HOKIE DAY 2012 DRAWS RECORD PARTICIPATION

By Michael S. Keeney

For yet another year, the Virginia Tech community can proudly boast record Hokie Day participation. On February 1st and 2nd, more Virginia Tech students, alumni, faculty, staff, and friends than ever before converged in Virginia’s capital for the 14th annual Hokie Day at the General Assembly. In total 170 participated. Hokie Day is important because it allows students to become more familiar with issues that are important to the University and to discuss these issues with members of the General Assembly.

The annual event is the culmination of efforts by the Alumni Association, the Office of Government Relations, and the Student Government Association (SGA). Scott Bennett (Senior - Agribusiness) from Red House is the Director of Government Affairs for the SGA and helped plan the event. Bennett notes that students “do a tremendous job in articulating the concerns of our University, while adding the personal perspective of a pupil.”

Preparation began with individuals from various academic disciplines submitting applications to the SGA expressing interest in participation. Following this, University officials, alumni, and SGA officers discussed impending issues before the General Assembly and organized training for students chosen to participate. “Training is an important aspect of Hokie Day planning,” according to the University’s legislative liaison, Elizabeth G. Hooper (MPA, ’08) adding that “students come together for three training sessions before Hokie Day so that everyone is aware of the issues that are critical to Virginia Tech and how they might best convey these important topics to members of the General Assembly.”

This year, the actual event kicked off Wednesday, February 1st with a welcome reception for Hokies traveling all the way from Blacksburg. The reception, hosted by the Richmond Area Alumni Association, included refreshments and warm remarks by the Honorable John C. Watkins (Virginia Senate and Class of ’69), Vice President for Alumni Relations, Dr. Tom Tillar (Class of ’69), and University President, Dr. Charles W. Steger (Class of ’69). After brief fellowship, the Hokies retreated to their hotel rooms to rest up for the big day that lay ahead.

Early the next morning, activities commenced with continental breakfast at the Sun Trust Bank building in downtown Richmond before the Hokies proceeded to the General Assembly Building to meet with legislators. For the next several hours, students met with members of the General Assembly from all over the Commonwealth. In most cases, students were matched with members from their home districts. Matthew C. Banfield (Senior – Theatre and Cinema) a native of Williamsburg met with several legislators from his home area. “It was great getting to meet with members of the General Assembly. All four members I visited with seemed genuinely interested in what we had to say and how they could help,” Banfield recalls. Emily Wilkinson (Senior - Psychology) from Moneta had a similar experience but was especially enthusiastic about her interaction with Virginia Tech officials. “I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Richmond for Hokie Day this year. It was really inspiring to speak to VT Alumni and Administrators who were all there supporting the same cause.”

After their morning meetings, participants took part in a photo opportunity on the steps of the Capitol with state dignitaries including Lieutenant Governor Bill Bolling, Secretary of Education Laura Fornash (Class of ’91), Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Todd Haymore, and Secretary of Health and Human Resources Bill Hazel. Students then went inside the Capitol to observe one part of the legislative process – a floor session. Senator John Edwards, who represents part of Montgomery County where Virginia Tech is located, honored Virginia Tech and the Hokie Day participants by introducing a group of students that were in the gallery. Following the floor session everyone reconvened for luncheon and continued conversation about the day’s events before traveling back to Blacksburg.

Hokie Day represents a significant undertaking on the part of many University officials and alumni; its success would not be possible without orchestration by many. Particularly, compliments are owed to the 95 proud Hokie students that took time away from busy course schedules, lab recitations, significant others, sports teams, and Greek organizations to be involved with something that is above and beyond their immediate world. The efforts of Hokie Day participants have an immediate effect of fostering enhanced learning about important budget and policy issues within the University community. More importantly, however, these efforts inform our elected representatives about issues that have significant meaning to both individual students and the University as a whole.

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