieve an impossible dream,” student Abdullah Bannan says, in a written statement. Bannan grew up in the war-torn city of Aleppo, moved with his family multiple times to avoid bombings, and with SYE’s guidance was accepted into Harvard University in 2019.

Through a grant from the New York-based **Catalyst Foundation** several years ago, SYE’s services were expanded to cover Iraqi students wanting to flee conflict as well. Those involved in the program don’t apply just to U.S. colleges; they’ve applied to institutions in Mexico, France, Canada, Egypt, and Lebanon.

In addition to his work with SYE, Abdulsamad is an architect and urban planner for **Global Designing Cities Initiative** in New York. When asked whether he’d return to Syria someday, he remembers the work it took getting out, and wonders.

Prior to the protest that got Abdulsamad expelled, he says that pictures of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad were being placed in every university hallway and room in the country. A friend in the registrar’s office had to send him his transcript in secret. Damascus’s airport and the U.S. embassy had closed, so he had to travel to Lebanon and to secure his passport and visa in a mere two months.

“If I was to play the hypothetical game, I would want to go back if and when it was safe for me to do so without being persecuted for my views,” Abdulsamad says.

“But until then, I’ll help as many who are there as I can.”

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🚩 **Category:** Alumni News

Sailors Brown and Cooper Share Land and Sea Memories

By Marcia Faye



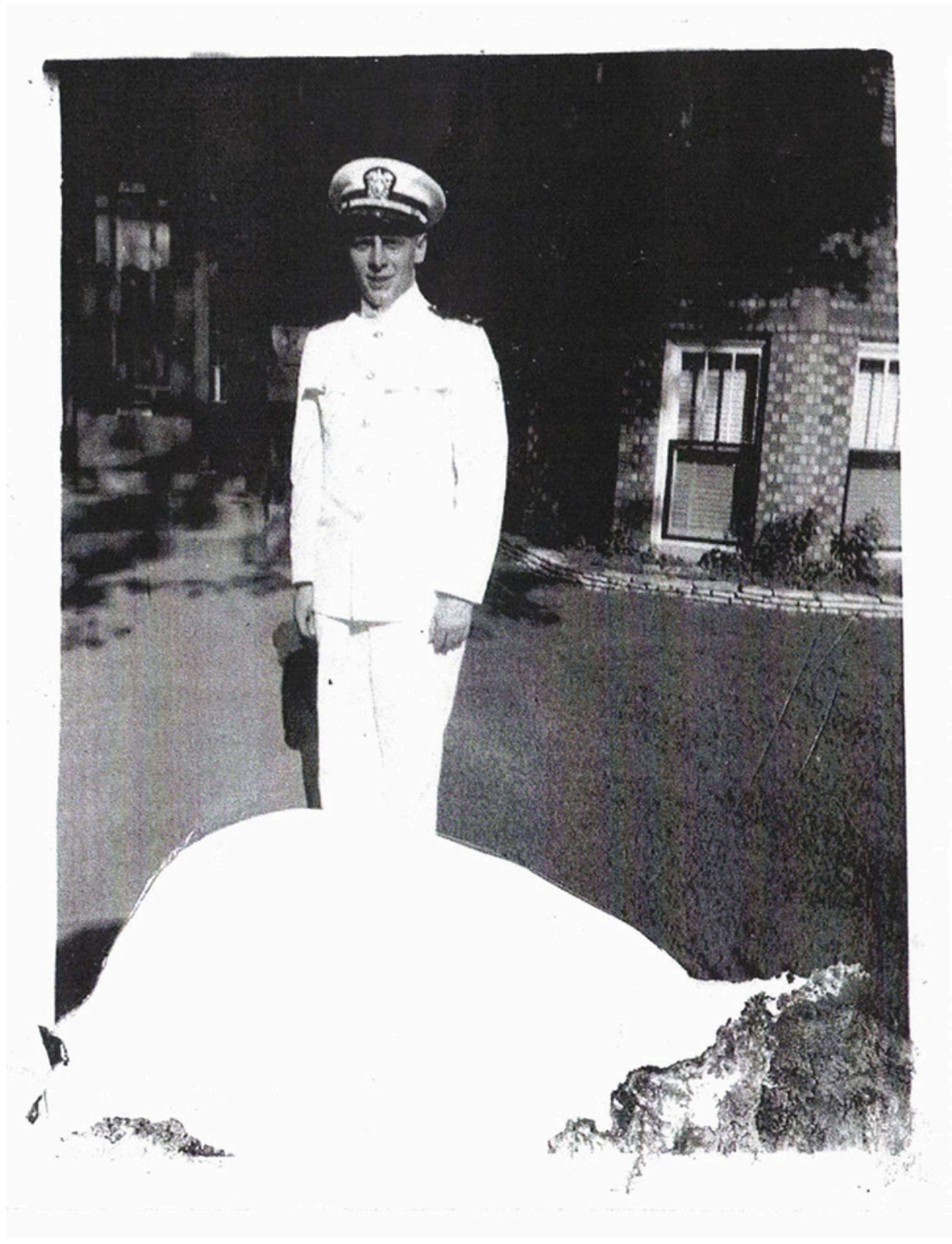
The presence of the United States military at Illinois Institute of Technology has a long tradition, reaching back to the early 1940s. According to information from Paul V. Galvin Library’s University Archives and Special Collections, President Emeritus **Henry T. Heald** wrote a letter to Admiral **Chester W. Nimitz** one week after the bombing of Pearl Harbor to request that the university be allowed to form a Naval Reserve Officer Training unit. Since that time, not only the U.S. Navy, but also the Air Force and the Army have enrolled students in **Reserve Officer Training Corps** (ROTC) programs on Mies Campus.

The then newly created **V-12 Navy College Training Program** was the first official naval program offered at Illinois Tech. It gave male students the opportunity to become eligible for an officer’s commission upon graduation, but after **V-J Day** and the end of World War II, the military ended the program with the 1946 commencement. The Naval ROTC program evolved out of that effort, graduating its first class in 1950. Two members of that inaugural class—2021 Alumni Medal recipient Theodore “Ted” Brown (CHEM ’50) and cell phone pioneer Martin “Marty” Cooper (EE ’50, M.S. ’57), author of the new book **Cutting the Cord**—share a few memories of their military years at Illinois Tech and aboard ship as they traveled to destinations in the Pacific Ocean.

From Ted Brown:

One of the luckiest days of my young life occurred during my registration as a freshman enrolling at IIT in fall 1946. The government had decided to institute an NROTC program and IIT was selected as an institution that would have a unit. I was a member of a select group of about 30 young men who studied and hung out together. We had a lounge in the building that housed the NROTC program—a space for study, card playing, and general camaraderie. We all felt proud to be in the program, wearing our uniforms on certain days. As a surprise bonus, we discovered that those uniforms were good for free admission to White Sox games in nearby Comiskey Park on special occasions! We organized dances and other social events and occasionally went to one of the neighborhood bars for a beer. After we were commissioned in summer 1950, there were quite a few marriage ceremonies, with the groom and his attending men in dress whites.

*The **Korean War** began in June, just as we were being deployed to our first duty stations. Several of us found ourselves meeting in the officer’s club at the naval base in Yokosuka, Japan, and attending special schools such as the Electronics Maintenance School on Treasure Island [California]. It was always a pleasure to be once again with our NROTC mates. After all these years, I can recall the faces of so many of my classmates.*

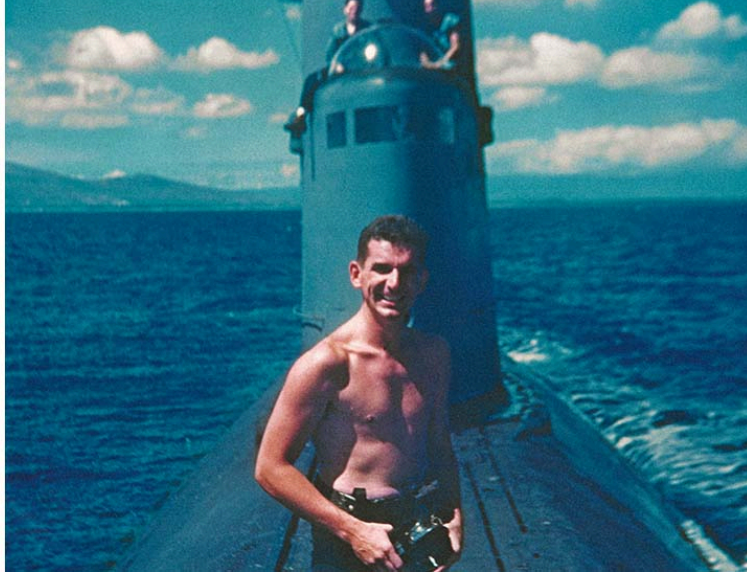
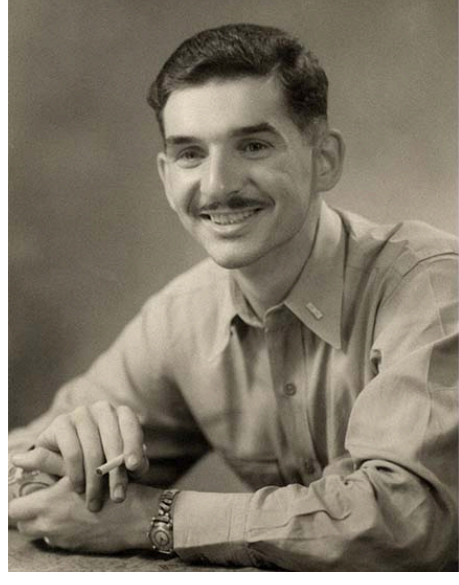


From Marty Cooper:

I was in the first Navy ROTC class of 1950. Tuition at IIT was \$256 a semester. I had already attended IIT for the previous semester, so I knew what I was getting into. I’m not sure how I would have been able to continue without the help of the U.S. Navy, but I had dreamed of going to IIT for years and nothing would have stopped me.

*Besides the Navy paying for books and tuition (and even my fancy slide rule), the Navy sent my fellow midshipmen and me on a cruise every summer for the next three years. On the **U.S.S. Helena**, a heavy cruiser, in 1952, I had my appendix removed at sea in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. In two weeks I recovered enough to resume my normal duties.*

I served in the Navy for almost four years after graduating from IIT, ending up as a submarine officer. I will always be indebted to the U.S. Navy and to IIT for the most complete university education a person could get.



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