



The Canisius College Alumni Association welcomed 675 new members in May, when bachelor's degrees were conferred to the Class of 2003. Like those who processed before them, this year's graduates walk away with more than a degree in their chosen field. They leave Canisius educated in the Jesuit tradition, which promotes Catholic intellectual life, spiritual and social development, and service to others — the true traits of leadership.

The following pages feature undergraduates from the Class of 2003 who, throughout their four years on campus, distinguished themselves academically, socially and through service to humanity. They are but a few among the many considered, by faculty, administrators and staff, to be Outstanding Senior Leaders.



## Rebecca Awald '03

When **Rebecca Awald '03** was presented with the Council for Exceptional Children Award at Spring Honors Convocation, she could not have been more surprised. Ask those who know her best, however, (her teachers, mentors, friends and co-workers) and they will tell you no one was more deserving of the award.

"This award is named after the largest international organization in special education and honors a senior student who exemplifies scholarship, leadership and advocacy for students with disabilities," explains Dr. Michele A. Marable, assistant professor of special education. "Rebecca has demonstrated



all three of these skills during her time at Canisius. She is truly a professional special educator."

A dual major in special education and early childhood education, Awald excelled academically, both in her required courses and in her concentration. This May, she graduated *summa cum laude* and received special recognition for seven consecutive semesters on the Dean's List. But it is her work with children and special needs students that is most remarkable.

"Rebecca has a very special gift of being able to communicate well with others – especially students with special needs," says Anne Marie Dobies '92, MS '00, director of the Disability Support Services (DSS) Office.

As a work-study in the DSS Office, Awald works with special needs students at Canisius. Whether she was writing an exam for a blind student or reading textbook material to a dyslexic student, "Becky was always there to lend a hand to help someone achieve," adds Dobies.

That helping hand extended throughout the various school districts where Awald spent countless hours tutoring children of all ages. In her sophomore year, she tutored students in the Reading Program at School 74, as part of the college's Partnership Program with the school. Awald says, "Each semester we would spend a certain number of weeks at the school where we helped prepare seventh and eighth graders for the English language arts test." Awald also tutored students with learning disabilities at Windermere School in Amherst. She worked with mentally challenged students at Kenmore East and taught students with behavioral disorders at the Falk School in Buffalo. Although many people find this field of work challenging, Awald believes the work comes easy to her because she is doing what she loves.

"My brother, who is autistic, has really been my inspiration to pursue education, particularly special education. I've been exposed to it my whole life and my family has always been active in the special education community."

As a high school student at Williamsville East, Awald became a member of the Pride Club, which enabled her to volunteer her time, during free periods, to work with special needs students. Awald also spent many summer vacations serving as a counselor and group leader at different local camps. At Park Camp in Cheektowaga, she worked with second, third and fourth-grade girls, assisting them in various organized activities. At Just for Kids Camp in Clarence, Awald planned the activities and field trips for boys and girls, ages five through 12. She even found time during spring and summer months to teach swim lessons to young children and early teens at the Flickinger Center in Buffalo.

Back at Canisius, Awald emerged as a leader among her peers in the Education Department and her graduating class. As a member of the college's Teacher Education Club, she participated in the department's "Week of the Young Child" event, which brings more than 600 kindergarten through second grade students to campus, from Buffalo's School 17. Her devotion to educating children, especially those with special needs, earned her a place in Kappa Delta Pi, the college's education honor society, of which she proudly served as secretary.

"Through Kappa Delta Pi we were able to bring in a lot of different educational speakers to talk about various aspects of the profession," explains Awald. "We had new teachers come in

and speak about their experiences. We also had superintendents of different districts come in to speak about the hiring process, portfolios and interviews."

Certainly education students and faculty have benefited from Awald's exemplary efforts in the field. Marable notes, "Rebecca is a diligent, hard working student who has served as a leader in our department." But it is Awald who says she has been most enriched by her experiences in the department and at Canisius.

"The education program here is so strong that it really gave me the confidence to get involved in the classroom and with other activities on campus," says Awald, who served as a Canisius College Ambassador for the Admissions Office. The opportunity enabled her to visit her old high school, where she spoke with junior and senior students about her Canisius experiences. Awald also became a regular at the college's fall and spring open house sessions, and served as a campus tour guide to dozens of potential students and their parents.

"I was just so excited about my college experience here that I wanted to share it with high school students who might be considering Canisius," notes Awald. That same excitement is keeping Awald at Canisius for at least one more year while she pursues her graduate degree and reading certification. And when she enters the workforce, Awald's passion and commitment to special education is certain to make her a leader in her field – just as she is a leader at Canisius.

"Becky's dedication to her education and the college exemplifies the strong leadership skills that Canisius represents," says Dobies. "She lives the Jesuit philosophy of men and women for others. She is a true leader." ■

## Jeffrey Blake '03

Given the current economic climate, many recent college graduates will spend months searching for their first job. Not so for **Jeffrey Blake '03**, who began his position as a commercial lending officer at Jamestown Savings Bank just two days after graduation. Interestingly enough, Blake was fascinated with biology as a freshman and intended to major in pre-med. But after considering the many challenges physician's encounter today and watching the then-booming stock market, he opted to pursue a degree in finance. Still determined, despite the current downturn on Wall Street, Blake hopes to one day work in the stock market, "whether it be on the trading floor, doing research or as an analyst." And with his record of high academic performance, and leadership in student government and community



service, this kind of young professional is just what the financial industry needs right now.

Dr. George Palumbo, chair of economics and finance, knows Blake well and is confident this outstanding student leader will quickly distinguish himself in the business world.

"If hard work, dedication and persistence are the hallmarks of a good and effective leader, then Jeffrey Blake will certainly be a good leader," says Palumbo.

A member of the All-College Honors Program, Blake excelled academically at Canisius. He spent three semesters on the Dean's List and graduated *cum laude* with a 3.55 GPA. He served four years on the Undergraduate Student Association (USA): the first three as a class representative, and his senior year as vice president of business and finance. The latter position involved a great deal of responsibility, which included managing the budgets for all college clubs and serving on the Canisius College Budget Committee – positions Blake believes helped him gain the skills needed to benefit his future career.

"I learned to interact with administrators and to compromise. Being in charge of dividing up student tax dollars for more than 100 clubs was no easy task," says Blake.

Palumbo adds that Blake's strength was his ability to use what he learned in class to help make a difference for others and improve the financial policies of student organizations. "As a student leader, Jeffrey applied the concepts and

tools he acquired in his finance and economics courses to college governance and helped institute efficiencies that will yield benefits to the college for years to come."

Although at times Blake's hectic schedule proved to be exhausting, his work ethic remained strong. It's something he honed during his years at Canisius High School where three hours of homework a night was the norm. And when Blake feels strongly about something, he manages to find time for it.

His passion to ensure state funding for student aid programs resulted in Blake leading the USA's annual Albany lobbying trip for two consecutive years. He scheduled appointments with various representatives, made travel arrangements, and recruited and educated students on the issues. Blake considered it a perfect opportunity to combine his interest in finance with his desire to serve others.

"It is so important that the state maintain financial aid programs for private schools, particularly for students from low-income families," says Blake, who is especially grateful for the financial aid that enabled him to attend Canisius. A recipient of the college's Resident Student Scholarship, the Wunsch Family Endowed Scholarship, and the Alumni and Family Grant, Blake is well aware of the importance to give back.

While at Canisius, he volunteered for various campus ministry programs, including food drives and student retreats. He visited residents at the Veteran's Administration Hospital and lent a hand at St. Luke's Mission of Mercy. Even after graduation, Blake remains very involved with the Knights of Columbus.

A well-rounded Canisius student, Blake was equally committed to three different aspects of his Canisius education – academic, spiritual and social. The end result is a mature, well-spoken young professional, certain to make his mark as a leader on Wall Street and in the community. ■

## Kathleen Riley '03

"Are you kidding" is usually the first response **Kathleen Riley '03** hears when she tells people she will be spending the next two years in Africa. The newly capped *summa cum laude* graduate, whom any advanced school would be fortunate to have, is postponing her pursuit of a graduate degree to fulfill her need to serve humanity.

"I applied for and was offered a job with the International Jesuit Volunteer Corps in Dar es Salaam, the capital of Tanzania, where I'll be teaching theology and coaching soccer at Loyola, the Jesuit high school there," explains Riley. "When they first notified me, I was given a 48-hour

discernment period during which I could change my mind. When they called me back two days later I said 'I'm ready for this.'"

In fact, there is very little this English and psychology major isn't ready for, if it means she can help make the world a better place.

"Kathy often puts the needs of others before herself," says Associate Dean of Students and Director of Residence Life Matthew H. Mulville '88, MS '94, who worked frequently with Riley during her time as a resident assistant. "She is serious about getting involved and committed to social justice causes."

That commitment is rooted in Riley's deep concern for peace, faith and care for others: characteristics she attributes to her mother and father, the parents of eight children. Riley notes, "They always encouraged us in our faith and taught us to incorporate service to others into our lives." Riley has embraced these lessons since high school when she first logged hours of volunteer work with St. Agnes Parish in Buffalo's Lovejoy District. She fed the needy at St. Luke's Mission of Mercy Shelter; visited the elderly; led the parish's Life Team Program for youths; and co-founded its Good News for Kids Sunday school program.

When Riley chose Canisius for her college education, she brought with her that same commitment to peace, faith and care for others and quickly began to seek out opportunities, in which



she could help those who have the least. In her freshman year, she volunteered for campus ministry's Alternative Spring Break trip to Appalachia. The only first-year student to make the trip that year, Riley says the experience opened the door to a new world of service opportunities.

"After the Appalachia trip, Father John Bucki (director of campus ministry) turned to me and said 'so what's next?' He wanted to know if I had any other ideas for service projects."

She did. Riley suggested an urban immersion program and with Father Bucki's assistance, she organized campus ministry's very first Winter Service Break Trip. In its initial year, nearly 35 Canisius students and faculty traveled to the South Bronx to work and teach alongside academically and economically disadvantaged students at St. Ignatius Middle School. The project was so successful that campus ministry made the urban immersion program a permanent addition to its many social justice events.

"To be a part of establishing something like that was so great," says Riley. "It was just amazing to me how a simple question from Father Bucki turned into 'go ahead and do it.' I really felt like the people at Canisius and in campus ministry empowered me."

"Kathy is committed to those who have the least in our society," adds J. Joseph VanVolkenburg '88, assistant to the director of campus ministry. "She stays with whatever the cause, rolls up her sleeves and takes action. Kathy is truly a person with a cause bigger than herself."

So much so that Riley went on to serve as site leader for the second Winter Service Break Trip, which took campus ministry back to the Bronx to work in a center for women and children. She also signed on for another Appalachia trip, during which she led 53 students at five different

sites. Riley traveled to Mexico City to work at a day camp with more than 200 impoverished children. And she spent one month visiting some of the poorest regions in the Philippines and learning how Christianity manifests itself in that culture, as part of Dr. Timothy Wadkins' highly competitive religious studies immersion course.

"If I ever had to identify a life-changing experience, that would be the one," says Riley. "We saw so many different aspects of society there and learned how poverty and Christianity are interwoven into all those aspects. I credit so much of that experience to my wanting to learn more."

Certainly, Riley's eagerness to learn led her to excel academically. The All-College Honors student graduated in May with a 3.83 GPA. Her thesis on the factors contributing to teen pregnancy earned her the college's Kristin Brady Award for Excellence in Senior Thesis. Riley's academics also earned her a place in Sigma Tau Delta, the English honor society of which she served as president; Alpha Sigma Nu, the Jesuit honor society; and the student chapter of the DiGamma Honor Society, for which she served as student master. Not surprisingly, it was under Riley's leadership that DiGamma became active in social justice causes for the first time in 15 years.

"DiGamma recognizes students who have shown loyalty, service and commitment to the Canisius community," explains Riley. "It's great to be recognized but our student chapter was comprised of a lot of very proactive people so I thought 'why not do something positive with that.'"

As student master, Riley went to work initiating a number of service projects for the DiGamma chapter. She engaged the group in the college's Thanksgiving Food Drive. She organized the club's participation in a Habitat for Humanity project. She encouraged the chapter to co-sponsor a cup campaign, which sold plastic, recyclable mugs as

an ecological alternative to the paper cups in the cafeteria. And she led the chapter's Change for Change fund-raising campaign, which raised \$700 for St. Ignatius Middle School, in the Bronx, the site of Riley's first winter service trip.

"With a lot of help, we were able to get the honor society involved in very positive projects," says Riley. "The best part is that we have a wonderful executive board appointed for next year to keep up the work. We also added a position to ensure that service to humanity, in whatever context, continues within DiGamma for a long time."

But, as she says, "Canisius will go on without me," and that is why Riley is now concentrating on the next chapter in her life. As she prepares to leave for Dar es Salaam, Riley is working to garner the spiritual and financial support needed to fund her efforts with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. (She is required to pay for all her first-year expenses.)

What happens when she completes her two-year commitment with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps?

"I anticipate I'll be coming back for graduate school, possibly for child psychology but I'm going to let Africa take me where it wants," says Riley. "Canisius has helped me better understand what my faith means to me, in a very real, very tangible way. It has helped me trust in my abilities and figure out who I am. I have an innate desire to do what I can to change things that don't need to be or shouldn't be the way they are and through my experiences here, I've learned that with the help of other people, I can really make a difference. So I think my time in Africa will be another great move towards continuing my journey."

And while Riley continues her personal journey towards serving humanity, her leadership efforts to further peace, faith and care for others will continue to thrive at Canisius. ■

## Outstanding Honor: Rivard '03 Receives Fulbright



**Marguerite A. Rivard '03** became the college's 23rd recipient of the prestigious Fulbright Scholarship, this spring. The international relations and elementary education major will travel to Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland for the 2003-2004 academic year, to study the complex issues regarding the country's preparation for and consequences of becoming the future eastern border of the European Union. Through a combination of university resources, coursework and visits to Poland's border crossings, Rivard will explore various border security and migratory issues, as the country prepares to meet the necessary requirements for European Union membership.

Throughout her four years at Canisius, Rivard served on the Canisius College Polish Students Association and as chair of the Canisius Polish Culture Scholarship for

Summer Study in Poland. She also volunteered in the Teaching English in Poland Program, was awarded the Tomaszkiwicz-Florio Memorial Scholarship for summer study at Jagiellonian University, and interned at the U.S. embassy and consulate in Poland, where she worked as a site officer for President's Bush's 2001 visit to Warsaw. This spring, Rivard's efforts culminated in her receiving the Canisius College International Relations Academic Excellence Award.

The Fulbright Scholarship is named for Senator J. William Fulbright and is the U.S. government's premier scholarship program. It is designed to foster mutual understanding among nations through educational and cultural exchanges, while providing recipients with tuition, fees, travel and research funds for a full year.