Second annual Alliance/KPC meeting connects industry leaders and students

By Jeffrey Laube
KRC assistant professor of process technology

Industry and academia met March 20 at KRC to discuss employment opportunities for aspiring students in KPC’s process technology and instrumentation programs.

The Alaska Support Industry Alliance—a non-profit trade association made up of more than 500 businesses, organizations and individuals that provide products and services to the oil, gas and mining industries, and represent more than 50,000 Alaskan workers—held its second annual cooperative meeting at KRC. The goal of the meeting was to match up process industry employers and process technology and instrumentation students.

Tim Musgrove, president of the Kenai Chapter of the Alliance, presided over the meeting. Gary J. Turner, KPC director, gave a welcome announcement. Sandie Gilliland, KPC process technology program coordinator, and Al Grant, assistant professor of occupational safety and health, delivered the portion of the meeting that was broadcast on KSRM radio.

Gilliland discussed the two-year process technology and instrumentation degree programs, emphasizing the value of internships for both employers and employees. He also extended an offer to assist employers in the development of internship programs.

In addition, Gilliland discussed the value of requiring or preferring the degrees in job postings, as that directly impacts student funding streams. He emphasized the practice of hiring those with these degrees and covered the KPC email list and how it is used to disseminate job postings to current students and graduates.

Finally, Gilliland explained the possible industry use of KRC’s training facilities, including classrooms, technology, and staying at the KRC residence hall.

Grant discussed the occupational safety and health degree program, touching on the course work required for the two-year degree and focusing on the KPC faculty’s wealth of industry knowledge and experience.

Students and employers spent time networking before and after the formal meeting.

Last year, the first time the Alliance met at KRC, more process industry employers attended. The lower turnout was attributed to the impact of declining oil prices, affecting projects that are generally handled by support contractors and resulting in the possibility of fewer employment opportunities this summer.

Advice & A Slice event set for April 3 at KRC

By Brandi Kerley, KRC developmental advisor
Christina Stuive, KRC assistant professor of counseling

KRC invites its current students, high school seniors and interested peninsula residents to the third annual Advice & A Slice. The event, slated for 4-6 p.m., April 3 in the McLane and Brockel commons, is an open house showcasing the academic and student-life programs offered by the college.

Advice & A Slice is an opportunity to engage with faculty and staff on all levels. Faculty will be answering questions, showcasing majors, and generally having fun meeting and greeting attendees. Students and prospective students alike can learn about the financial aid process, discover how Rural and Native Student Services provides assistance to students from small places, become informed about campus health services offerings, explore leadership opportunities in student clubs.

Attendees can also discover the Learning Center and find out about testing, tutoring and Adult Basic Education. Other opportunities include checking out the extensive collection in the KRC Library and finding out how to research more effectively.

While munching on fresh, hot pizza, prospective students can meet with faculty members of all subjects and academic degrees and staff from all departments. Attendees can ask questions, get answers, and enter for a chance to win fabulous door prizes, such as a $500 tuition waiver (only for new students) or great KPC logo items! The grand prize this year is an iPad!

After eating pizza, participants can walk off the pepperoni on a tour of the Residence Hall and complete the experience by reserving a room overnight (limited spaces available). College officials are expecting a full house, showcasing the best KPC has to offer.

For more details or to reserve a room for the overnight Residence Life experience, please call Counseling and Advising at 262-0383 or email developmental advisor Brandi Kerley at bekerley@kpc.alaska.edu.
Diversifying our revenue stream during challenging budget times

By Gary J. Turner
KPC director

By the time you read this issue of the Connection, about 45 days will remain until Gov. Bill Walker signs the state operating and capital budgets. Much can change in that time, but KPC continues to plan for how to reduce or avoid costs and to generate additional revenue.

Unless you have a very accurate crystal ball—I don’t—it is impossible to say how large the reduction will be for UA and subsequently KPC. Whatever the final number is, we will survive and continue to serve our region and state as we have for the last 51 years.

One thing none of us should do is lose sight of the outstanding things KPC is doing and will continue to do. Our enrollments are looking good, and that’s not true at some UA campuses. Tuition is the primary way we generate revenue to do the things we do. However, as in the corporate world, it is not wise to rely on one revenue stream. For that reason we are moving strongly into non-credit, non-degree workforce development efforts at both KPC campuses.

Our goal is to provide short-term (two hours to a month) job training to businesses in our region and across Alaska. Many businesses send employees either to Anchorage or to the Lower 48 to acquire the skills-upgrade training they need. We want to provide this training on our campuses with a focus on the marine trades at KBC and oil/gas at KRC.

Our efforts are gaining traction quickly as KBC partners with marine businesses on the southern peninsula and KRC reaches out to the oil industry. This semester alone, KBC has already offered or will offer nine non-credit courses in the marine trades. KRC has attracted a national oil/gas organization that plans to send many employees to KRC and take advantage of the Career & Technical Education Center and residence hall. We expect many businesses to follow suit.

These efforts will help KPC’s bottom line by diversifying our revenue stream, and they will enhance the economic development of our region and state by educating our current workforce.

We will continue to pursue and achieve excellence in everything we do. That is our promise to you.

Gary J. Turner, KPC director

Photo provided by KPC advancement

Sen. Murkowski to host town hall meeting at KRC

U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski will visit KRC on April 3 to participate in a variety of activities and events. She plans to be on campus from 3:45:40 p.m., and Gary J. Turner, KPC Director, said her itinerary includes: a town hall type meeting in the River View Commons from 3:30:30 p.m., a tour of CTEC and student housing from 3:30:4:15 p.m., and a walk-through at Advice & A Slice from 4:15:4:30 p.m.

KBC honored for work with Homer Art and Culture Alliance

As part of the Homer Art and Culture Alliance, KBC was one of the winners at the 2015 Annual Arts Awards, as announced by the Homer Council on the Arts. The awards were presented at HCOA’s annual meeting in January.

The Homer Arts and culture alliance, which formed in 2012, was recognized by HCOA for its “arts leadership and advocacy” work. Besides KBC, the alliance consists of the Homer Council on the Arts, the Bunnell Street Arts Center, the Pratt Museum and Pier One Theatre.

The initiatives the alliance promoted this year included advocating for the Homer City Council to include arts and culture activities into its formal community recreation needs assessment, strengthening another coalition, PARC (Park, Arts, Recreation and Culture), and jumpstarting the newly formed Woodard Creek Coalition, which includes at least 10 community organizations and concerned citizens interested in the health and safety of the watershed.

KPC scholarship, registration deadlines announced

Two important dates for current and prospective KPC students take place soon. The first is April 2, when the High School Senior Tuition Scholarship Packet is due to the KRC Financial Aid office by 5 p.m. The packet is for graduating seniors from Cook Inlet Academy, Kenai Alternative High School, Kenai Central High School, Nikiski High School, Ninilchik High School, Seward High School, River City Academy, and Soldotna High School, plus Kenai Peninsula Borough residents participating in home-school programs.

Selected recipients will have full-time tuition (up to 15 credits) waived for the fall and spring 2015/2016 semesters.

The second important date is April 6, when priority registration for Fall 2015 begins online for returning admitted students. This registration period is designed to ensure that veterans and those students closest to graduation are given the highest registration priority.

KBC welding student wins recognition in skills competition

Alex Clark, a welding student in his second semester at KBC, finished third in the welding competition during the Kenai Peninsula SkillsUSA event last month. According to his welding instructor, KBC adjunct Larry Staehle, the competition features students enrolled in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, and Clark is a student at Homer High School.

Regional winners move on to the state competition and perhaps even nationals. SkillsUSA is a career and technical student organization that focuses on leadership, technical, vocational and employability skills.

KBC professor honored by Homer library

Michael Hawfield, KBC associate professor of history and political science, has been named the winner of the 2015 Lifelong Learner Award by the Friends of Homer Library’s board of directors.

Hawfield has served on both KBBI and Hospice of Homer boards, and is currently on the boards of the Alaska Historical Society and the Friends of the McNeil River Brown Bear Sanctuary. Former Gov. Sean Parnell appointed Hawfield to the Alaska Historical Commission in 2014.

Hawfield will be the guest of honor at the Celebration of Lifelong Learning slated for 7 p.m., April 4 at the library, where he will formally receive his award.

“Hawfield is a great educator, especially here in Homer, which is a community of life-long learners, of folks deeply engaged in their community,” Hawfield said. “I am flattered to have been singled out among them this year.”

see BRIEFS, page 3
English as a Second Language classes help students in a variety of ways

By Sara Hadfield
KRC ESL instructor

On Thursdays from 1 to 2 p.m., the KRC Learning Center bustles with activity. Thursday is the day the English as a Second Language program holds Conversation Group, an opportunity for English language learners to meet others in a friendly, casual environment to practice basic listening and speaking skills.

The students in the ESL program include men and women of varied ages, attend classes, or receive one-on-one tutoring, depending on their goals, interests, and proficiency levels.

Some students come to the Learning Center seeking to improve their everyday conversation skills while others want to brush up on grammar or improve their vocabulary. Some are preparing for the U.S. citizenship exam, and still others come to see the language skills needed to enter degree programs at KPC.

This year, several ESL students met their initial language goals and decided to move on to new ventures. Guangyuan Ding started out in the ESL program soon after arriving from China. After a couple semesters, he decided to enter the Certified Nurse Aide program. Ding now has her CNA certificate and is employed at Heritage Place.

This semester Ding is taking Psychology A150: Lifespan Development in hopes of one day completing a college degree program. She said she believes the ESL classes gave her a place to practice and use language comfortably. “I really enjoyed the classes,” she said.

“The instructors speak clearly so we can easily understand. This gives me more confidence about speaking correctly. I was never afraid to speak at the Learning Center.”

ESL courses include U.S. Citizenship, Basic Literacy, Advanced Grammar, Vocabulary Development, and Basic American History. At any point in the academic year, new students are welcome to enroll in the program, which is offered free and is funded through a state Adult Basic Education grant. To learn more or to register, interested students may stop by the Learning Center, Room 153 in the Brockel Building.

ESL instructors Kathy Christopherson and Sara Hadfield agree that it is exciting to see the students meet their goals and pursue their dreams.
A Day in the Life: Megan Bubnar embraces life at many levels

By Janice Maloney High
KRC associate professor of English

Megan Bubnar has taken college courses every semester for the past three years—an accomplishment more impressive by the fact she is just 17 years old.

Born into a military family in Colorado Springs, Colo., she has lived in many locales. The home-schooled high school junior currently lives in Chugiak with her parents and five siblings, two of whom are also home-schooled. Bubnar’s long-range goals include earning a degree in biology and following in her father’s footsteps to become a physician assistant. She currently is enrolled in three online KPC courses—English, biology and math. She also attends to her high school courses and works 16 hours a week as a nanny.

She still finds time for recreational activities, such as hiking with her golden retriever, Koda, and for horseback riding, which she once did competitively. In addition, she belongs to the “Simply Drama” club, an organization that practices and performs skits all over Alaska.

Bubnar is also an active member of her community. She is part of a youth group whose mission is to help provide food to the homeless. In Eagle River, she helped raise money for the pregnancy resource center there, through the “Couture Fashion Show,” in which all the models made their own dresses out of recycled materials. Bubnar based her design on the business that sponsored her. “My dress theme was movie theater/video store inspired,” she said. “I used strung popcorn, popcorn buckets and DVDs.”

“It takes a lot of time management for me to get my weekly work finished, and a big part of this is taking my work on the go,” she said. “I take homework with me when I drive my brother to his weekly class. I also schedule time every week to ensure my completion of work. Sometimes keeping up can be a challenge, but I love the feeling I get every week when I know that I’ve worked hard and done my best.”

Peninsula veterans seek information, assistance at Town Hall event

By Drew Baker
KPC Veterans Services coordinator

Veterans from all over the Kenai Peninsula attended the Veteran Administration’s Town Hall event at the KRC Residence Hall on March 12 to receive information about or receive help with personal issues. On hand to help them were Susan Yeager, director of the Alaska VA Healthcare System; Gary Puckett, the interim director of the Veterans Benefits Administration, and staff members from both agencies.

The thrust of Yeager’s message to those assembled was that despite recent bad press for the VA as a whole, the Alaska VA office is willing and able to help. Since Alaska is a big state, she said, in order to get this message to veterans the VA is going to meet them in their home towns and villages.

VA personnel focused on the recent Choice Act signed last year by President Obama and the $750,000 transportation grant received by Alaska VBA to assist remotely based veterans. The Choice Act gives Alaska’s 2,589 veterans enrolled in VA health care greater flexibility in choosing their health care providers, while the transportation grant gives veterans in remote areas the means to get to their appointments.

The one-hour meeting stretched into an hour and 45 minutes as there were many questions. Most of the VA staff were surprised by how little information the audience had on these issues.

Forrest Powell, a program manager for the VA and the architect for the transportation grant, stated that he needed to “rethink how they get the word out to veterans about the availability of transportation funds.” Of the total grant awarded to Alaska, the Kenai Peninsula received $150,000 to help cover costs for round-trip transportation to medical appointments. Veterans can contact the Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Kenai at 395-4100 for more information on this program.

Yeager also expressed a need for the VA to communicate more effectively with those it serves. “There is a need to continue these Town Hall meetings,” she said, “(and) to do more kinds of communication, more flyers, more radio spots, as there is a lot of confusion for veterans.”

Yeager also said she hopes to speed up payments that are due to veterans and providers. These steps are critical in building confidence in current providers and encouraging new providers to join the network, she said.

The next Town Hall meeting is tentatively scheduled for June. The specific date, location and time have yet to be determined.
Word on Campus:
“How do you balance school with all the rest of your responsibilities?”
Compiled by KPC advancement department

Sean McBride, KRC, bachelor of art psychology
“I follow a schedule and try to stick with separating school time, me time, and work time.”

Martin Moldih, KBC, bachelor of science physical education
“It’s actually one or the other. You get your life but no school, or the other way – school or no life.”

John Post, AES, associate of applied science process technology
“To balance going to school full time, I cut my hours at work to part time. I also come into school early to make sure I am prepared and understand the weekly materials. I figure I will sleep sometime.”

Jessica Rogers, KRC, associate of applied science process technology
“The way I prioritize is by making sure all of my important schoolwork gets done first, leaving enough time for me to also have a social life.”

Veronica Jinete, KBC, certified nurse assistant preparation
“Fortunately, I am extremely excited about my CNA course. I try to make a schedule, and always plan ahead although life doesn’t always work that way…I also have support from my loved ones and that really helps.”

Owen Duffy, KBC, associate of arts
“Poorly.”

Myles Snell-Burton, KRC, associate of applied science process technology
“I balance school with my other responsibilities by making sure I get all of my schoolwork done during the week. If I have extra, I will do it on the weekends or on my breaks at work.”

Jacob Zindel, AES, associate of applied science process technology
“I’m currently working at Safeway, and the management works with me on scheduling. I hope to be able to transition to the process industry this summer. For their part, the staff and faculty involved with the Process Technology program at KPC-AES are very amenable to work around the student’s availability. As far as having a social life goes; you just try your best to stay ahead of the workload so you can squeeze in some fun adventures here and there. The harder you work, the harder you can play!”

Acclaimed novelist to be keynote speaker at writers’ conference

By Clark Fair
KPC Connection coordinator

Andre Dubus III, whose 1999 novel, “House of Sand and Fog,” was a National Book Award finalist and the source of a 2003 Oscar-nominated film, will be the keynote presenter when aspiring writers gather at KBC’s 14th annual Kachemak Bay Writers’ Conference in Homer this summer.

Joining Dubus at the conference will be 19 other award-winning, nationally recognized authors, editors and agents who will conduct creative writing workshops, readings, craft talks and panel presentations in creative fiction, nonfiction, poetry and the business of writing.

Presenting writers include Simmons Buntin, Joy Castro, Richard Chiappone, Alice Friedman, Adrianne Harun, Kim Heacox, Justin Herrmann, Erin Coughlin Hollowell, John Larson, E. Lockhart, Nancy Lord, Jeremy Pataky, Andy Ross, Eva Saulitis, Frank Soos (Alaska State Writer Laureate), Peggy Shumaker, Judith Sternlight, Peter Trachtenberg and Afaa Michael Weaver.

Optional activities include manuscript reviews, editor-agent consultations, receptions, a boat cruise and open “mic.” Evening readings on June 13-15 by visiting writers will be free to the general public. A special post-conference writing workshop will be held June 16-18 across Kachemak Bay at Tutka Bay Lodge for conference registrants.

“Whether you are voracious reader of literature, appreciate the richness, diversity and perspectives of the written word, are an emerging writer, teacher, student or essayist or poet, this conference will inspire you,” said conference founder and KBC Director Carol Swartz.

Early registration for the highly acclaimed conference, to be held June 12-16 at Land’s End Resort, is open until May 1. The early registration fee is $375, and a reduced rate of $325 is available for UA admitted degree-seeking students.

Advanced registration is required. To register or learn about other opportunities, such as agent/editor meetings or manuscript consultations, go to the conference website at http://writersconference.homer.alaska.edu.

After the early registration deadline, the price rises to $400 until June 11. On the first day of the conference, if space is available, the price is $450.

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KRC introduces new staff and faculty members

KPC workforce development & training coordinator

1. What are your duties?
Responsibilities of this position are principally to coordinate within the business and industry sector (with a focus on oil/gas) on the peninsula to identify the educational and training needs locally, regionally, and statewide as well as to customize training programs and curriculum to meet these needs. I also work to coordinate, develop and expand the already established KRC conferencing program to address the professional sector and promote KPCs state-of-the-art facilities.

2. What was your last position? Where?
I was at Barton Community College in Great Bend, Kansas, since 2006. During that time I served as the director of Adult Education & International Student Services as well as the GED examiner. My most recent position there was faculty in the Developmental Education Department. I worked with the international students instructing them in English as a Second Language as well as English Comp I & II for general core requirements.

3. Where did you go to school?

4. What brought you to Alaska?
I gradually continue the trend of western migration. I was raised on the East Coast, and after spending several years in the Midwest, I desired to live and work in Alaska. In addition to wanting to build a successful conference program, I felt that this was the right time in my life for a change and where my dogs could really enjoy the great outdoors.

5. What are your long-term goals at KPC?
My long-term goal is to retire from KPC having achieved a successful training and conferencing program here. I hope that these programs will reflect the attainment of goals that individuals set forth for themselves within the workforce sector to improve their professional and personal lives.

KRC Health Clinic registered nurse

1. What are your duties?
Duties involve both administrative and health care. Administratively, I am charged with ensuring the smooth running of the Health Clinic. As a registered nurse, I provide any health care to students within the scope of my license. This would include immunizations, screenings, dispensing over-the-counter drugs, and consultations.

2. What was your last position? Where?
I joined KPC after 14 years of employment at Central Peninsula Hospital. At CPH, I was a medical/surgical staff nurse (three years), a care coordinator (three years), a physician quality analyst (seven years), and, most recently, a pre-op nurse in Day Surgery (one year).

3. Where did you go to school?
My education began in Malaysia where I was born. In the U.S., I attended Western Michigan University where I obtained two bachelor of science degrees—one in communication and the other in psychology. Three years later I attended Laurentian University in Ontario, Canada, and began my third bachelor of science degree, this time in nursing. I was enrolled there for two years before moving to the U.S. and completing my nursing education at Northern Michigan University.

4. What brought you to Alaska?
A husband whose life-long dream was to live in Alaska! Since my family is still in Malaysia, it did not matter to me which part of the United States I lived in. My sense of adventure also played a part!

5. What are your long-term goals at KPC?
It is my hope that I stay employed at KPC till it’s time for me to retire. I envision remaining a part of the KPC community for many years. In addition to working in the clinic, I hope to one day teach a class or two.
A Day at KPC Res Life:
Students audition for feature film in Alaska

By Timothy Alsobrooks
KRC Res Hall resident

In the pale light of dawn on the morning of March 1, seven KRC Res Life students, peering through the panoramic windows of the Res Life van, watch the lowlands of western Cook Inlet give way to the dramatic, rugged summits of the Kenai Mountains. In Cooper Landing, they make a pit stop to breathe the alpine air and admire the alpenglow that paints the mountains’ peaks. “We live in the most beautiful place on Earth,” remarks Shawn Rogers, a second-year student in KRC’s process technology program.

But Shawn has been beckoned along the three-hour journey to Anchorage by something more than the achingly beautiful scenery of the Seward Highway: a chance to be on the silver screen. The producers of “Hunter Killer”—an in-the-works movie scheduled to be filmed in Whittier this fall—are hosting an open casting call in Alaska’s largest city, and the Res Life students are eager to stake their claim. “I’m excited to see how it all works. I’ve never done anything like this before,” comments Jeff Boss, a first-year KRC associate of arts student.

Two hours later, in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel, a stern woman explains the audition procedure: “Each of you should take a form, fill it out, and give it back to me. I will assign you an audition number, and then you will proceed to the photo room.” Pens furiously scratch at clipboards throughout the lobby. One by one, those auditioning are assigned numbers and hurriedly ushered through a room where their photographs are taken.

“That’s it? Just a form and a picture?” laughs Shawn. “I guess that’s show business, for you!” Brusque and impersonal as her brush with Hollywood may have been, Amanda Dorough, a first-year KRC paramedicine student, is undeterred: “My fingers are still crossed for fame and fortune.”

Part or no part, it was fun to come up to Anchorage and participate in the audition,” Jeff concludes.

Milestones:
Beth Graber, KBC professor of English, reaches 25-year mark

By Janice Maloney High
KRC associate professor of English

Although Beth Graber, KBC English professor, officially concluded her first quarter-century of teaching at KPC last spring, her history with the college stretches back more than 25 years.

In the seven years preceding her full-time teaching career, she served as KBC’s Learning Center facilitator, Adult Basic Education coordinator, interim campus co-director, adjunct instructor, and grant-funded English assistant professor.

In 1989, she signed her first full-time, tenure-track, assistant professor contract, and she has since taught some 20 courses in English and communications, served on innumerable university committees, and participated in community service, including the KBBI and Hospice of Homer boards of directors. Along the way, in 1997, she completed a doctoral program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Not surprisingly, Graber has seen myriad educational changes during the last 32 years, including the explosive rise of e-Learning. She thoroughly enjoys the courses she does teach online, but notes, “I didn’t grow up in the digital world. I learned to type on a manual Underwood typewriter, I didn’t get a smart phone until a couple of years ago, and I’m still not on Facebook or Twitter. So learning the technology expertise that’s needed to offer a motivating, interesting, and interactive distance class has taken me a long time.”

While much changes, much also remains the same, at least when it comes to how college funding is affected by the boom-and-bust cycles of Alaska’s oil economy. “This pattern of seeing no other option than whacking our way out of downturns disrupts continuity and diminishes quality,” she said. “I wish we could come up with a more stable funding formula for both our public schools and our university system. We are the trainers of the future work force, and an integral cog in the state’s economic engine.”

Graber contemplates retirement “sometime soon,” to be followed by travel and adjunct teaching. She is excited when new instructors join the KPC/UAA family, and offers this advice:

“Reach out, network with others, and build community among your colleagues and students. Prepare well, make your classes relevant, and most of all, teach from your heart.”

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Artists in Europe:
ASLA students tour Western Civilization’s treasures

By Brandi Kerley
KRC developmental advisor

Last summer six members of KPC’s Art Students League Association (ASLA Club) took a tour of London, Paris, Venice and Rome and the artistic histories they contain. We six women—Nicole Lopez, Kathi Overpeck, Nita Dreyer, Jessica Bookey, Alisah Kress and I—raised more than $16,000 to cover the expenses of airfare, trains and lodging.

An overnight flight into London via Reykjavik had us arriving red eyed, fatigued and deliriously giddy as we rode the metro to our first hostel, Sir Palmer’s charming 18th century hunting lodge, complete with a coat of armor and wood paneling. We found our room in one of the attic gables next to a small round window that reminded me of Anne Frank. Bunk beds, rolling storage chests and curtains lent a feel of summer camp.

With a full schedule and only three days we set off almost immediately to eat London food and take in London sights. We saw Parliament, Buckingham Palace, the Tower of London, Queen’s Gallery and former KPC history instructor, Dr. Cathryn Pearce-Boyd, who graciously led us on a tour of the British Museum and lunch at the Sherlock Holmes pub.

Travelling opens one’s eyes to other cultures, customs and the personal habits of fellow travelers. Reminding ourselves of childhood days, it was “follow-the-leader” through metro stations, sidewalk marches and hostel check-ins that brought laughter, moments of hilarity and observations of the absurd, such as the street performer who scaled the exterior of the Pompidou while bouncing a soccer ball on his head.

We took in the breathtaking view of Paris from atop the Eiffel Tower and the imposing strength of Notre Dame as it soared skyward. We ate at Deux Magots café and tiny bistros while watching Parisians stroll and getting to know ourselves and each other. And we prepared to delve into the Louvre. Then there was the one-hour miscommunication between my brain and the train schedule that caused us to race through the terminal check-in and up the platform to catch our train to Venice with five minutes to spare.

Sleeping overnight on a train prompted new levels of intimacy with our travel mates as we crammed three deep into a sardine compartment, then rushed to disembark after sleeping all the way into the station. Maneuvering the Grand Canal, the water taxis and the Doge’s palace, we still found time to sunbathe on Lido’s famed white-sand beaches and experience another aspect of European culture: While everyone wears bottoms, not necessarily so with tops.

Rome is the Eternal City, pulsing with an ancient heartbeat that is still clearly visible as monuments such as Trajan’s Column overlooks a gelateria. We ate our way across Italy at the gelaterias. And just two blocks from our hostel was our favorite restaurant, La Famiglia, a little gem off a side street in Rome. It was a playful, teasingly familial and cozy place with a warmhearted staff and delicious cuisine. We ate there every day we were in Rome and said a fond farewell as we departed.

Caesar said, “Veni Vidi Vici (I came, I saw, I conquered).” We conquered Rome with a panache only those with artistic flair may command and have permanently carved a place in our hearts for the memories. More than an exploration of museums, architecture and churches, this trip awakened us to the art of humanity explored in the medium of new foods, clothing, existential experiences and friendships made, nurtured and strengthened across three continents and 6,000 miles. Audrey Hepburn in Sabrina says, “I found myself in Paris.” Those of us who took this trip found ourselves in Europe, but more importantly we found each other.