Salisbury University has a long history of supporting honors education. What began as a small group of 20 students who met with English Professor Tony Whall in the fall semester of 1980 has grown to a sizable Honors Program that recently welcomed 114 students into its freshman class. Regardless of changes in size, location and name, the Thomas E. Bellavance Honors Program has remained faithful to its founder’s belief that honors education could “encourage students to think independently about substantive issues and enable them to acquire skills for articulating and defending their insights and ideas.”

This past summer, the Honors Program lost a friend and one of its most important supporters, Elizabeth Bellavance. Over the decades, she visited and mentored Honors students. As Honors Program director, I never met her in person, but we corresponded quite frequently after I arrived in Salisbury. She was always supportive of the program and me. In her last months, she worked on revising student articles for the program newsletter, The Saunterer, although she asked me to keep her involvement a secret. Current Honors senior Thelonious Williams recently told us, “She worked “She worked outside of the limelight, but those who she directly and indirectly touched will be forever indebted to this amazing woman.”
outside of the limelight, but those who she directly and indirectly touched will be forever indebted to this amazing woman.” I agree and think she’d be proud of the fruits of her labor. In November, based on the issue that Bellavance had edited, The Saunterer was named as the second best honors newsletter in the nation by the National Collegiate Honors Council.

The Honors Program will not forget her or her husband’s contributions to honors education at SU. To honor them both, the Honors Program recently awarded three student scholarships. The plaque that bears their names reflects the influence of the entire Bellavance family. Beginning this year, the students will be known as Bellavance Scholars. Elizabeth Bellavance’s passing offered those of us close to the Honors Program a moment to look back from where we came at the same time we imagine where we might go.

The Honors Program will welcome its 35th incoming class of freshmen in the fall. For 20 of those years, the Honors House has offered a comfortable place for students to study, perform on the grand piano, cook and unwind. While the exterior of the House has changed little, these interior spaces have been transformed in the past year and a half. The computer lab features updated technology and the building has been transformed into a Wi-Fi hotspot, the upstairs lounge has become a state-of-the-art study and conference room at the request of students, and the interior – including the classroom – has been freshened up with new paint, new floors and new furniture.

More is happening in the Honors Program than a splash of paint and new furniture. The Honors Program will begin offering sections of economics, cell biology and nursing in the years to come and more actively support students studying abroad. In the past year and a half, students have traveled to Scotland, South Africa, Estonia, New Zealand, Italy, Australia, Spain, England, Ireland, Iceland, Costa Rica, Argentina and India to complete coursework. Additionally, the Honors Program encourages students to reflect upon the local community, with an initiative that requires students in freshman courses to partake in community engagement projects. These have sprouted new partnerships between the Honors Program and the Salisbury City Council, Perdue Farms, Inc., the Chipman Cultural Center and the Newtown Association.

These are exciting times for honors at SU. After nearly 35 years, the Bellavance Honors Program is poised to build upon a long legacy of excellence while preparing a growing number of students for the challenges of the 21st century.

DID YOU KNOW?

Any SU student with a 3.5 GPA or above can take an Honors course?

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