

# Black Student Union celebrates 40 years at Widener

It was 1969—the era of the Vietnam War and the Black Panther Party. The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was still fresh in the minds of the American public, and civil disobedience ruled the day. At Penn Morton College, two students, Muhammad Ahmed '73 and his cousin Brent Staples '73, started a Black Student Union.

President Moll read. "We, the B.S.U., wish to interview any black staff before they are hired."

In April 1971, the Black Student Union received documents in the mail detailing FBI surveillance of Black Student Unions nationally, including the Penn Morton College union. A group identifying itself as the Citizens Commission



The Black Student Union represented a small, but growing number of African American students on campus when it was formed in 1969 by Mohammed Ahmed (front row, fourth from right) and Brent Staples (back row, center).

"There were no elections to speak of," Staples wrote of the early days of the Black Student Union in his book, *Parallel Time*. "My cousin and I held leadership with noise and force of personality."

Under their leadership, the Black Student Union set out to be the voice for the handful of black students enrolled at the college at the time. In February 1971, they sent a list of demands to then president Clarence Moll that included, among other things, increases in financial aid for black students, a black studies program, and more black faculty and counselors.

"The first logical attempt in building a Black Studies Department is hiring black professors," the letter to

to Investigate the FBI broke into a bureau office in Media, Pa., stole up to 1,000 documents, and mailed them to the media, members of Congress, and people who were under FBI surveillance.

"We held a press conference where we harangued the FBI and their campus informant," Staples wrote. "With the television camera in tow, we stormed into the president's office and demanded that the informant be fired. He wasn't."

Though the informant kept his job, the BSU was successful in getting many of its demands met by the college administration, according to Dr. Alonzo Cavin, associate professor emeritus and advisor to the Black Student Union at Widener from 1971 to 2004.

*Story continues on next page*

## Blue & Gold—more than just Widener's colors

Widener University's Blue & Gold Club derived from a project started by Widener and Pennsylvania Military College (PMC) alumni who served as captains of the football team. The "Captains' Table," as it was known, started to grow in numbers and it quickly became apparent that this endeavor could help more than just the football program. Bill Creamer '68, leader of the initial concept, expanded the program to include all varsity teams at Widener. In 2006, the program was solidified and officially renamed the Blue & Gold Club.

The Blue & Gold Club has already done a lot for Widener's athletes. Last year the club purchased NCAA and Middle Atlantic Conference championship banners, which hang

proudly from the walls of the Schwartz gymnasium. "We've had a great number of championships and thanks to the Blue & Gold Club, we are now able to honor them properly," said Athletics Director Jack Shafer, who works closely with the organization. "Visitors can now see the strength of our athletic program."

Peter Rohana '66, president of the Blue & Gold Club, was captain of the football team at PMC in his senior year. "I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't believe in it," he said. "If sports benefited your Widener/PMC career then why wouldn't you want to give to the next generation of Widener athletes?"

The club raised more than \$50,000 since 2006. The money is used to enhance the athletic experience of Widener's student-athletes. In

addition to purchasing the championship banners, the university upgraded the equipment in the Borislow Weight Room. Going into its fourth year, increasing membership is the top priority for the organization.

Those who join now at the "Captain" level can receive a Lifetime membership that is usually only offered at the "Champion" level, said Michael Talarico, assistant director of development. Also new this year, the club is giving the graduating class their first year free and inviting parents of current student-athletes to participate.

For more information on the Blue & Gold Club, visit [www.widenerpride.com](http://www.widenerpride.com), or contact Michael Talarico at 610-499-4118 or [mjtalarico@widener.edu](mailto:mjtalarico@widener.edu).

# Sculptures capture the spirit of Widener-PMC

Framing the steps of Old Main, a cadet and civilian shake hands, while across the front lawn, an eagle prepares to take flight. Just through the University Center doors, a lion pride on the hunt moves stealthily toward its prey. These are the striking images created by three new sculptures on Widener's Main Campus.

The bronze eagle, named *Freedom's Pride*, belongs to the Widener University Art Gallery's Alfred O. Deshong collection and hails from the Japanese Meiji period (1868–1912). It once adorned the grounds of the Deshong mansion in Chester and was recently restored by Laran Bronze, Inc., a Chester-based bronze casting company.

Opposing *Freedom's Pride* is *Homecoming*, a newly cast bronze sculpture depicting a Pennsylvania Military College cadet welcoming a veteran on the GI Bill. Designed and cast by Laran Bronze, the sculpture also captures the university's rich history by symbolizing the transition from Pennsylvania Military College to Widener University.

Homecoming was made possible by donations from alumni, family and friends, and the PMC Museum. Ollie Armitage and Fred Shahadi, both PMC class of 1949, headed the alumni fundraising committee for the project, enlisting a dedicated group of volunteers to help spread the vision for the sculpture and raise the funds to make it a reality.

"It took my breath away," said Armitage of seeing *Homecoming* for the first time. "It's very



Representing the three alumni classes that raised funds for the sculpture, (left to right) Nicole Gutekunst '08, Dana Bay '09, Rob Freiling '08, and Ryan Riley '07 celebrate the unveiling of *The Hunt* at Homecoming.

meaningful, and it's something that is needed to preserve the school's history."

Across 14th Street in University Center, *The Hunt* captures another significant, although more recent, moment in Widener's history, the adoption of the *Pride* as the school's mascot. A pride of lions "on the hunt," the sculpture, designed by Colorado-based artist Rosetta, is a gift from the last three senior classes, which together raised more than \$9,800.

Ryan T. Riley '07 and Lindsey Ford '07 chaired the first senior class to raise money for *The Hunt*. "A sculpture was a logical next step in the branding of our new mascot," said Riley, who recently returned to campus for *The Hunt's* unveiling at Homecoming 2009. "It's something that the classes of '07, '08, and '09 can cherish forever."



Homecoming symbolizes the welcoming of veterans to PMC and the transition to Widener University.

Continued from front page

"Dr. Moll was a prime mover in bringing black students to campus," Cavin explained. "He was interested in these students having a good experience here and he acquiesced a lot."

Forty years later, the Black Student Union is still a vibrant organization at Widener. The dramatic civic rights struggle that defined that 1960s and helped set the agenda for many Black Student Unions of the era has been replaced by a movement toward cultural awareness and understanding, according to Michelle Meekins-Davis, director of Multicultural Student Affairs and co-advisor for the Black Student Union.

After the success of Black Student Unions in the 1960s, other minority and ethnic groups



Sophomore Jermaine Hartsfield lights the *Mishumaa Saba* (the seven candles) during the Kwanzaa celebration hosted by the Black Student Union in December.

began to form their own organizations. At Widener, there are more than 10 different minority or ethnic student groups including Latinos Unidos, the Saudi Student Organization, Black Men United, the Asian Student Scholars Association, and others.

Jonathan Philippe, a junior from Atco, N.J. and treasurer for the Black Student Union, said the Black Student Union doesn't see these other organizations as competition. In fact, these groups have helped the BSU redefine its mission as an

umbrella organization for these groups.

"Our mission is to bring all of the multicultural organizations on campus together and to inform all students on campus about not only

African American history, but the history of all cultures," Philippe said.

To accomplish this mission, the Black Student Union is working on collaborating with other groups on campus to plan events together and provide a forum for them to voice their differences, goals, and ideas.

"Through all the years on the executive board struggling to keep the BSU on top," Philippe said, "the one thing I don't want to see is our struggles get the best of us."

Davis said that the BSU has been a strong organization throughout its history, and one of the leading student organizations in the area of community service.

"They realize they can't just rest on their laurels," Davis said. "They know they could suddenly become obsolete if they don't evolve. I'm really excited about the direction the organization is going."

# Widener alum enjoys working with the Phillies

Anthony Burns '98 drove to Veterans Stadium in November 1998 hoping for an "in" with the Philadelphia Phillies. Fresh out of college, he displayed an energy and drive that helped land him an internship with the organization. In addition to his ticketing responsibilities, he did everything that was asked of him, from pulling out the tarp in torrential rains to performing with the Phanatic in front of thousands of fans. Burns' internship year showed him that a career in sports was worth the long hours, and it showed the Phillies that he was someone worth having on their team.

Fast forward 11 years and Burns still, as he puts it, "gets to come to the ballpark every day for work." Now group sales coordinator and auction coordinator of the annual Phillies Phestival, Burns sometimes logs 15-hour days for 18–20 days in a row during the season, with off-season workdays not much shorter. Yet he would gladly trade his occasional fatigue for the perks of the job.

In the past two years, Burns saw the Phillies make back-to-back World Series trips and experienced firsthand the thrill of the team's



Burns '98 participated in the Phillies victory parade and posed with the World Series trophy.

championship win. "I have Brad Lidge's last pitch of the 2008 World Series on video," said Burns, who watched from about 20 rows back. "After he throws the ball, it's chaos. I made rounds through the ballpark to celebrate with my clients, coworkers, and friends. Nobody left."

Burns later celebrated with the entire city of Philadelphia, riding on an employee float in the Phillies' victory parade. "As we progressed down the route, the crowds grew bigger and bigger."

While the memory of the 2008 win is still fresh, Burns' tangible reminder of the season is a 3.84 karat World Series ring encrusted with 103 diamonds to represent the 92 regular season and 11 postseason wins for the Phillies.

Widener students caught a glimpse of Burns' ring when he spoke at the School of Business Administration's Sport Speaker Series. Burns' experiences with the Phillies proved especially insightful for the sport management students who hope to one day follow in his footsteps.

# Alum uncovers the life of Henry Clay Robinett

Bill Speer '72 picked up flowers and went to the Chalmette National Cemetery to visit Henry Clay Robinett.

"I said a prayer for him and all the soldiers buried there," Speer later wrote. "I talked to him a bit and promised him I would do everything in my power to tell his story and determine what led to his untimely demise."

Robinett's grave in Chalmette, La. was one of many stops on Speer's two-year-long quest for information on the 1860 graduate of Delaware Military Academy, now Widener University. Speer, a member of the class of 1972, has been interested in Robinett since first hearing of his Civil War heroics as a "rook" at PMC.

Like all cadets, Speer was told of Robinett's bravery in the Battle of Corinth, Miss., in October 1862. He learned how Robinett commanded a battery in his name that was key to the Union victory, and how the Battery Robinett, that fires the cannon after each score at Widener home football games, was named in his honor.

"Everything seemed so vague and nebulous about him," Speer said. I thought this might be an interesting project."

A resident of Harlem, Ga., Speer is a faculty member at American Military University and had grant from that university to conduct research



Henry Clay Robinett  
Courtesy of Holt-Atherton  
Special Collections, University  
of the Pacific Library

on Robinett. What he discovered about Robinett is infinitely more interesting than anything he learned as a cadet.

He discovered that Robinett received a serious head injury at the Battle of Corinth, one that likely caused a concussion or possibly post traumatic stress disorder. He believes it may have resulted in him taking his own life in 1867.

"It was obvious that Robinett was a deeply troubled young man after the war," Speer explained. "Between the death of his fiancé, the loss of his honor through three courts martial, the lack of empathy from the Army command structure, and his mental health issues, he was driven to suicide."

In his role as a professor, Speer intends to use the knowledge to train a new generation of military leaders. "I think Robinett's story speaks to how we treat wounded soldiers, not just physically, but their mental health after being wounded," Speer said. "It also speaks to how the Army needs to care for veterans who choose to stay in the service after a war is over."

Speer chronicled his research on his blog at <http://broomstickstobattlefield.blogspot.com>, and is currently working on publishing his findings.

Speer's research not only helped him keep the promise he made to the spirit of Robinett that day in Chalmette, it also helped him reestablish a relationship with his alma mater. Speer addressed the Widener Army ROTC Freedom Battalion and members of the class of 1954 during Homecoming weekend—his first Homecoming since graduating from PMC.



Bill Speer '72 poses with the Battery Robinett cannon, named for Henry Clay Robinett, during Homecoming 2009

"It is in the memory of every cadet that I conducted my research," Speer said, "and in our memory they will hopefully reside for many years to come."



# Widener University

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*posts*  
ALUMNI NEWS FROM WIDENER UNIVERSITY



Lieutenant Kerri Smith '09 (left) and Lieutenant Keith Bright '09 (center) accept the class of 2009 guidon from Fred Shihadi '49. Establishing a new Homecoming tradition, each year a Pennsylvania Military College alumni class will present representatives of the most recent Widener Army ROTC class with a guidon to carry during the broom drill ceremony.

## Inside

- Black Student Union celebrates 40 years.....1
- Blue & Gold—more than just Widener's colors .....1
- Sculptures capture the spirit of Widener-PMC.....2
- Widener alum enjoys working with the Phillies.....3
- Alumnus uncovers the life of Henry Robinett .....3
- Catch spring fever at Alumni Weekend 2010.....4

For more Widener University news and views, visit our new blog at [widenermagazine.com](http://widenermagazine.com), designed for readers of *Postscript* and the university magazine. You are encouraged to join the conversation by posting your comments and online letters to the editor.

### Postscript

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## Catch spring fever at Alumni Weekend 2010: April 9–10

Spring is just around the corner, and so is Alumni Weekend 2010. Join us April 9–10 for a fun-packed weekend culminating in the annual Alumni Awards Celebration on Saturday night. For more information, visit the Alumni Weekend page at [www.widener.edu/alumni](http://www.widener.edu/alumni).

*Alumni  
Weekend  
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