

The world now knows Virginia Tech

by Vice President for Alumni Relations Tom Tillar '69

More than 40 years ago, I first arrived on this campus as a student. Charles Steger lived in my residence hall, just a few doors away, and was in several of my classes. We became friends. We enjoyed a campus that was safe, beautiful, and so inviting to its brand-new students. Little did we know that we would spend our entire careers working for our alma mater. It truly is an honor and a privilege to serve the institution that helped shape our values and fulfilled our passion to serve in a community of learning.

No one that I know could do a better job of leading Virginia Tech and guiding us through this recent crisis than our president, Charles Steger. He is a talented and gifted leader in the academic world. On April 16, he rose to the occasion far beyond the expectations of all who work with him. Charles was given the longest standing ovation at the Memorial Convocation on April 17—in front of both the president of the United States and the governor of Virginia—and it was a visible symbol of the gratitude of a grieving university community and, indeed, an entire nation.

Virginia Tech is a special place and community in the hearts of thousands, now millions, of people worldwide. The college is associated with beauty and serenity in Southwest Virginia. Blacksburg is a college town. Everyone who lives here, passes through here, attends Virginia Tech, or attends a sporting event feels ownership of this place.

Our campus, our sanctuary of learning, has been violated beyond anyone's imagination. The pain caused by the events of April 16 resonated around the entire world—not just with alumni, but with millions who have never been here in person. Somehow, they understand and appreciate the value and quality of a place dedicated to the missions of teaching, research, and outreach.

The world mourns with us that violation of a campus and

town that invite students to come to live and learn as Charles and I did years ago. It is important for the world to know that Virginia Tech remains a place that our current students love, that our alumni treasure, and that all who visit can still call their own.

I have walked among students struggling with their grief. I felt a spirit of hope every time I mingled with the thousands of students, families, alumni, and friends who were drawn to this place after the tragedy. To know that people all over the world share that grief with us is incredibly comforting and powerful.

The demonstrations of support across the country and around the world are far too many to list, and there are many that we may never even learn about. The special events, the memorial services, the candlelight vigils, the concerts, and the many public tributes said that Virginia Tech was in people's hearts and prayers. The welfare of our community was foremost on the minds of those who saw images and watched, heard, or read interviews with our brave students faculty, staff, and alumni. Even at the South Pole, an American flag was lowered at a research facility surrounded by many nations' flags.

Poet Nikki Giovanni closed our Memorial Convocation with the words, "We will prevail. We are Virginia Tech." Now etched in the hearts of everyone who sympathized with the families that lost their loved ones, her words rang across the world so loudly that they made hearts soar with hope for the future. They were the perfect inspiration in the very darkest hour of a university torn apart with sadness and grief.

We realize that tragedy does strike when and where it may be least expected. And we have learned that strength can be drawn from such horrific events. Virginia Tech is a place that cannot be beaten down by tragedy of this proportion; it is a place that students did not leave during its darkest hours. We