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AN ADVOCATE FOR EDUCATION: Juliet Stipeche stands outside HISD headquarters, where she plans to bring about some positive changes.

Education as a Human Right

As president of the HISD board, Juliet Stipeche '96 wants to change and improve everything in the school district.

It's a monumental effort, especially for a district that's the seventh largest in the country, with more than 203,000 students of which 80 percent are considered economically disadvantaged. Stipeche, however, remains undeterred.

"I see education as a human right, the great social equalizer and the foundation of a prosperous community," she said. This is her mantra, a phrase she uses often in many of her impassioned speeches that she gives around the city.

The 40-year-old Rice alumna has identified four issues that she considers the most pressing for HISD. No. 1 is literacy: Only 36 percent of HISD's third-graders are reading at the recommended STAAR level. The

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SSPEED Center Prepares for the Next Big Storm

With the start of the 2014 hurricane season, one question to consider is: Are we better prepared than we were when Hurricane Ike hit the Gulf Coast nearly six years ago?

Rice University's Severe Storm Prediction, Education and Evacuation from Disaster (SSPEED) Center works to answer this question. The center brings together university researchers, emergency managers, and private and public groups to study the best way to prepare the region for storm surge and flooding.

"Hurricane Ike took 20 lives and caused nearly \$25 billion in damages, but it could have been much worse," said Philip Bedient, director of the SSPEED Center and the Herman and George R. Brown Professor of Civil Engineering. "As Hurricane Ike exposed our region's vulnerabilities, we began researching the protection strategies

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Inside:



WHERE THE HISTORIC MEETS

THE SACRED: Rice University's Boniuk Institute for the Study and Advancement of Religious Tolerance organized a project in which local high school students designed and created benches for a labyrinth that is part of a prayer garden in Freedmen's Town.

overall figures in Harris County are not much better, with only 38 percent meeting the recommended reading level. These results project that approximately 525,000 of the 860,000 students enrolled in the area's K-12 public schools in Harris County are not proficient in reading at their grade level.

"If you don't have students reading at grade level by third grade, then you're going to have to pour in such tremendous resources to get things back on track that it will compromise the health and integrity of the entire school system," said Stipeche, who also is associate director for the Richard Tapia Center for Excellence and Equity in Education at Rice and a lawyer with Nagorny & Stipeche, P.C.

According to Stipeche, it cost the state more than \$21,000 a year to keep one person in prison, and \$8,500 a year to educate a child. "We should focus on investing more funds into our school system to insure that we have universal pre-K for all our children." That's why, she said, she's a big supporter of the HISD's Literacy by 3 Plan, which will put more resources into classrooms, hire more specialized teachers, and calls for more help from parents and the community.

Stipeche believes that HISD should recruit the best teachers and retain them with good salaries and professional development. "The compensation model we now have is inadequate to fulfill that requirement," she said. The current model rewards teachers on how well their students perform on the state's standardized test, but Stipeche added, "STAAR is not a norm-referenced test, and its passage requirements set a very low threshold. While the rigor is purportedly being phased in, today, a child can pass the STAAR exam, be promoted to the next grade and still be unable to read on grade level. It's a perverse set of circumstances."

Funding for the different programs in HISD also needs to be revamped, said Stipeche. "We need to embrace a methodology that includes an assured performance contract, that is to say, when we purchase a product, we should expect a certain level of improvement in our schools," she explained. "HISD has tried many programs, such as Apollo, Twilight Academies, Early Colleges, magnets and vanguards, and some have worked better than others."

Engaging the community with HISD is another concern of hers. Stipeche has plans

to create an advisory counsel comprised of a diverse group of community leaders. "We need outsiders with great expertise and knowledge to help us with these problems. We need to gather a diverse group of people who can look at the issues in a unique way and offer innovative solutions."

Stipeche faces a herculean task in changing HISD, but she has a fiery determinism to make a difference. "I have an inner strength that comes from my mother and father," she said. "I have been blessed with this sense of trying to help others and make the world a better place, and that's what motivates me."

Her father came from Argentina; her mother from Mexico. They met in Houston, got married and settled in the East End, near Highway 45 and Telephone Road. Her mother worked as a housemaid and her father as a diesel mechanic. Together they instilled in Stipeche and her sister, the importance of an education. "My father was afraid of the public school system," Stipeche said, "so he sent us to Broadway Baptist School."

There, Stipeche experienced an epiphany. It came after Stipeche had argued on behalf of a troublesome kid with the teacher. The teacher asked her: "Who do you think you are, a lawyer?" And she responded: "What's a lawyer?" The teacher then explained to her that it's a person who argues and fights on behalf of other people. "That's when I decided that I wanted to be a lawyer."

That in turn led Stipeche to apply to a public school, the High School for Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, which she credits for changing her life. She graduated valedictorian from the magnet school and then entered Rice, where Richard Tapia, University Professor and the Maxfield-Oshman Chair in Engineering in the Department of Computational and Applied Mathematics, welcomes new Hispanic students with a speech that she still remembers today.

"He told us that we deserved to be at Rice and while many of us came from schools that might not have prepared us so well, that those schools gave us tremendous confidence," she said. "He told us not to lose that confidence and not to lose the ability to speak up for ourselves and others."

Another professor that Stipeche admires is Robert Stein, the Lena Gohlman Fox Professor in the political science department, who served as her adviser and mentor while

she was at Rice. "He was one of my biggest champions and advocates," she said, adding that Stein was instrumental in getting her a senior internship with a city councilmember.

"Juliet was an outstanding student with a keen interest in matters of public policy," said Stein. "She brought to her studies and the classroom a sophisticated understanding of Houston and issues of urban policy. It was obvious to me she would continue to marshal her skills to serve Houston and the larger community."

In 1996, Stipeche graduated magna cum laude from Rice, with three majors in political science, policy studies and religious studies, and was awarded the Joseph Cooper Prize for the most outstanding policy studies student in her graduating class.

She went on to the University of Texas School of Law, graduated in 1999 and became a civil litigation attorney. She practiced for three years in the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas before returning to Houston to live in Idylwood, a neighborhood in the East End, where she grew up. She also started her own law practice, Nagorny & Stipeche, P.C. In 2010, she was elected to the HISD board to complete a vacant, unfinished term. Stipeche was re-elected in 2011 and this year was chosen by the trustees to be the board's president.

HISD board member Mike Lunceford said that he tried to talk Stipeche out of running for the position because the responsibilities as board member are overwhelming. "I tried to convince her that it was more trouble and time consuming than it was worth, but she still jumped in, and HISD and Houston are fortunate she did," he said. "She always thinks of the students first and how we can make it better for all of the children across HISD."

For Stipeche, educating the children is the key to a prosperous community. "I see the greatest hope and opportunities in the smiles of the children that I serve today," she said. "They are everything and until we focus on their well-being, we won't be able to move to where we need to go."

DAVID D. MEDINA

Director
Multicultural Community Relations
Public Affairs

for the Gulf Coast.”

In 2012, after the center focused on evaluating the region’s protection strategies, Bedient’s team released a nontechnical book, “Lessons From Hurricane Ike,” written for concerned citizens, policymakers and urban planners. The book contains illustrations, photos and maps of areas affected by the storm.

The SSPEED Center also looked into how the region could use “multiple lines of defense” through structural and nonstructural alternatives to protect both residential and industrial development.

One alternative the SSPEED Center offered was the Centennial Gate, a Rotterdam-style floodgate near the Fred Hartman Bridge,

“Hurricane Ike taught us that undeveloped lands along the coast could serve as a natural buffer to reduce flooding and property damage further inland. Creating a national recreation area along the Texas Coast could withstand surge flooding and create ecotourism and recreation-based economic activity.”

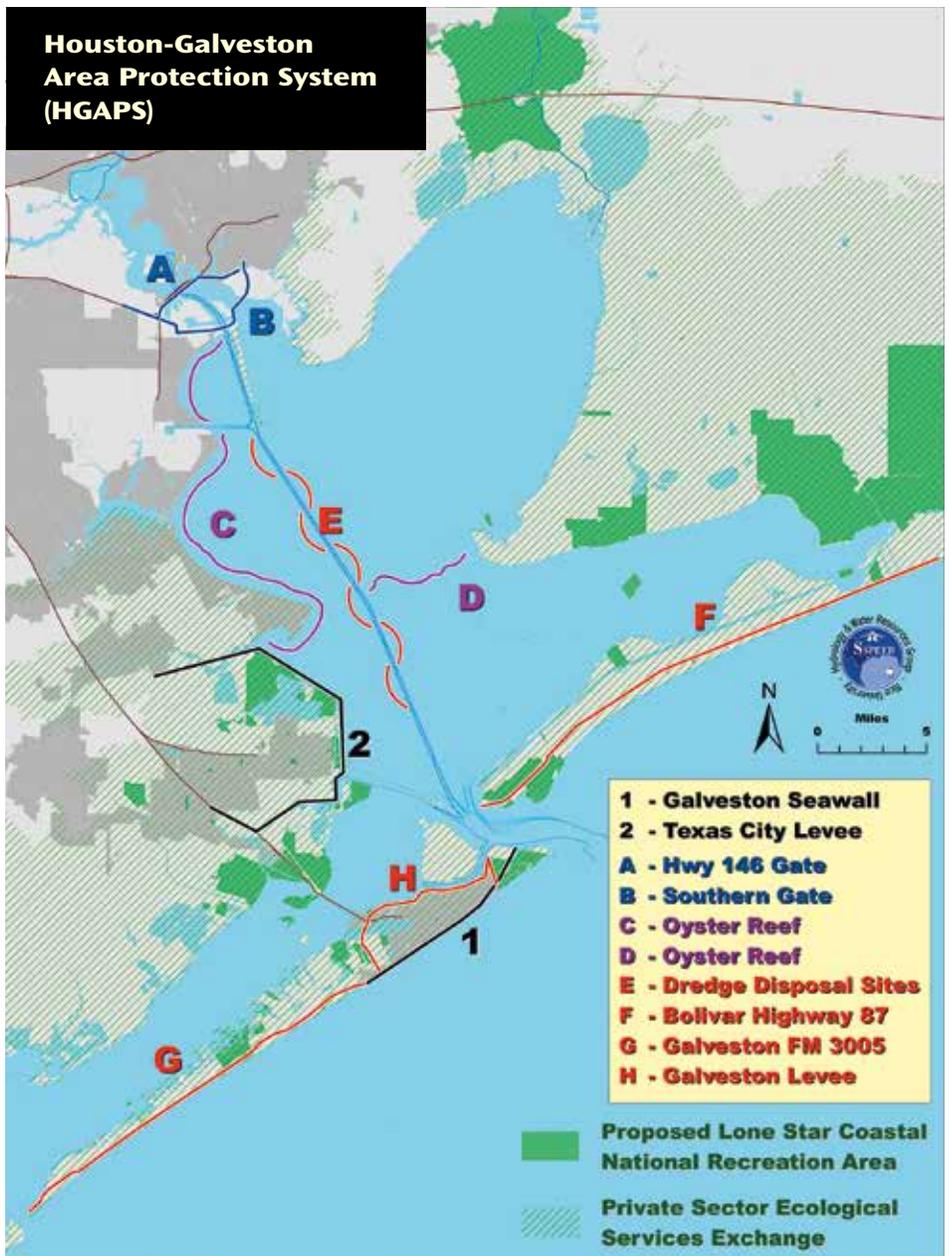
—Jim Blackburn

designed to protect the region’s core industries along the Houston Ship Channel. For a non-structural line of defense, the center proposed the creation of the Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area.

“Hurricane Ike taught us that undeveloped lands along the coast could serve as a natural buffer to reduce flooding and property damage further inland,” said SSPEED co-director Jim Blackburn, co-principal investigator on the project and professor in the practice of environmental law at Rice. “Creating a national recreation area along the Texas Coast could withstand surge flooding and create ecotourism and recreation-based economic activity.”

The Houston Endowment has consistently funded the SSPEED Center’s research, and this spring it awarded the center a three-year, \$3.1 million grant to conduct research in four key areas. One area will research the development of the Houston-Galveston Area Protection System, which includes the Centennial Gate and green-space alternatives.

Another priority is comparing social, economic and environmental consequences to alternative courses of action, such as the proposed Ike Dike. A third research project will focus on the development of a free-market system to buy and sell ecological services through a marketplace



THE BIG PICTURE OF STORM PROTECTION: The SSPEED Center is studying the best way to protect our region from the next big storm.

that will promote both economic development and flood storage capabilities. The fourth area will identify creative concepts for modifying and using the Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012.

“The SSPEED Center’s research is designed to help the Gulf Coast community make informed decisions about how to protect our region from severe storms and hurricanes,” said Bedient. “Our goal is to provide the best research and protection alternatives possible to protect our community from the next big storm.”

► For more information about the SSPEED Center, please visit <http://sspeed.rice.edu>.

JILL W. NESTING

Communication Specialist
 SSPEED Center

Rice Students Inspire Innovation in African Villages

About a year ago, 16 Rice students, mostly engineering majors, founded Village Innovators, a not-for-profit group that seeks to create homegrown technologies in East Africa by investing in people with the knowledge and resources to build humanitarian devices.

These same Rice students later entered the OwlSpark startup accelerator, a program that offers mentorship and investment opportunities to support start-ups such as Village Innovators.

“Low-cost, reproducible technologies such as wind turbines, water pumps and biogas generators can make a dramatic difference for everyday life in East Africa,” said Andrew Amis, the organization’s founding chief executive officer and a 2014 Rice alum, who majored in engineering and history at Rice. “Village Innovators exists to make technology creation democratic and humanitarian so every home and school can have basic provisions like electricity.”

Amis was inspired to create the organization after his freshman year, when he spent a summer teaching chemistry in a Tanzanian

village. He led students through basic science experiments using inexpensive equipment, such as plastic water bottles instead of beakers. The students enjoyed the experiments so much that Amis wanted to return to Africa and teach students engineering.

Amis’ vision quickly spread beyond the classroom, and in summer 2013, the team began pilot tests in Uganda and Kenya. Amis recruited Baek Ho Jang, his roommate at Martel College and a junior majoring in bioengineering, to help lead the organization. Jang serves as the organization’s chief operations officer.

“Baek Ho served in the South Korean military under a two-star U.S. general,” Amis said. “He brings phenomenal intelligence and professionalism to the organization.”

In Kenya, Village Innovators gave \$650 to an impromptu group of young Kenyan adults, who constructed a wind turbine in three days. Today the windmill produces enough electricity to power several computers and lights in the local school.

According to Amis, regular electricity is too expensive for everyone in the village except the wealthy residents. He said it was very rewarding to see the project completed and benefiting people.



HUMANITARIAN INNOVATION: Rice engineering students Baek Ho Jang and Andrew Amis are leading a project to make technology democratic and humanitarian.



“Village Innovators exists to make technology creation democratic and humanitarian so every home and school can have basic provisions like electricity.”

—Andrew Amis

“Village Innovators showed that a hypothesis on paper could actually work,” Amis said. “Community development can be low-cost, grassroots and homegrown.”

In Uganda, Amis said, the response was so welcoming that he would arrive at schools unannounced and almost immediately begin conducting engineering projects with the students.

Back in the U.S., Amis worked full time during summer 2013 with fellow students Ernest Chan '15 and Lynn Gai '15 in the OwlSpark startup accelerator. Chan helped produce the early engineering portfolio while Gai conducted pilot tests with students in Katy.

The organization offers packages to users, including cash for materials and “Technology Guides,” an electronic book series with do-it-yourself technology content. Rice engineering majors volunteer their free time to help design, prototype and create the engineering guides.

“We currently have prototypes for a wind turbine to generate electricity and a cooler to keep foods fresh,” Jang said.

Village Innovators now is

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GRASSROOTS IN A GLOBAL WAY:

Village Innovators seeks to provide basic provisions, such as electricity, to every home and school in East Africa.

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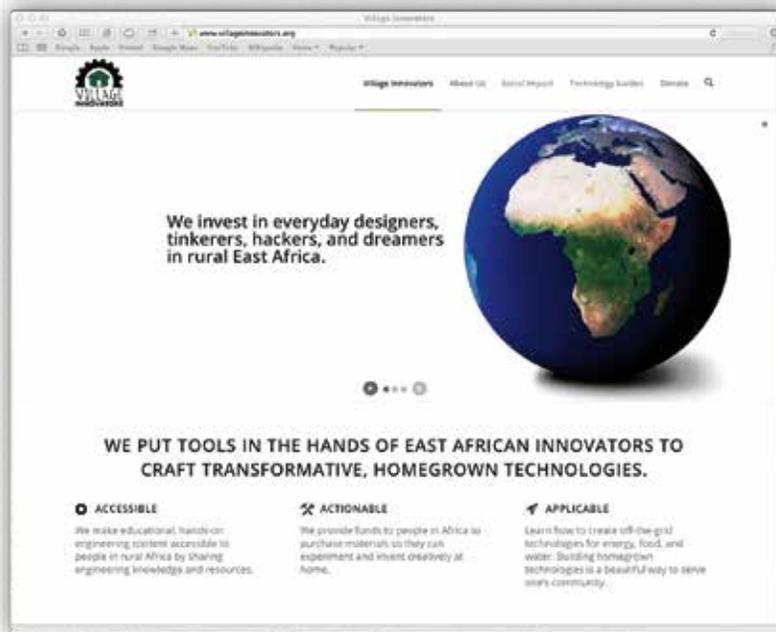
working in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, and thanks to a new relationship with Peace Corps volunteers, the group is working to expand its presence in remote villages around the world.

“In the coming weeks, we will release our open-source ‘Technology Guides’ to 10 Peace Corps volunteers, who will beta test the model this summer,” Jang said. “What we do can work anywhere in the world, so long as there are people who want to create new things and there’s a need for humanitarian technologies.”

Amis and Jang hope to support 10 more village technology projects, just like the windmill in Kenya. “If we are successful, the sky is the limit to how big this could be,” Amis said. “We’re doing something distinctly new.”

▶ For more information on Village Innovators, visit www.villageinnovators.org.

AMY HODGES
Senior Media Relations Specialist
News and Media Relations
Public Affairs



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—Baek Ho Jang

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Rice's Oshman Engineering Design Kitchen Entices Prospective Students

The Oshman Engineering Design Kitchen (OEDK) at Rice University provides a place for engineering students to design and create solutions to real-world problems. Students work on designing robotic arms and devices that, for example, can save toddlers sitting in unattended vehicles, among other fascinating projects.

So impressive are the projects that visitors touring the facility — 3,500 this past year — leave Rice wanting to return.

“We get a lot of parents who are visiting the campus with their kids, trying to decide if Rice is the right place for them. I’ve been told many times that what they saw in the OEDK tipped the scale. That’s why they decide to come here,” said Amy Kavalewitz, the OEDK’s associate director.

Among last year’s visitors were 43 high-school groups, 19 from middle schools and six from elementary schools. Representatives from 17 educational institutions interested in developing their own version of an OEDK-inspired design space also visited. Other drop-ins include prospective donors, industry and government representatives, and Rice alumni.

“It’s an extremely busy and popular place. When we get school kids in here during the year — often it’s kids from underrepresented groups — they’re very enthusiastic about what they’re seeing,” Kavalewitz said.

The OEDK is an 18,000-square-foot space with a central work area containing 60 worktables, a classroom, a wet lab, rapid-prototyping equipment, large format printers, a designated woodworking area, a machine shop and access to a welding shop. Last year, more than 925 students used the OEDK for engineering design courses and project development. About 120 design teams, several clubs and 21 courses utilized OEDK resources.

The OEDK was built in 2009 with the aid of a \$2.4 million gift from Rice University alumnus and trustee M. Kenneth Oshman ’62 and his wife, Barbara. National Instruments also made a major corporate gift to build the National Instruments Design, Prototype and Display Lab.

Bart Sinclair, associate dean of engineering for academic issues and budgets, has been conducting weekly information sessions in the OEDK since 2009. Sinclair meets with visitors, conducts tours of the facility and answers questions.

“A couple of years ago we got some data from the Office of Admission. Engineering prospects who attended one of our information sessions and received an offer of admission from Rice were 20 to 30 percent more likely to matriculate to Rice,” Sinclair said, “than if they had not visited the OEDK.”

Spending time in what Sinclair calls “a kind of center of gravity for design activities” is a useful recruitment tool for student prospects

and their families. They get to observe activities ranging from freshman design through senior capstone design and beyond, as well as the Rice Robotics Club, the Rice Solar Car Club and other engineering-based organizations.

“Every week I get to see how the OEDK intrigues young people,” Sinclair said. “The great part about this is that on most days they have the opportunity to talk with Rice students, not just about their design projects, but about their overall experience at Rice as engineers. We couldn’t organize a better first impression for our visitors if we tried.”

PATRICK KURP

Science Writer

George R. Brown School of Engineering

“We get a lot of parents who are visiting the campus with their kids, trying to decide if Rice is the right place for them. I’ve been told many times that what they saw in the OEDK tipped the scale. That’s why they decide to come here.”

—Amy Kavalewitz



FIRST IMPRESSIONS CAN MAKE FUTURE OWLS: The Oshman Engineering Design Kitchen has become a popular place for prospective students and their parents to visit, making Rice their university of choice.

Rice Robotics Club Revived

The Rice Robotics Club returned full of energy after being dormant for two years, and won second place in both the Robot in 3 Days and the VEX-U competitions, beating out other college students and professional engineers.

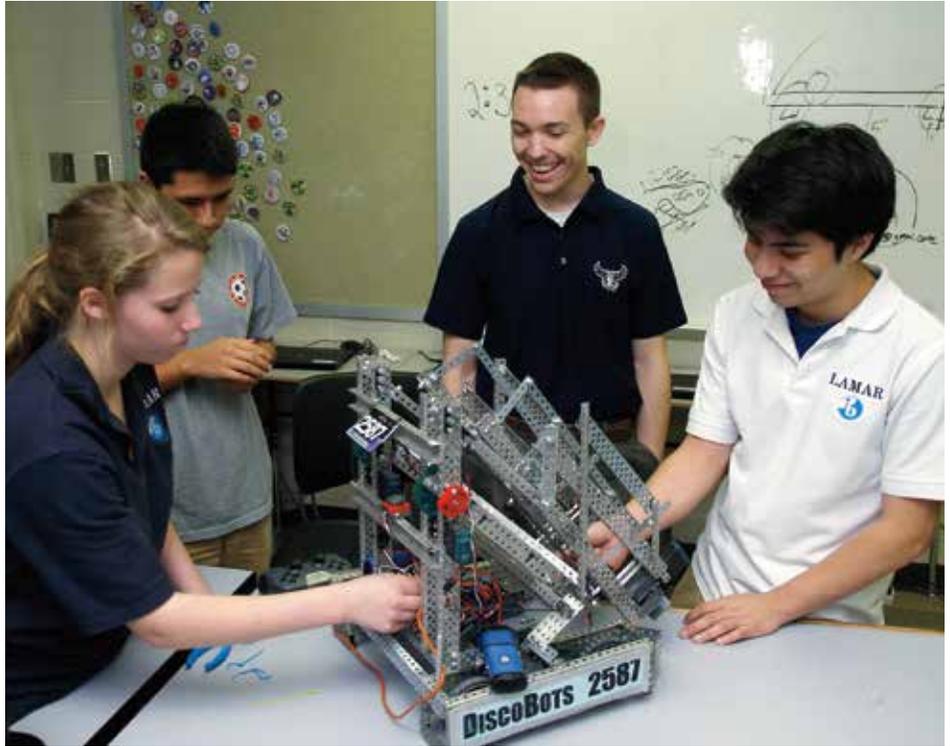
The club was revived by Paul Chaguine '14, who served as the group's president. While proud of those accomplishments, Chaguine is even more thrilled that the club had the chance to work with Lamar High School students, continuing a legacy that was started by Andrew Lynch '09, who earned two master's degrees from Rice and now works for Jacobs Engineering Group.

Lynch founded the Rice Robotics Club in 2008. As part of that effort, he established a robotics club at Lamar, giving students an opportunity to partner with Rice mentors in building and programming robots. As a former Lamar student, Chaguine participated in the Rice Robotics Club.

"In high school, I didn't know anything about robotics," Chaguine said. "So, I worked with the club on tools and design. Then, when I came to Rice, I began mentoring high school students. It's been a great experience."

Lamar High School's robotics team, The DiscoBots, also incorporates team members from Carnegie Vanguard High School. The team, helped along by Rice Robotics Club members, participated in the VEX Robotics World Championship in California in April. More than 10,000 elementary, middle and high school teams competed, but only 764 teams qualified for the prestigious tournament.

"We coached them in their design, and a



BUILDING ROBOTS AND MORE: Members of the Rice Robotics Club build a robot, while learning engineering skills that will remain with them for the rest of their careers.

couple of times a week, they came to campus to test the robots in Ryon Lab," said Lynch. "That space is excellent for testing. There's so much height you can catapult things."

Lynch and Chaguine agree that working with students has been an important part of their experience at Rice. Lynch still serves as an adviser for the club.

"Kids learn real engineering skills that you can't learn in a classroom setting," Lynch said. "They learn how to solve problems, how to build things. And those are skills you can take with you in any career."

Students built robots that weigh 120 pounds and stand five feet tall. "They have to develop a prototype, build and test it, and

then compete," Chaguine said. "It's a major undertaking, and it's been an interesting experience for me to work with them."

Chaguine will be coming back to campus as a graduate student this fall, having received the XTO Energy Scholarship to pursue his engineering professional master's degree. And he plans to stay involved with the Rice Robotics Club.

"I was self-taught in robotics," he said. "Having the robotics club mentor high schoolers means that they can learn something about this and it can further their education."

"The Robotics Club is really an engineering club," said Lynch. "But when you call it a Robotics Club, it sounds like high school kids like they'll get to do fun stuff. And this is a great way to learn about practical engineering."

HOLLY BERETTO

Marketing Specialist
George R. Brown School of Engineering

"Kids learn real engineering skills that you can't learn in a classroom setting. They learn how to solve problems, how to build things. And those are skills you can take with you in any career."

—Andrew Lynch

A Prayer Garden Labyrinth in Freedmen’s Town

A new labyrinth installed in the prayer garden of Mt. Carmel Missionary Baptist Church became a bit more colorful thanks to a group of high school students who created four mosaic-tile benches to stand next to the intricate design.

The 24 local students designed and created the benches as part of the Sacred Sites Quest (SSQ), a project organized by Rice University’s Boniuk Institute for the Study and Advancement of Religious Tolerance. A festive dedication ceremony for the labyrinth, attended by more than 75 people, was held in June.

The SSQ students, who attend a dozen different schools in Greater Houston, designed the labyrinth as their capstone art and service project. Before they created these original designs, they spent two months exploring 12 differ-

ent sacred sites around Houston. Since April, a multifaith, highly diverse group of Houston community volunteers has taken up the students’ distinctive design, collaborating to install their 11-circuit labyrinth in the prayer garden located in the shadow of Houston’s downtown skyscrapers.

Freedmen’s Town, also known as Fourth Ward, where the labyrinth and prayer garden sit, is one of the most-endangered National Register of Historic Districts of its kind in the United States. The historic residential neighborhood was founded and built by enslaved

feature. The four benches frame the four corners of the prayer garden plot.

The labyrinth measures more than 50 feet in diameter. Its path was constructed using recycled bricks from the original church building and 54 tons of crushed granite that volunteers meticulously placed around them. Without the dozens of additional community volunteers who turned out over eight consecutive weekends to complete the project, the SSQ students wouldn’t have been able to pull it all off.



SERENITY SETTINGS: Colorful mosaic-tile benches provide a comfortable place to sit for those who wish to contemplate in the prayer garden located in Houston’s Fourth Ward.

ent sacred sites around Houston. Their four mosaic-tile benches complement the distinctive labyrinth design and represent how they have synthesized their collaboration and learning.

The SSQ students did not get to complete construction of the labyrinth they designed before their quest concluded in March. So that task was taken up by another new group of grassroots volunteers, including many adults from throughout the city. The students dubbed their capstone artwork “The Heart of Serenity.”

families and their descendants immediately after emancipation in 1865. It’s a place where there is a church on virtually every corner.

About 100 years ago, neighborhood residents founded the Mt. Carmel Church. Over the decades, however, the church building became structurally unsound and was eventually demolished. All that has endured of the church is its prayer garden. In addition to the herbs and flowers that gardeners tend, the labyrinth anchors the space as its largest central

“Now the Mt. Carmel prayer garden has been totally rejuvenated,” said Lue Williams, the clerk and a trustee for the Mt. Carmel congregation. “We couldn’t be more pleased about this remarkable transformation of our precious sacred space.”

MIKE PARDEE

Associate Director for Community Engagement
The Boniuk Institute for the Study and
Advancement of Religious Tolerance

Rice School Instills Awe for Math

“If the Ten Thousand Day War started on a Wednesday, what day of the week did it end?” Students in the Rice School’s new math club pondered this question and provided answers with detailed justifications supporting their computations.

Kenan Ince, a graduate student in Rice University’s mathematics department, started the math club for sixth-grade students at The Rice School/La Escuela Rice during the fall 2013 semester. Thanks to her efforts, the math club completed a successful first year.

Students met weekly for an hour after school in the classroom of mathematics teacher Cambrian Watkins. In groups, they explored interesting, fun and challenging math activities under Kenan’s guidance and encouragement.

A variety of topics and questions were considered. The 16 students began by analyzing graphs depicting income inequality and looked at exponential growth and the Richter scale. Students also built Pascal’s triangle



PASSIONATE ABOUT PROBLEMS: The math club challenges students to tackle problems that are not typical classroom assignments.

and explored related patterns such as counting numbers, triangular numbers and the Fibonacci sequence. They then used Pascal’s triangle to answer coin-tossing questions such as, “What is the probability of getting exactly two heads tossing four coins?”

One student commented that she loved the math club because she “was given challenging

He added, “Because of the emphasis placed on standardized tests in ‘regular’ school, I think it’s really important that kids get to see a side of math that’s not multiple choice, a side where there are many acceptable ways to solve a problem and math is applicable to kids’ passions. I’ve watched my group of kids solve hard



NOT YOUR ORDINARY MATH: Students in the math club at The Rice School/La Escuela Rice learn about the Richter scale, Pascal’s triangle and the Fibonacci sequence.

“The math club has been a really rewarding way to give kids an idea of the creative beauty of mathematics, and to teach topics that aren’t ordinarily covered at this level.”

—Kenan Ince

problems to solve which were not the typical problems assigned in math class.”

The math club was initially designed with the help of the Rice University School Mathematics Project (RUSMP), which works with schools and school districts in the Greater Houston area. RUSMP provided resources, materials and strategy games for the students.

“The math club has been a really rewarding way to give kids an idea of the creative beauty of mathematics,” Kenan said, “and to teach topics that aren’t ordinarily covered at this level.”

problems on their own many times. I’ve been pleasantly surprised at how strong the kids’ math intuition is.”

Watkins, whose students participated in the math club, agreed: “We are trying to instill in our students an awe for mathematics, a reverence that will extend not only to their mathematics classrooms but also to their lives outside of school.”

ANNE PAPANIKOLAOU

Director
Rice University School Mathematics Project

Graceful Gateway Links Rice and Hermann Park

Perhaps it's a harp for an ensemble of giants or a suspension bridge looking for a river to cross.

Whatever your interpretation, the pavilion that stands in Hermann Park is a welcome place for visitors. The structure's graceful lines direct the eyes to a set of benches where people can take a break in the shade.

Designed by students from the Rice School of Architecture (RSA), the pavilion was a project of the Rice Building Workshop (RBW). Rice was invited to contribute one

a dozen architecture students from all levels began strategizing last year, with graduate student Sigi Zhu emerging as the "head conceptualizer."

"The only requirements were that they didn't want us to hurt the earth too much, and we couldn't move the trees," Zhu said. By the end of last fall, the students, working with Samuels and Rice alumni and RBW fellows



A UNIFIED EFFORT: Rice architecture students designed and created a pavilion called "Convergence" in honor of Hermann Park's 100th anniversary.

of eight pieces of public art to celebrate the park's 100th anniversary. The yearlong effort to design and build the pavilion was completed in May. The airy structure is 19 feet high at its peak and is hard to miss.

The structure, the students call "Convergence," sits amongst the trees across the street from the METRORail stop on Fannin and Main streets. "Convergence" is so named for its placement between the realms of the park, the Texas Medical Center, the Museum District and Rice.

Danny Samuels '69, an RSA professor and RBW director, said more than

Jason Fleming '11 and Peter Muessig '11, had settled on a design and pitched their idea to the Hermann Park Conservancy's Art in the Park initiative.

"Six concrete benches were cast at the RBW's workspace in the Third Ward while other custom elements were pieced together at Rice's Oshman Engineering Design Kitchen," Samuels said. Andrew Daley '11, Fleming and Muessig ran a two-day concrete workshop, which led to the pouring of the benches by architecture and Rice engineering students.

Samuels was grateful for consultation and on-site help from Houston's MetaLab, founded



by Joe Meppelink '00, and construction services company Linbeck, as well as the donors whose contributions made the project possible. Like the other artworks, "Convergence" will stand at the park for at least a year. After that, its fate is uncertain, but Samuels hopes it will find a new home on the Rice campus as its modular structure was pieced together to facilitate a future move.

Houston architect Jay Baker '80, a member of the Hermann Park Conservancy's board of



“Convergence” is “a way to celebrate being iconic, important neighbors.”

—Jay Baker

directors and longtime advocate for the park, said “Convergence” is “a way to celebrate being iconic, important neighbors.”

“The collaboration between the students at the school and Hermann Park being open-armed to the idea turned out beautifully,” he said. “It’s modest in scale but it was immense in effort. I think everybody involved is very happy with the results. In terms of scale and proportion, it’s right on the money.”

Baker noted RSA and the park have been

linked for many years, and he has been pleased to serve as the bridge. “In 1992, when I was six months away from being head of the Rice Design Alliance (RDA), I asked (former dean) Jack Mitchell what I should do ... and he looked at me and said: ‘Fix. Hermann. Park.’ Two weeks later, Mitchell died.

“I dreamed up a competition in his memory to address the center of the park, and the RDA funded that effort,” Baker said. The competition drew entries from 26 states and

prompted a renewed interest in Hermann Park and the public or private partnerships that have thrived ever since.

“Since that time, we’ve raised more than \$100 million to improve the park,” Baker said. “In 1992, it wasn’t a very happy place. Now it’s a destination.”

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AT LARGE



INSIDE THIS ISSUE: Young adults created a windmill that produces electricity in their Kenyan village. See story on Page 4.

David D. Medina, Director, Multicultural Community Relations, Office of Public Affairs

