

VirginiaTech

magazine

summer 2010 | vol. 32, no. 4



Hereditary Hokies

Saving the bay | Factor of X

Hereditary Hokies

BY CHELSEA NEWMAN '10

It's no wonder that Hokie Spirit is sprinkled across the blood lines of many Hokie families, with 20 percent of Virginia Tech's current students considered legacies. When Hokie charm hooks a family, the results passed down from generation to generation can be impressive. The Echols-Saunders clan claims 35 Hokies and the Craun family boasts 33 Hokies, to name just two. But it's more than just following in mom's and dad's footsteps; Virginia Tech and its environs have charmed people for generations.

For Pat (Echols) Saunders (interior design '87) the allure of Tech was its small-town, yet global, atmosphere. "I applied to only two schools, Virginia Tech and Radford," says Saunders, and when she got into both, she headed to Blacksburg. She fell in love with Tech as a child, when her parents would buy football tickets and make game days into a vacation. "We would walk over to the bookstore, get a T-shirt or some kind of Tech memorabilia, then walk to the football game." At Homecoming games,

Saunders' father would buy her mother a mum corsage from a vendor on the corner.

Virginia Tech may inspire the romantic in all of us. Saunders met her husband, Robert, at Tech, and the union of the two families created one of the largest Hokie families around. Robert Saunders' six brothers joined him at Tech, and all six Echols sisters are Hokies as well. Various marriages, daughters, sons, nieces, nephews, and distant cousins factor into the 35-count Echols-Saunders family,

with plans for more: Pat Saunders hopes that her daughter, Annie, a high school sophomore, will fall in love with Virginia Tech, too.

The lineage of the Craun family, 33 Hokies deep, shows a focus on agriculture, including dairy science, animal science, and poultry science. "Many of us Crauns own and operate dairy farms, beef farms, or are involved in the agricultural economics field," says Linda Leech (dairy science '78). "We are so fortunate that Virginia Tech has a nationally

Photos of the Echols-Saunders family are surrounded by memorabilia from the family and the Holtzman Alumni Center's Alumni Museum.



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The Tokarz brothers, all Hokie alumni, recently celebrated the 95th birthday of John, the eldest, seated at lower right. Go to www.vtmagazine.vt.edu to see photos from the party with their extended family.



COURTESY OF THE TOKARZ FAMILY

recognized dairy science department that encourages its students to achieve their potential." The family often encounters other Hokies in their profession and, thus, realizes the true reach of the Hokie Nation.

Hokie Spirit runs strong in the Craun family. Sidney Grove (dairy science '66), Linda's cousin, often returns to "walk the same grounds and paths that bring back so many memories from the early 1960s," he says. "I often go with a classmate, and we seem to always relive the same stories and return to the same places." When Tech is not inspiring a love for the beauty of Blacksburg, it is often inspiring a love for fellow Hokies.

Chad Craun (dairy science '07) returned to Blacksburg on June 5, 2010, to marry Samantha Davis (dairy science '09) at Smithfield Plantation.

Virginia Tech also strengthens family ties, as shown by Brendan McDonald (political science '04) and Cindy Comisky (psychology '06), two cousins from a 12-graduate Hokie family. When Comisky entered Tech as a freshman, she became best friends with her cousin, McDonald, who was a junior. Comisky is thankful for her experience at Virginia Tech, which became a surprising family reunion.

Hokie family trees come in all sizes, and each has a story—or any number of

stories—to tell. The Bugas family may have the largest number of current Hokies, with six first cousins all attending Tech. The Howes, who sign cards "Happy Holidays from the Hokie Howes," have seven graduates and can trace their Hokie lineage back to Richard David Maben, who was a freshman in 1875.

The Watsons—with 10 Hokies and a lineage that includes the late William E. Skelton, a former dean and namesake of two centers at Virginia Tech—found themselves in a pinch when one of their sons got married during a home game against Miami. The minister graciously provided the current score—14-0—during the ceremony.

During most any game, it can be assumed that J.W. Thomasson (agricultural education '64) and his wife, Linda, cheer on the maroon and orange in their "VT Room," a room in their home with "nothing but VT stuff in it."

George Nolen (marketing '78), a member of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, met his wife, Michele Carpenter

Family members gathered on campus for the June 5 wedding of Chad Craun and Samantha Davis.



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Nolen (finance '78) at freshman orientation. He said in a 2006 *Virginia Tech Magazine* story that in addition to their two children, "18 other members of our family have attended Virginia Tech."

If you're not one of the nine Hokies across three generations in the Venerable family, they'll dress you up like one. In family photos, the children in the family hold maroon and orange pom-poms. To the Quick family's 19 Hokies, dressing up half Hokie and half Cavalier is a crime. When William Austin Quick (dairy science '39), saw his granddaughter Jill in a Tech sweatshirt and U.Va. sweat pants, he was shocked—"He sure knew he wasn't a U.Va. fan!" says his daughter, Donna Quick Courtney.

The Jackson family, with 11 Hokies, prides itself on a combination of American and international students attending Tech. George C. Jackson (horticulture M.S. '59) was granted leave from the University of Puerto Rico to pursue a master's degree in horticulture at Tech, and he brought his family with him. His eldest daughter, Zulma, studied at Tech as a transfer student from Puerto Rico. While in Blacksburg, she met her husband, Robert Keynton, and their three children later attended Virginia Tech. When Jackson returned to Puerto Rico, his younger daughters went with him. His daughter Emilse returned to Virginia, married, and had four children, three of whom are Hokies. His daughter Maritere lives in Puerto Rico, but the Hokie blood still runs strong. Maritere's daughter, Marilse, attended Tech as an exchange student from the University of Puerto Rico.

Is it genetic, or is there something in the Blacksburg water? Whatever the case, once someone in the family catches the contagious Hokie fever, it tends to spread quickly, as each new generation is drawn to the charm of Virginia Tech. □

Go to www.vtmagazine.vt.edu to upload photos of your Hokie family, and share your family with the Hokie Nation!



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A special thanks to those who submitted their Hokie families!

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| (35)* Pat Saunders | (8) Robert Thomson |
| (33) Linda Leech | (8) Edward "Ned" Carter Turner Jr. |
| (19) Donna Quick Courtney | (8) Teresa Weisenburger |
| (18) John R. Wilkins Jr. | (7) Bruce Chestnutt |
| (17) Amy A. Vaughan | (7) Douglas C. Curling |
| (17) Michael E. Snyder | (7) Jennie Stokes Howe |
| (16) Linda Thomasson | (7) Bart Warner |
| (15) Gretchen Quant | (6) Betty Pendleton |
| (15) Jeff Sweeney | (6) Anne Cabell |
| (14) Annie Roller | (6) Carolyn Kramer |
| (13) Elaine Griffin | (6) Michelle Vance |
| (12) William Armstrong | (5) Rena Johnson |
| (12) John Hovell | (5) Bruce Kirk |
| (12) Cindy Comisky | (5) Brenda Logan |
| (12) Hugh David Scott | (5) Valerie Ore |
| (11) George C. Jackson | (5) Lisa Preskitt |
| (11) Theresa P. Price | (5) Rose Mary Alexander |
| (10) William E. Watson | (4) Patricia Brown |
| (10) C. Todd Bower | (4) Gray Coyner |
| (10) Lorrie Cooper | (4) Mayer Levy |
| (10) James N. Wright | (4) Frank Miller |
| (9) Susan Lamore | (4) Laura Roberson |
| (9) David Brown | (4) Keith E. Sturgill |
| (9) Michelle Gibson | (3) Tom Ficklin |
| (9) Helen E. Meeks Mitchell | (3) Walter Gray |
| (9) Becky O'Connor | (3) Carol Landaiche |
| (9) Laura Stemann Crotteau | (3) Crystal Morgan |
| (9) Laura Venerable | (3) Ed Pittman |
| (8) Aron Johnson | (3) Audrey Woo |
| (8) Paul Bugas | (2) Tom Kingsley |
| (8) Ashley Jones | (2) William Stepp |
| (8) John Miller | |
| (8) Deborah L. Powers | |
| (8) Sara Tatum | |

* Represents the number of Hokies per submitted family.