

CELEBRATING OUR FIRST 50 YEARS

**STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY**

1957-2007



FIFTY YEARS AGO, 148 STUDENTS CAME AS THE TRAILBLAZERS  
FOR THE NEW STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE ON LONG ISLAND





*The Class of 1961 was the first to graduate from the State University of New York, Long Island.*



*Students outside Coe Hall at the Planting Fields in Oyster Bay, the site of Stony Brook University's first campus.*

*President Shirley Strum Kenny's State of the University Address Presented at the University Convocation on September 19, 2007*

## TIME FLIES

Fifty years ago, on September 17, 1957, 148 students came to Planting Fields, the William R. Coe estate in Oyster Bay, as the trailblazers for the new State University College on Long Island, or SUCOLI, later to become SUNY Long Island Center, later still SUNY Stony Brook, and now Stony Brook University. We have to believe the 148 students, 14 faculty members, and four administrators were a stunning if youngish group because they included amazing people like Frank Erk and Cliff Swartz as faculty and Les Paldy as a freshman. That first year there were three divisions: Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Science; in the Division of Natural Science was one chemist, two physicists, and one biology professor, Frank Erk, who also served as chair of his division.



Francis Bonner, who came to SUCOLI in its second year, gives a flavor of the times in *Chemistry at Stony Brook: From SUCOLI to SBU*, his memoir of his years at Stony Brook:

*"Coe Hall is an authentic Tudor mansion whose Great Hall includes a fireplace large enough, as one visitor presciently remarked, to roast a faculty member whole. . . . The College held some classes in Coe Hall, others in a series of prefabricated Butler buildings, and later on in an array of geodesic dome structures. The Coe Estate's extensive stables were converted from equine to student residential use..."*

The stated mandate of the college originally was to train science and mathematics teachers and engineers. The time table was accelerated because, 17 days after the opening, Sputnik was launched.

To promote school spirit, the first-year classes were canceled on October 30 to establish a new tradition, referred to as Nameless Day. According to *Stony Brook: State University of New York*, a book by Kristen Nyitray and Ann Becker, "Students challenged the faculty to softball and volleyball

...Stony Brook was virtually built top down, starting with excellence in research and graduate study, even before there was a secure base of undergraduate education on which to build.

games, tug-of-war competitions, and egg-tossing contests.” Somehow, Nameless Day is no longer on our calendar.

In 1960 the Heald Report, commissioned by Governor Nelson Rockefeller, recommended a major new public university be built on Long Island to “stand with the finest in the country.” There was land, 480 acres, given by the shoe magnate Ward Melville. The name was changed to State University of New York Long Island Center (I guess that would be SUNYLIC).

Instability and administrative perturbation marked the early years. It was not until January 1961 that the first president, John Francis Lee, who had been chairman of the Department of Mechanical Engineering at North Carolina State, began his tenure. He is not with us here today, and he was not with the University very long, being summarily fired by the SUNY trustees on November 9 of that same year after complaining about the mismanagement of the earlier administration.

## The Next Phase

The Stony Brook campus opened on September 16, 1962. There were 780 students, including the first graduate students, and one dorm, creatively named G Dorm.

The history of Stony Brook for the next few years is far murkier than I can deal with here, but it is worth learning about from the several histories that have been published. In 1965, when John S. Toll became the second president, the first at the new location, he came with the expansive vision that shaped Stony Brook. It had always been the intention that Stony Brook and one unspecified upstate campus would be the two research centers of SUNY. This was to be a great research university. Dr. Toll immediately lured H. Bentley Glass from Johns Hopkins to be academic vice president, and Nobel laureate Chen Ning Yang from the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton to become Einstein Professor of Physics. These appointments would seem an incredible feat at a fledgling college, but I suspect no one who knows Johnny can be too surprised. In fact, what he accomplished at Stony Brook was unprecedented: A few years post-Sputnik, when the federal government had dramatically accelerated support of scientific research and graduate study, Stony Brook was virtually built top down, starting with excellence in research and graduate study, even before there was a secure base of undergraduate education on which to build. And it worked. President Toll also started to create the medical campus, and hired Edmund Pellegrino as vice president for the Health Sciences Center and Dean of the School of Medicine. The Hospital opened in 1980.

*Geodesic domes were constructed on the Oyster Bay campus to accommodate the growing student population. The domes housed the bookstore, student lounge, and faculty offices.*



Johnny was here in tumultuous times, when buildings and even the Bridge to Nowhere were springing up with great speed and minimal—I am being kind—architectural merit; when students were protesting not only Vietnam but the living conditions at Stony Brook and sit-ins were the mode of the day; and when accelerating appointments of great professors provided the shape of the University’s tenured faculty for many years to come. For example, he hired a 30-year-old named Jim Simons to create a world-class math department, and Jim did just that, to the consternation of more established universities. It was a turbulent time all over the country, which many of us remember from our own adventures here or elsewhere, but which is remembered at Stony Brook both for the astonishing rapidity of the growth of research excellence and for the ankle-deep mud. Not to mention the infamous drug raid. As former University Provost and Distinguished Service Professor Sidney Gelber described that legendary night in his book *Politics and Public Higher Education in New York State*:

Following three months of undercover work by agents planted on the campus and disguised as hippies, a set of plans “...filled a 107-page book...entitled Operation in Stony Brook. ...[it was] bolstered by 42 pages of dormitory maps.”...198 Suffolk County policemen carrying guns...arrived on campus in a caravan of 68 police vehicles. They arrested 35 people, 24 of whom were students, and collected 10 pounds of marijuana, one pound of hashish, some drug paraphernalia, and 2,000 pills, some of which turned out to be vitamins.”

The press coverage, like the raid itself, was so over the top that people still talk about that night 40 years ago.

And where have we come in those 50 years? From a teachers college to a member of the AAU, the top 62 research universities in North America.



Composer and musician Dr. Isaac Nemiroff (center) directed the University's instrumental group, which held its first concert in 1960.

### A Third President Named John

After 14 years, Johnny returned to Maryland as president of the University of Maryland system (where he was my boss), and after yet another interlude of administrative turbulence, two years' worth, in 1980 John H. Marburger came from USC to become the third president—the third who was a scientist named John. Jack steered the campus through a period of growth, maturation, and regularization of many campus processes. The Hospital grew to maturity, and the Health Sciences campus became fully established. Its faculty doubled during Jack's tenure and the Veterans Home opened. As the quality and quantity of research continued to grow rapidly, the Long Island High Tech Incubator was created, the Fine Arts Center became the Staller Center, the Pollock-Krasner House was deeded to the University, and the Dalai Lama received an honorary degree. And then there was Tent City, created on the Mall by the graduate students to protest the paucity of their stipends. Jack served as president for 14 years, after which he briefly returned to the Physics Department before being called to become director of Brookhaven National Lab (I was doing the calling), and for the past seven years he has been serving as the United States President's science advisor and director of the Office of Science and

Technology Policy. He was followed at Stony Brook by the first president who was not a scientist and was not named John, a development that came as something of a shock to the system.

### So Far, So Fast

There are many important people in our history whom I have left out of this brief narrative, but who will always be key figures—Sidney Gelber, Alec Pond, Karl Hartzell, and many others. Their imprint is permanent.

And where have we come in those 50 years? From a teachers college to a member of the AAU, the top 62 research universities in North America. From a total enrollment of 148 to 23,400. From a freshman class of 148 to 2,700. From a freshman applications pool of 365 to 24,000. From 14 faculty to 2,100. From an operating budget of \$2.7 million to \$1.8 billion. From geodesic domes to the Centers for Molecular Medicine.

From the horse stables to up-to-date campus housing for almost 9,000 students, including many new apartments, to be increased by 770 more beds in the next two years. From locating near Brookhaven National Lab to managing the Lab.

From a few borrowed buildings in Oyster Bay to a university comprising 222 buildings on 1,600 acres, including the Main Campus on both sides of Nicolls Road, the Veterans Home, the Manhattan site, the Research and Development Park, three incubators on campus and at Calverton, and the new Stony Brook Southampton campus.

Not bad for our first 50 years.

### It All Adds Up

If you look at our trajectory on a shorter time line—because we don't have numbers for our total history—an upsurge is still apparent:

First, the number of freshman and transfer applications has rocketed from 19,000 ten years ago to 30,000 this year. For the second year we have the highest number of applicants of any SUNY college.

Consequently, we have become far more selective in admissions, decreasing our acceptance rate from 56 percent to 43 percent.

And that, of course, has led to our rising SAT scores, which have climbed 110 points in that same ten years.

All that has helped with our recognition as one of the 100 best national universities and the 50 best public universities in *U.S. News & World Report*.

**Stony Brook**  
**WELCOME**

MAIN ENTRANCE  
**STONY**  
**BROOK**

WEST  
CAMPUS









*(Left) An aerial shot of the campus in 1964. Today, Stony Brook's main campus has expanded to encompass both the west and east sides of Nicolls Road.*





Our research success has landed us in the top 2 percent of universities worldwide, according to the London *Times Higher Education Supplement* and the Shanghai Higher Education Institute.

## Red Hot

The fact is, Stony Brook really IS “red hot.” You can see it in just about every aspect of campus life:

You can see it in the numbers of applicants just mentioned; you can see it in the growing number of out-of-state freshmen, which has doubled in the past three years.

You can see it in the fact that we are regularly cited, along with Harvard, Yale, MIT, Berkeley, Stanford, and some others, as one of the top institutions for undergraduate research.

You can see it in the growth of our research expenditures, from \$878,000 in 1965 (the first year for which we have figures) to \$184 million in 2007, the most federal dollars of any institution in SUNY. You can see it in the number of patents, 710 patents worldwide over the past ten years. And in the royalties from Stony Brook inventions, some \$137 million over the past ten years, about 95 percent of all SUNY royalties in that period, money that is reinvested in research on our campus.

You can see it in the role we play in economic development on Long Island. As the only research university on the Island, we have a special responsibility to connect with the business, cultural, and governmental needs of our population through research, incubation, collaborative ventures, and meeting the educational needs.

You can see it in the number of Stony Brook doctors listed by *New York* magazine as the Best Doctors in New York—24 this year.

You can see it in our medical miracles, year after year, the successful delivery of sextuplets, the reattachment of a workman’s two severed hands, the delivery of triplets immediately followed by open heart surgery for the mother, the saving of a little boy whose head had been run over by an SUV—and day after day other miracles. And there will be more surgical miracles attributable to our remarkable new da Vinci robot, the only high-definition system on Long Island and in New York City, which will provide unprecedented surgical precision and greatly reduce the loss of blood, scarring, and the chance of infection.

You can see it in the three Nobel Prize winners connected to Stony Brook, the Fields medalist, winners of United States Presidential medals, MacArthur



*(Top) In its second year, the Red Hot Marching Band is spreading Stony Brook pride at home football games and campus events.*



*Stony Brook heart surgeon Dr. Frank Seifert was part of the team that performed a medical miracle—delivering Roseann Errante’s triplets then performing life-saving heart surgery on her.*

genius awards, members of the Academies and the Royal Society, most recently Richard Leakey, who became a Fellow of the Royal Society this year. You can see it in our new state-of-the-art computer, one of the five fastest outside the Defense arsenal, located at Brookhaven National Lab.

You can see it in our three incubators and our new 246-acre Research and Development Park, where a 100,000-square-foot Center of Excellence in Wireless and Information Technology is under construction and the Center for Advanced Energy is in design.

## Now it is time to think about where we are going. We begin with our third Five Year Plan. . . .But that is a mere beginning.

You can see it in our brand-new School of Journalism, the first in SUNY, with its Newsroom of the Future and remarkable feat of raising \$2.25 million in its first year.

And in our writing program at Southampton, with faculty like Frank McCourt, Billy Collins, Roger Rosenblatt, and Alan Alda.

You can see it in the six freshman colleges and the freshman seminars that make Stony Brook a leader in first-year education.

You can certainly see it in the new Southampton campus, and the 191 students this year with their trailblazing spirit, an echo of the 148 that came to Oyster Bay 50 years ago.

You can see it in the world-class programming at Staller Center, some of it provided by our own world-class faculty.

You can see it in the increasing importance of athletics on this campus, with football, soccer, and lacrosse games now filling the Kenneth P. LaValle Stadium. We are beginning to have winning teams, such as our women's lacrosse team championship winners. And yes, in the Red Hot Marching Band, new last year and already 80 strong.

*Stony Brook University continues to build international initiatives with organizations such as the Turkana Basin Institute in Kenya.*



You can see it in the creativity, artistic elegance, and engineering genius of the Roth Pond Regatta—the teamwork, often in adversity, and the dignity and decorum of our sailors as they abandon ship.

You can see it in the diversity of our students, graduate and undergraduate, and the strength and collaborative spirit of our religious ministries on campus, serving these diverse groups.

And you can see it in the five Habitat for Humanity houses and the volunteers who spent spring vacation helping to rebuild New Orleans. In the student volunteer ambulance corps and the Student Ambassadors. And in the fourth-year dental students who went to Madagascar to treat patients who had never seen a dentist, to pull hundreds of teeth that could not be saved, to repair those that could. They worked without electricity, without running water, without dentist's chairs. Doctors from Stony Brook treated children there. And you can see it in world-class researchers like David Krause and Patricia Wright, who helped impoverished villages by making wells for clean water and building schools where there were none, for children who had never learned to read.

You can certainly see it in the quality of the outstanding new faculty who have joined us this year—the largest influx of faculty in many years.

And you can see it in our alums, who include many distinguished scientists, doctors, lawyers, CEOs, investors, professors, teachers, writers, artists, inventors, performers, journalists, ambassadors, statesmen, and winners of such awards as the Pulitzer and the Oscar. It has truly been an amazing 50 years.

Now it is time to think about where we are going. We begin with our third Five Year Plan, which started with six task forces, and has since been vetted by many groups, most recently including faculty, students, and staff at two Town Hall meetings this past fall. The plan lists 12 goals to be achieved in the next five years, and we will carefully monitor to make sure the goals are met on a timely basis. But that is a mere beginning.

*The School of Journalism's "Newsroom of the Future" is one of the most technologically advanced facilities of its kind in the country.*

When I came to Stony Brook, I said that to be a great national university, we must be a great local university. That is a truth that seemed far more controversial then than it does now.



*(Top) Stony Brook paleontologist Dr. David Krause was instrumental in setting up a fund to help finance the construction of a school in a village in Madagascar.*

*Stony Brook researchers help impoverished villages in Madagascar by constructing wells for clean water.*



## Inventing the Future

This 50<sup>th</sup> year provides us the perfect opportunity to look ahead. When I came to Stony Brook, I said that to be a great national university, we must be a great local university. That is a truth that seemed far more controversial then than it does now. Our economic development responsibilities through research, educating the leaders of the future, and providing world-class health care to the citizens of Suffolk County are more important than ever. We must design the new products, develop ecological sustainability, find the cures, and create the arts that make Long Island a desirable and productive home to all its citizens.

At the same time, we must protect our nation through our interconnections with Brookhaven, our BioLevel 3 Lab, our work on sensors and material science and other engineering initiatives, sophisticated research for the public good. And we must continue to build our international initiatives, through outstanding research such as what we are doing in Kenya and Madagascar, through continuing to build relationships as we are doing in China and Korea and India, through our exchanges with great European and Asian universities—the planet is also our neighborhood now.

But we cannot oversimplify to believe that the world's ills will be solved by science and technology alone. The issues of sustainability, for example, are not just matters of biology and chemistry; protecting our planet will involve political science and economics and philosophy and psychology and the arts.

We must understand that interdisciplinarity in research and in education is key to the future, that interuniversity research will increasingly be necessary to discover the answers to the big questions, that we must educate our students to live and prosper in a world of complexity and ambiguity. This year, with a host of public lectures, conferences, and symposia, will be the perfect time to look at the long-range future in as clearheaded and far-reaching and inventive ways as possible.

This, our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, is really the beginning. Welcome to a future in which Stony Brook will continue to grow and thrive as it has done so extraordinarily in its remarkable first 50 years. ■



...Stony Brook was not an existing college brought into the system from a previous life; it was built from scratch, with no recognition of the seeming impossibility of the task, the odds of growing a truly great university in the mud fields of a raw new campus, no hesitation in metamorphosing what was first intended to be a small college into a world-class research university.

That is what I love about Stony Brook. I love the boldness of its ambitions, the blindness to obstacles, the recklessness of ignoring “why we can’t” for “let’s do it,” the spirit of adventure. I love the fact that we are still an adolescent university; we are not finished yet; we are still open to change...

*Excerpted from  
President Shirley Strum Kenny’s  
Inaugural Address  
April 28, 1995*



*Stony Brook Southampton's  
inaugural class, Fall 2007—  
191 students and growing.*





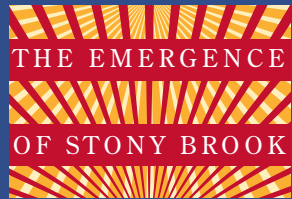
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