

# We're all Hokies at heart

**Though Boston is my home now, Blacksburg, Va., is where a part of my heart will always be. What happened to the Hokie community has happened to me, has happened to all of us. We are Virginia Tech.**

## **AS YOU WERE SAYING** **Michael Givens**

This month on the campus of Virginia Tech, Norris Hall officially reopened. The building where 30 of my fellow Hokies were slaughtered last April will not be a classroom building again, but one now reserved for offices and labs.

Some things will never be the same. But some things will never change — like what we have always called Hokie spirit and what the rest of the nation has come to recognize as our spirit of community.

Recently I received a newsletter from Virginia Tech's English department. The entire issue was devoted to discussing the aftermath of the killings.

It told stories that bear retelling:

On April 20, four days after the killings, three Virginia Tech students hung a banner in the university's English department that solemnly, yet proudly, declared, "We love you. We are in this together."

Students from across the university exhibited a tremendous amount of support for the English department's faculty, staff and students. Some students wrote notes of encouragement. Others brought cookies. One Hokie compiled a list of students who'd be willing to babysit faculty members' children while instructors devoted extra time to counseling their pupils in the wake of the April 16 tragedy.

Days after the newsletter arrived, the Virginia Tech Magazine came in the mail, also devoted to



AP PHOTO

**VICTORY TODAY, TOMORROW: A new Virginia Tech graduate wears her colors proudly.**

the events in the wake of the massacre. As I flipped through the magazine's glossy pages, I was struck anew at the great minds that were lost because of one man's lunacy.

■ Leslie Sherman, a junior at the university, spent much of her time helping those less fortunate. A history major, she enjoyed volunteering at a retirement home and was a coach for the Special Olympics. She hoped to join the Peace Corps after graduation.

■ Jarrett Lane was a senior civil engineering major. Senselessly murdered a month before his graduation, no one will ever know what amazing things he could have accomplished after leaving the university.

■ And no one will ever forget Dr. Liviu Librescu, the heroic aeronautical engineering professor who blocked the door to his classroom so that his students would have a chance to escape. It's tragically ironic that a man who survived the Holocaust would die at the hands of a troubled kid.

I remember interviewing Nikki Giovanni for an article I wrote in 2004. She was intelligent, brave, compassionate and honest. There was no one more fitting to pen the "We are Virginia Tech" poem than a woman who epitomizes the "Hokie" spirit.

She emphasized that although we may never understand this tragedy, we will prevail. And through the senseless deaths, the Virginia Tech community will still continue to "invent the future," to move forward as a community that, though tainted by death and destruction, will ultimately survive, and thrive.

And the support spread throughout the country.

A black flag was hung in the lobby of the College of Architecture at Texas A&M University. Officials at Niagara Falls bathed the waterfall in orange and maroon lights, the first time the falls had ever been lighted in the wake of a tragedy.

On April 23 and April 24, Baylor University's Patt Neff Hall tower was lighted up in orange and maroon. Thousands of fans at a Penn State spring football scrimmage attended the game in Hokie colors.

The overwhelming support shown by others around the country is both awe-inspiring and humbling.

I haven't been back to Virginia Tech since I graduated in 2004. But I think about it often. I think about living in Pritchard Hall for four years. I think about the insanity of Hokie football. I think of the friendships forged in trust, compassion and honesty.

And though Boston is my home now, Blacksburg, Va., is where a part of my heart will always be. What happened to the Hokie community has happened to me, has happened to all of us.

We are Virginia Tech — today and tomorrow.

*Michael Givens is a member of the Boston Herald staff.*