WATER IS LIFE

Twenty-four years after the first Villanova engineer arrived in rural Panama to help an American missionary priest develop an ambitious water-supply system for local residents, more than 15,000 people are now enjoying fresh, potable H2O around the clock. Says Walter (“Father Wally”) Kasuboski, while saluting the more than 100 Nova engineering students and faculty who’ve volunteered to help him design and implement the gradually expanding system during the past two and a half decades: “Water is life—and Villanova is a big part of the reason why we now have plenty of it!”

Scan the airport terminal on that long-ago afternoon in Panama, the youthful engineer saw no signs of a welcoming committee. With growing alarm, he asked himself: Was he really doing this? Was he going to spend the next year and a half as a volunteer engineer at a remote outpost in rural Central America where he’d agreed to help build a water-supply system for a Catholic missionary priest he’d never even met?

Yes, he was. He’d taken the plunge. After conferring at length with his College of Engineering mentor, Associate Engineering Professor Frank Falcone ’70 CE, ’73 MSCE and telling him “I want to help people,” McCartin had followed Falcone’s suggestion and dropped by Campus Ministry where a thoughtful staffer told him about “a really interesting opportunity to volunteer in Panama.”

Less than six months after graduating, the gung-ho McCartin packed half a dozen of his engineering textbooks, along with a brand-new spirit level and a surveyor’s rod (both donated by the College). Then he hopped aboard a jetliner for the 4,425-mile flight from New York to Panama City where he soon found himself shaking hands with the cheerful and endlessly energetic Capuchin missionary priest from Wisconsin—Father Wally—who’d already been working on the water-system startup for three years. Within a few hours, the two of them were rattling down a bumpy road in the priest’s battered pickup toward Chris McCartin’s Amazing Adventure in Panama.

During the next 18 months, the tireless young engineer from East Rockaway, New York, would spend hundreds of hours “applying engineering principles” to Father Wally’s numerous water-related infrastructure projects in the Bayano region of central Panama. On one particularly memorable occasion, he rode on horseback high into a range of nearby mountains, and then, with the help of a few local volunteers, surveyed a gravity-based path of descent that would allow water to flow smoothly through downhill pipes all the way to the village of Wacuco and environs.

“That was a terrific way to start an engineering career,” says McCartin, now 46, who these days serves as a managing director at the New York City-based real estate firm, Tishman Speyer. “That experience taught me how to rely on myself as an engineer—and it also taught me a lot about how the rest of the world lives. For a young engineer just starting out, both of those lessons were invaluable.”

Like Chris McCartin and Frank Falcone, more than 100 Villanova Engineering students, alumni and professors have journeyed to far-off Panama to help Father Wally bring water to parts of the Bayano region during the past 24 years. “I’ve been there seven times so far,” says Daniel Lutz ’71 CE, now the director of public works for Upper Darby, Pa., “along with some great teachers like [Assistant Professor James C.] Jim O’Brien and [Professor and Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research Gerard F.] Jerry Jones. We’ve taken many students along, and most of them learn a great deal about using their [engineering] skills to help other people.” Adds Engineering Associate Professor Bridget Wadzuk, PhD, ’00 CE, who’s visited the region on three separate occasions: “I think one of the best things about these...
Nearly a quarter of a century after Chris McCartin got it all started, Villanova service-learning connections to the Central American country and Father Wally is no stranger than ever. “I went down there six times during my years at Villanova,” recalls recent graduate William Angiolillo ’12 CE, ’13 MSCE, who’s now a staff engineer at Redhine & Mold Inc., in Stamford, Ct., “and that experience expanded my horizons. It provided invaluable insight into the process of civil engineering, and also some spiritual insights that I still value today. Father Wally is an incredible man, and his faith is infectious.”

**SUPPORTING ENGINEERING SERVICE LEARNING**

Villanova Engineering Service Learning would not be possible without generous support from alumni. The following alumni and families have made significant contributions to advance Villanova’s commitment to developing innovative and humanitarian engineers:

- **Engineering students travel to Cambodia to support structural development efforts at the Caramanico School, built by Tom and Marilyn Caramanico PE. The Caramanicos also established an endowed fund to support Villanova students’ continued service at the school and in the surrounding community in the Cambodian province of Ratanakiri.**
- In addition to working service trips, the College of Engineering also offers students the opportunity to participate in international service internships over the summer. Villanova parents Maureen and William Dooley are in the process of establishing an endowed fund to support engineering and business students who volunteer for those projects—and the faculty members who advise them. The Dooleys made this generous commitment after their son, Will Dooley ’12 EE, volunteered for a service trip to Panama.
- April and Joe V 88 CE Denny established an endowed fund to support engineering service learning in perpetuity. The family was inspired to give after Mr. Denny’s brother, Charles Denny, ’54 CE, joined a service trip to Nicaragua. Denny also is a dedicated member of the College’s Engineering Advisory Board (EAB), which invites students to present about their service trip experiences.
- Patricia ’84 CLAS and John ’85 ME Hartner established an endowed fund so students from any of Villanova’s four undergraduate colleges can participate in integrated service learning experiences that complement academic coursework. Mr. Hartner chairs the College of Engineering Campaign Committee and serves on the EAB.
- Robert C. Pizzano ’70 CE established an estate gift that will offset the costs of civil and environmental engineering trips to places like Panama and the Philippines. Pezzano was inspired to give after he joined a service trip to Panama with Professor David Dinehart, PhD, department chairman, and Frank Falcone, associate professor.
- Founded by John ’67, ’72 CLAS, Denise and the late Frank ’58 CLAS Ermilio, the Ermilio Family Endowed Service Learning Fund supports graduate students in the sustainable engineering program who are pursuing international service work. To help the College manage the costs of service learning programs, including travel and other expenses, Nancy and Ken ’56 CE, ’56 MSCE Schmidt created a programmatic endowment. Mr. Schmidt has participated in two Villanova Engineering service trips to Westela, Nicaragua, both of which made a lasting impression and resulted in his commitment to support the VESL program in perpetuity.

“**These trips provide Villanova students with the opportunity to experience a culture distinctly different from their own, put their education into practice and feel the satisfaction of helping those less fortunate than themselves. Service to others is a foundational value at Villanova that is evident everywhere one looks.**”

—William Dooley, parent

“This program changes lives. It reaches the people who are living without running water or electricity. It educates the local engineers about sustainable maintenance. And it is a life-changing experience for the Villanova students who design and install the systems. **This is truly a win-win-win!**”

—John Ermilio ’67, ’72 CLAS

**Supporting Villanova engineering students have contributed to the structural development of the Caramanico School in Cambodia.**

“The opportunity to travel to developing countries and assist with basic infrastructural needs like potable water, electricity and public health information, is a transformational experience. The service learning program teaches students that they can make a tangible difference in areas where it matters most and opens up new perspectives that will last a lifetime.”

—Karl Schmidt ’78 CE, ’82 MSCE