Because the borough, school district, and the college all had their beginnings in 1964, it was an easy decision to collaborate on a shared celebration of the 50th anniversary benchmark. The groups have been sharing resources and working together since their inceptions.

By Janice Maloney High
KRC associate professor of English

Last year at this time, John Pollock was settling in to his new job as KPC Veterans Services coordinator. Now he has taken on a position with far greater responsibility: KPC director of Student Services, in charge of the successful operations of eight divisions, including Veterans Services.

The retired Marine colonel, veteran of multiple tours of duty in Afghanistan and Iraq, says working with college students here is similar, in many ways, to the 25 years he spent working with military personnel.

“In both environments, young people value guidance on matters like success strategies, time management, overall maturity, social challenges, and complex cultural environments,” Pollock said. “My best advice for KPC students is to stay informed. Student Services does its best to get the word out on matters like registration deadlines, financial aid, and special services, but each student needs to be proactive as well.”

While much of his current work is behind the scenes, Pollock also engages in what he calls “leading by walking around,” talking informally to students and staff, gaining valuable perspective through what he calls “unvarnished feedback.”

In this first semester as Student Services director, Pollock says his main objective is to “learn the operation rhythm of an academic year,” to get a full sense of the various elements of student services and how they interact. He also is looking to some specific goals, one of which is to increase retention and sustainability rates of KPC’s Alaska Native students. In addition, Pollock, while pleased with the current rate of growth in the KRC Residence Hall occupancy, will work to see it increase even more.

When the semester began, Pollock welcomed advice from retiring Student Services director, Bill Howell, and found it matched his own philosophy of being “fair, competent, and consistent in dealing with students.” Pollock is also in a position to dispense suggestions. To Drew Baker, his replacement at Veterans’ Services, Pollock advises a focus on the core business of ensuring students receive their benefits in a timely manner. “No matter what the department or office at KPC,” Pollock said, “the mission is to function on behalf of the students.”
By Gary J. Turner
KPC director

Retirements: saying farewell and looking forward

It happens to every organization—retirements of long-time cherished employees. KPC will see four professors retire next May, and I can’t describe how much they will be missed.

Those departing include: Fritz Miller, associate professor of welding with 31 years at KRC; Dr. David Wartinbee, professor of biology with 17 years; Janice High, associate professor of English with 11 years; and, Dorothy Gray, assistant professor of English with four years.

How do you replace such wonderful faculty members that cumulatively dedicated 63 years to our college? You don’t. We will fill these positions, and searches are already under way for new professors who will start next fall.

We can’t expect the new instructors to fill these shoes. No one can; however, we will find the best professors we can and they will step in and move our college forward. Yes, it will take some time for them to get comfortable and find their groove, but they will because of the foundation laid by those retiring and the support of their new colleagues.

One thing we will not do as an organization is to compare the new faculty members to the ones who retired. That’s unfair to all involved. We will gracefully thank those retiring for their dedicated years and remember all they did for the institution. And we will warmly welcome those walking in our doors for the first time with the hope they will serve as long and honorably as their predecessors.

To David, Fritz, Janice and Dorothy: we wish you all that is good as you start new adventures next summer. We have eight more months to enjoy your company and we will make the best of it. Thank you for all you’ve done for our college, UAA, our region and the state.

KRC’s Dave Atcheson pens new book

Dave Atcheson, KRC’s evening coordinator, recently celebrated the publication of his third book. “Dead Reckoning: Navigating a Life on the Last Frontier, Court- ing Tragedy on Its High Seas”, a coming-of-age memoir of a near-death experience while commercial fishing. The book recalls Atcheson’s rocky introduction to commercial fishing and the incident that nearly killed him.

Replete with colorful characters, the book has been well received critically, with strong reviews from Alaskan authors Nick Jans and Nancy Lord, among others. Atcheson has a book signing planned for Oct. 4 at the Barnes & Noble store in Anchorage and will do a reading and book talk on Oct. 22 at the UAA bookstore.

A Sterling resident who has lived in Alaska since 1984, Atcheson is the author of “Hidden Alaska: Bristol Bay and Beyond” and “Fishing Alaska’s Kenai Peninsula.” He has written for Alaskan authors Nick Jans and Nancy Lord, among others. Atcheson has a book signing planned for Oct. 4 at the Barnes & Noble store in Anchorage and will do a reading and book talk on Oct. 22 at the UAA bookstore.

KPC faculty/staff mark numerous milestones

At the KPC convocation earlier this fall, the following faculty and staff members were recognized for milestones in their service to the college:

see BRIEFS, page 3

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The KPC Connection editorial team consists of:

-Gary J. Turner, KPC director
-Suzie Kendrick, KPC advancement programs manager
-Clark Fair, KRC adjunct writing instructor
-Janice Maloney High, KRC associate professor of English

Questions about the KPC Connection or how to submit articles for this newspaper can be directed to Suzie Kendrick at wskendrick@kpc.alaska.edu or by calling 262-0320.

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Out-of-state students gain unique opportunities in Semester by the Bay program

By Debbie Boege-Tobin
KBC associate professor of biology

This fall, KBC is hosting 10 Semester by the Bay students from the University of North Carolina-Wilmington, University of California-Santa Barbara and Cal State-Fullerton. This cohort of students, mostly marine biology majors, is enrolled in a variety of courses including Marine Biology, Marine Mammal Biology, Ichthyology, Ornithology, and a new one-credit course, Marine Mammal Skeletal Articulation. A few are also taking American Sign Language, Women and Gender Studies and Theater.

Additionally, eight of the 10 SBB students are taking Internship in the Biological Sciences, through which they work with Dr. Debbie Boege-Tobin and one of several community-partner agencies to gain practical, hands-on, career-building experiences.

Four students are working with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service out of Anchorage and with Marc Webber of the Maritime National Wildlife Refuge in Homer on sea otter response and mortality. Two students are working with Lee Post (a.k.a. “Boneman”) to collect data, help organize and prepare bones, and construct the display for the Stejneger’s beaked whale which will be articulated later this fall in his course, as well as prepare bones for future use by the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies (CACS) in their summer Marine Mammal Discovery camps held across Kachemak Bay.

Another student is working with CACS on various marine debris data-collection projects and educational outreach programs, while two others are working with the Kachemak Bay Research Reserve on sea otter-foraging ecology and plankton surveys in Kachemak Bay and Lower Cook Inlet.

All of these internships provide the students with free or significantly reduced housing and with in-state tuition rates for KPC courses. With the numerous field excursions and immersive lab activities, such as beluga observations in Turnagain Arm, shorebird surveys along the Anchor Point beaches, skeletal articulations of local fish and marine mammals, plus various trips out on the waters of Kachemak Bay, all of the students are spending a great deal of time studying the incredible fauna in and along the shores of the lower Kenai Peninsula, which in most cases is quite different from the places they call home.

Trending upward: Enrollment and KRC Residence Hall population

By Suzie Kendrick
KPC advancement programs manager

As of Sept. 12, enrollment across the KPC system was up more than six percent compared to the same period last year. Currently 2,676 students attend KPC locations in Soldotna, Homer, Seward and Anchorage. The number of credits these students are taking is also up six percent numbering 15,784 semester credit hours.

KPC also continues to see a significant increase in minority student enrollment. In the last four years, the number of minority students has increased to 23.6 percent of the general population. KPC enrolls more Alaska Native/American Indian, Pacific Island, Asian, Hispanic and African American students than any other UAA community campus.

Another area of rapid enrollment growth is in the number of veterans who are choosing KPC for their higher education needs. Across all academic programs and VA educational benefit chapters, 166 students are currently attending classes at KPC, a 30 percent increase from fall 2013. The total KPC course credits being attempted by veteran students is 1,216, an average of 7.3 credits per student.

In the KRC Residence Hall, occupancy has nearly doubled last year’s totals—right in line with the track that the college predicted in the initial feasibility plans. The hall’s capacity is 96 beds, with six reserved for resident advisors who oversee 16 residents each in exchange for their rooms. Current occupancy stands at just more than 58 percent of capacity. It is expected that by this time next year, the hall will maintain 70 percent or more occupancy.

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A Day in the Life: Domonique Ruiz

Making every moment of every day count, this KPC student maximizes life’s opportunities

By Janice Maloney High
KRC associate professor of English

Anyone who is simultaneously raising a family, working outside the home, and pursuing an academic degree needs to be remarkably organized. And organization is the byword for Domonique Ruiz, a Kodiak resident who balances life to encompass her partner, their four-year-old son and nine-month-old daughter, a job at Providence Counseling Center, and three online KPC classes.

This freshman UAA psychology major has time management down to a science. Take for example, her Tuesday-Thursday schedule:

6 a.m. Wake up, get kids ready for day, get self ready for work.
7:30 a.m. Leave for work, which starts at 8 a.m.
Noon-1 p.m. Use lunch break to complete postings and readings for three classes: communications, English, and math.
5 p.m. Leave work, pick up kids from day-care, and sing (usually “Itsy Bitsy Spider”) during the entire 45-minute drive home.
6 p.m.-8 p.m. Schoolwork time, as partner assumes cooking, cleaning and childcare tasks.
8 p.m. Dinner
8 p.m.-10 p.m. Family time, review highs and lows of everybody’s day.
10 p.m. Kids to bed; finish up schoolwork.
Midnight. Bedtime.

Wednesday and Fridays after work are reserved for making dinner and enjoying recreational activities, both indoor and out, with the family.

Ruiz also has longer-term, seasonal schedules, “especially when football season is here. Nothing gets in the way of the Seahawks! We take a poll of who is thumbs up for the schedule and who is thumbs down. Then we fit it to everyone’s needs and we stick to the schedule.”

She knows there is much in life that cannot be controlled, but she is motivated by a particular passage in the Elizabeth Gilbert novel Eat Pray Love: “I can decide how I spend my time, whom I interact with, whom I share my body and life and money and energy with. I can select what I can read and eat and study. I can choose how I’m going to regard unfortunate circumstances in my life—whether I will see them as curses or opportunities. I can choose my words and the tone of voice in which I speak to others. And most of all, I can choose my thoughts.”

KRC dorm resident wins summer coho derby

By Clark Fair
KRC adjunct writing instructor

Amanda Towne, an 18-year-old KRC freshman living in the Residence Hall, won the Valdez Silver Salmon Derby and received $15,000, plus another $1,000 in cash and $1,000 in clothing and merchandise for finishing in first place in the Women’s Silver Salmon Derby.

Towne, a Valdez resident who became the first woman to win the overall derby, told the derby’s official news media that she planned to use her winnings to help pay for her college education.

She caught the 17.54-pound coho on Aug. 9 while fishing with her father aboard a vessel named the Amanda Rose. Her silver salmon won her that day’s daily prize and placed her in the lead in both the women’s and the overall derby. Over the remainder of the derby, catches by two men came close, but she hung on to win by 0.02 pounds.

Her winning salmon was the only fish caught that day on the Amanda Rose. In fact, she told derby officials, the action had been so slow that she had her back to her rod when the coho took her bait. She wasn’t aware that the bite was on until her father hollered, “Someone grab the pole! Someone grab the pole!” So she did.

“I just grabbed the pole and yanked up really hard,” Towne said. “And I thought I’d lost it. It wasn’t doing anything.” So she began reeling in line as if just retrieving her lure. Then she and her father glimpsed the fish for the first time and realized it was still hooked. Her dad said, “That’s a big one!” and the fish began to fight, swimming beneath the boat and almost yanking the rod from Towne’s hands. Finally her father was able to net it and haul it into the boat.

At ConocoPhillips...
We’re moving in the right direction

KRC eLearning student Domonique Ruiz lives on Kodiak Island.
Photo provided by Domonique Ruiz

KRC eLearning student Amanda Town poses with her derby-winning salmon.
Photo provided by David Towne

I interact with, whom I share my body and life and money and energy with. I can select what I can read and eat and study. I can choose how I’m going to regard unfortunate circumstances in my life—whether I will see them as curses or opportunities. I can choose my words and the tone of voice in which I speak to others. And most of all, I can choose my thoughts.”
Aaron Gray, KBC, bachelor of science, biological sciences
“Communications III is my favorite course so far. Exploring is more intriguing than I thought.”

Chris Young, AES, associate of applied science, occupational safety and health
“My favorite course was OSH A108 Injury Prevention and Risk Management with Professor Al Grant. He is a great instructor who brings a fun and interesting style of teaching to the classroom.”

Erinlee Doty, KRC, bachelor of arts, psychology
“My favorite course would have to be Human Sexuality, one of my psychology courses. It’s my favorite because the conversations we have in that class are really interesting and off-the-wall. I thoroughly enjoy it. Our professor is awesome, which makes the course even better.”

Luke Dedych, AES, associate of applied science, process technology
“My favorite course was PRT A144 Industrial Process Instrumentation II with Professor Rick Adams. I liked it because it was hands-on learning. We learned about control loops by building and playing around with them in class.”

Marsha Graham, KBC, bachelor of arts, history
“My favorite course so far has been the history classes taught by Professor Hawfield and Professor Haigh. I would have to say Civil War with Professor Hawfield as he made the era come alive with lots of reading and class interaction.”

Joshua Wolf, KRC, associate of applied science, process technology and instrumentation
“My favorite course is the OSHA class I’m currently taking for my degree program. I’ve had a lot of training in OSHA, so I’m comfortable with the material and also learning a lot of new stuff.”

Jessica Hill, KBC, bachelor of arts, justice
“Japanese is my favorite class thus far, this semester. I would have to say my favorite course in my whole college career would have to be any Law and Justice course!”

Skylar Taylor, KRC, associate of applied science, process technology and instrumentation
“My favorite class this semester is my math class. I haven’t taken a math course for almost 12 years, so taking this refresher course has really helped me out a lot.”

KRC renovation on track
During the past ten years, construction and modification projects have been taking place somewhere in the KPC system. The latest renovations are underway at the Kenai River Campus, with several tandem projects designed to contribute to campus renewal.

Pictured here is the most recent improvement to the KRC Library: an upgraded circulation desk and newly configured office spaces for the staff. Also shown here is the remodel of the upstairs Ward Building to accommodate most KRC faculty members in one location. This is a back-fill project from space freed up by the establishment of KRC’s new Career and Technical Education Center.

Other projects are in various stages of planning with many additional improvements and efficiencies scheduled over the next three years that will continue to enhance the campus.

Photos provided by KPC advancement
**Adjunct Spotlight**

1. **Why do you teach as an adjunct?**
   I love to teach—face-to-face and eLearning classes. Really enjoy motivating and empowering students. Watching them gain self-confidence as each semester progresses and start to believe they truly have something worthwhile to say. Teaching as an adjunct has also afforded the chance to share my passions for reading, writing and learning while holding down a less “humanities-oriented” full-time job that pays the bills. In the end, though, I’d join a college/university faculty as a full-time professor in less than a heartbeat—if only they’d hire me.

2. **What skills and experiences do you bring to the classroom?**
   I’ve been venturing into classrooms for more than 14 years—mostly at UAA, KPC, Alaska Pacific University and North Idaho College—so I’m still relatively new at the game. Yet I’m still open enough to try out new teaching techniques or technologies. I’ve also worked several years in production management and journalism. And I apply that hands-on, real-world expertise to such classes as Technical Writing, Beginning Reporting or Creative Writing: Fiction/Poetry.

   I also try to pass on to students countless writing tricks gained as an editor, copy editor, reporter, columnist, reviewer and page designer in several daily, weekly and monthly newspapers and magazines. I know what it’s like to stare at a blank computer monitor screen for hours without the slightest idea of where to start. Not sure if this matters as much as my life and classroom experience, but I received a BA in English/philosophy from California State University Fullerton and an MFA in creative writing from the University of Montana.

3. **What is the most challenging aspect of being a part-time faculty member?**
   Most of the students I encounter are NOT English majors. Basically they’re stuck in my classes because of their General Education Requirements. Just the word “English” is daunting enough to most undergrads. And these novices may enjoy the “romance of writing” but they tend to avoid the actual process as too darn difficult. Not to mention all those boring reading assignments.

   So the challenges involve making these conscripts, er, students, first, want to attend class as opposed to having to, second, lose the fear of English and writing all those papers with strong thesis statements; and third, maybe once in a very blue moon inspiring an aspiring scholar toward a major in English or, at least, a better understanding of Emerson’s and Thoreau’s transcendentalism.

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**KPC introduces new staff members**

Compiled by Clark Fair
KPC adjunct writing instructor

**Richard Drew Baker**
Veteran Services coordinator and campus safety officer

1. **What are your duties?**
   As the Veteran Services coordinator, I inform KPC and the VA of the enrollment status of veterans and other eligible students; maintain VA-related records; assist students applying for benefits or dealing with payments. As the KRC safety officer, I oversee policies and procedures regarding the safety and security of all campus staff, faculty, students and visitors. I also provide UAA with information regarding incidents that occur on campus.

2. **What was your last position? Where?**
   I was a King Air 200 pilot for EagleMed, LLC from June 2013-July 2014. I piloted medical evacuation flights out of Anchorage in support of Alaska Regional Hospital.

3. **Where did you go to school?**
   I have a bachelor’s in psychology from West Virginia University and a master’s in aeronautical science from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. I am currently pursuing an Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) degree through KPC.

4. **What brought you to Alaska?**
   I was serving as a pilot with a Christian humanitarian relief and development ministry in Afghanistan from Jan. 2006-Aug. 2009. In late 2008 the security situation became uncertain and many families, including mine, made the decision to pull out. I was then recruited for and took the position of executive director of Missionary Aviation Repair Center (MARC) at the Soldotna airport. They provide transportation for ministries and churches throughout Alaska. They also do aircraft maintenance and flight instruction. I served there for three and a half years (Sept. 2009-March 2013).

5. **What are your long-term goals at KPC?**
   To bloom where I am planted. In other words, do the best job I can do as the VSC for as long as I am called to the position. For the last 10 years, my long-term plans were often interrupted or changed by Providence. For now, I am pursuing a degree in OSH. Everything else I will take one day at a time.

**Sandie Gilliland**
KRC process technology program coordinator

1. **What are your duties?**
   Here at the college I am teaching one class each semester and helping coordinate any activity that is related to the process technology program. Some of these activities might include helping facilitate a college visit from an industry employer to talk to students about positions they are hiring for. I also attend many process industry functions and meetings, and am a voice for the college and the Process Tech and Instrumentation programs.

2. **What was your last position? Where?**
   Just prior to beginning work at KPC I worked as an operator assistant for Baroid Surface Solutions (a Halliburton Company) doing grind and inject (G&I) operations and mobile G&I plant startups. I worked both here in the Cook Inlet and also on Oooguruk Island on the North Slope.

3. **Where did you go to school?**
   I went to school at KPC when Big Blue was the PRT mainstay and the instrument simulator was a little room in the back.

4. **What brought you to Alaska?**
   I moved to Alaska when I was five. I didn’t have much room in the back.

5. **What are your long-term goals at KPC?**
   Having just started here I haven’t had much time to think about my long-term goals here at the college. I have some general ideas though. The longer I think about something the better ideas I come up with.

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How do you find missing parts for an antique brass chandelier that was made in Russia more than 100 years ago? That was the problem facing the Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Church in Kenai while the building was being restored.

The church, one of only 49 national historic landmarks in Alaska, asked for help from National Park Service historical architects and took some of the parts to an Anchorage foundry, hoping to get answers.

But no one had any idea of how to find parts or even find someone who could craft reproductions until church member Dorothy Gray asked KRC's associate professor of welding, Fritz Miller. After one look at the brass chandelier parts, Miller knew that Cam Choy, KRC's associate professor of art was the person the church needed.

“When I first saw the chandelier, I knew I needed the help of a metal smith to do the job,” Choy acknowledged. He contacted a former colleague from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, who recommended a well-respected artist/craftsman James Viste, the 3D technician at the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit.

Choy immersed himself quickly in his first KPC community service project. He took measurements and photos, compiled drawings, and sent a list of missing parts to Viste, who trained a blacksmith and metal smith at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

Three months later Viste mailed the chandelier reproductions to Choy, who was impressed how the newly fabricated pieces perfectly resembled the originals.

According to Choy, the final installation was the most challenging aspect of the project. “I naturally assumed that the component parts and connections were standard sizes; i.e., quarter-inch threads on the chandelier arms to connect to our new parts which were made to fit. [However], we tried to attach the new parts and realized the thread sizes did not match.”

Choy, who is a trained sculptor primarily in cast metal/foundry work, took the arm and parts back to the KRC sculpture studio to make adjustments and quickly realized that the connections were “random at best.” Thread sizes had been hand cut and made to fit; some of the connections used a bolt while others relied on a threaded stem which needed a nut or matching threads. In the end, Choy found a way to make all the connections work.

“I’m glad it turned out so well,” he said. “The success of this project is just another sign that I am in the right place! I love it here and appreciate all the support KPC has offered me.”

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), often referred to as “Lou Gehrig’s Disease,” is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord. People throughout the nation are accepting a unique challenge for ALS fund-raising: Accepting a pail of cold water poured over them, to get a sense of breathing difficulties suffered by ALS patients, and to gather donations for ALS research. KRC Res Life joined the ice-bucket challenge.

Tammie Willis, associate director of KRC residence life, said her experience with the ice bucket challenge was very chilling.

“In all honesty, it was rather shocking. I expected the water to be quite cold but it was so cold it actually paralyzed my diaphragm for a moment. I understood that the experience simulates what it is like to try to breathe for a person with ALS,” she said. “I was grateful when my breathing returned to normal but also more aware of just how devastating ALS truly is.”

She shared that she was doing the ice bucket challenge as a fundraiser. People who donated a minimum of $5 were able to toss a bucket of ice water on her.

“After the first two buckets and the challenge it presented with breathing, I knew I would not be able to do six more so Gary [KPC director] suggested we do the last six buckets at once. We raised $150. $100 went to ALS and $50 went to the food bank,” said Willis.
Travelogue:
Won’t you let me take you on a sea cruise?

By Susan Lee
KRC Student Services assistant

I was surprised that it takes an entire day to go through all three locks. First, the Gatun Locks from the Caribbean Sea entrance; followed by the Pedro Miguel Locks, and lastly the Miraflores Locks that lead out into the Pacific Ocean. A new wider set of locks is due to open in 2015 and will double the capacity of the current locks. I recommend this trip wholeheartedly; it does not disappoint.

Back home in Alaska, I reflected on my life and travels and decided I am indeed lucky. I have visited many picturesque places; I have a husband who loves to travel and who looks forward to more adventures with me.

The crocodile snapped his jaws tight on the dangling, misshapen chicken carcass. The snack was being offered by a young teen-aged Costa Rican boy who was barefoot with his pants rolled up unevenly on his dark, thin, exposed legs firmly planted on the muddy banks of the Tárcoles River. He slapped the water with the bird, his version of a croc call.

The croc had been through this before; he quickly responded, his reptilian eyes just above water level. The mom in me wanted to haul the boy out of the river and send him home with scraps, but nobody had ever lost a limb to “Chomper” and that local residents were paid well for their crocodile calling services.

We visited multiple ports of call on our cruise aboard the 70,367-ton, 855-foot long Carnival Imagination. We boarded in Miami and visited Grand Cayman; Montego Bay, Jamaica; Cartagena, Colombia; the Panama Canal Transit; Puntarenas, Costa Rica; Puerto Vallarta and Cabo San Lucas, Mexico; and ended our cruise in Long Beach, Calif.

The beaches in Grand Cayman are pristine. Seven Mile beach features a shade of turquoise seldom seen in Alaskan waters, and it is 40 degrees warmer than Cook Inlet! The Caribbean locals are outgoing and colorful and seem to share a laid-back approach to life. I found myself abiding by the reggae song “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” In Jamaica, we had lunch at a shack frequented by locals, and the chicken was flavorful with a hint of pineapple and Cajun spices.

I disembarked in Cartagena sweating like a pig, or as corrected in my teen years by a friend’s mother: “flushed as a rose.” I have never experienced humidity and pure scorching heat. We toured the La Popa Monastery, the San Felipe Castle and walked through the streets of Old Town, charmed by the centuries-old cobbled streets and stucco buildings splendent in the traditional faded blues, pinks and greens.

One of the most important waterways ever built, the Panama Canal is 48 miles long. The cost of the Imagination’s passage was roughly $300,000. The amount varies based on the size of the ship and passenger capacity—still a substantial savings over the treacherous and lengthy old route around the tip of South America known as Cape Horn.

We reached the entrance of the canal on the seventh day of our trip. Passengers did not disembark at this “port,” but all eagerly anticipated the canal. The decks were filled with viewers well before sunrise. The water was calm, and the lifts and dock equipment in the distance were mere outlines due to low-lying fog that had settled in the night. Life slowed as we moved quietly through the water and approached the first locks, the Gatun Locks.

Being there and experiencing the canal is entirely different from seeing it on documentaries. Ships passed on the left so close that I could almost reach out and touch them as they glided by. We waved as they passed; we didn’t need to speak their language, as they replied with earnest waves.

A view of ships transiting the historic Panama Canal.

A crocodile surfaces near the bank of the Tárcoles River in Costa Rica.

A nice beach at Puerto Vallarta, Mexico.

A view of ships transiting the historic Panama Canal.

I found myself abiding by the centuries-old cobbled streets and stucco buildings splendent in the traditional faded blues, pinks and greens.