The People Page Highlights Multi-faced, Multi-talented Hollins Alumnae, Don’t Tread on Me

Hollins Alum Magazine

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Physics Theorist

What is the nature of the energy that formed our universe? How did matter evolve from that energy in the so-called “Big Bang”? Physicist Mary Ralph Gaillard ’60 (below) has spent over two decades researching the connections between energy and matter which may ultimately answer these questions. She is currently in the forefront of research on superstrings — wiggly, interactive, one-dimensional strings of energy which are believed to compare in size to the atom as the atom compares to the solar system. At this point, superstrings exist only in theory and are likely to remain theoretical for quite some time. According to Gaillard, an experimental look at a superstring would require an accelerator “as big as the galaxy.” Nonetheless, Gaillard and others in her field continue to be intrigued with these strings of energy which may eventually provide an explanation of how and why the world as we know it began.

Gaillard does her research at the University of California at Berkeley where she is a professor of physics.

Cookin’ Cheap

“Cookin’ Cheap,” a comical cooking show co-starring Laban Johnson MA ’77 (left), began as a local production of Blue Ridge Public Television but quickly became so popular that it is now seen on stations across the country. Last year “Cookin’ Cheap” was carried on nearly 40 public television stations, including those in New York City and Los Angeles. The program, which has been described as a “totally, unrehearsed, unedited, and zany 30-minute workout in a kitchen with two southerners,” provides Johnson the perfect opportunity to combine his talents as an actor, teacher, and professional caterer (all vocations he has pursued at various times in his life). Although the show is designed more to entertain than to educate, Johnson and co-star Larry Bly cook up dishes each week that are nutritious, reasonably priced, and made from ingredients readily available in all parts of the country. Their greatest successes have been included in their newly published cookbook entitled, not surprisingly, The Cookin’ Cheap Book.

In addition to showcasing his culinary talents on TV, Johnson also serves as coordinator of special events for the City of Roanoke.

Don’t Tread On Me

Perhaps the most important sex discrimination case facing the U.S. Supreme Court this year is one brought on by a Hollins graduate, Ann Hopkins ’65, against gigantic Price Waterhouse, a national accounting firm. The case resulted from PW’s failure to promote her to a partnership in the firm. As Time described it, “She looked like a winner. Despite the demands that go with being the mother of three children, she had helped bring in between $34 million and $44 million in business to the firm and had billed more hours in the preceding year than any other candidate.” (There were 88 candidates; she was the only woman.) Among the criticisms which had been aimed at her was that she should take a “course at a charm school.” Another suggested that she needed to walk, talk, and dress “more...”
Diercks Award

Professor of Music John Diercks has been honored with his tenth special award from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). ASCAP makes the awards annually to reflect its commitment to “assist and encourage writers of serious music.”

A prolific composer, Diercks has written more than 200 pieces, of which 120 have been published. He has been composer-in-residence at Wolf Trap Center for the Performing Arts, the MacDowell Colony, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Last year, “For Winds and Piano,” an all-Diercks recording featuring alumna Martha Anne Dorminy Verbit as pianist, was issued on the Spectrum label.

Wheeler on TV

This season marks the 20th anniversary of “Nightline,” a weekly public affairs program broadcast by Blue Ridge Public Television. Better known to Roanoke Valley viewers as “Jake Wheeler’s Nightline,” it holds the record as the longest-running locally-produced program in the region. Its host since 1979 has been Professor of Political Science Jake Wheeler, who chooses many of the program’s guests and conducts all of the on-camera interviews. Wheeler is known as a mellow interviewer (“I’m no Mike Wallace”) who lets the politicians, community leaders, visiting artists, and other guests who appear on the program speak their minds with little interference or editing.

“Nightline” is seen on Blue Ridge Public Television affiliates in western Virginia and in neighboring regions of North Carolina, West Virginia, and Tennessee.

Athletics Complex

The new gymnasium, now home for Hollins’ basketball and volleyball teams, will be officially dedicated in April. The last home basketball game was played December 6 in Tayloe Gymnasium, which is now being renovated to provide facilities for exercise, aerobics, weight training, and fencing. Hollins coaches anxiously await the new facilities.