The Ties That Bind

Pitt Community Bonds Are Strengthened As Many Join Hands in Challenging Times

Numerous people within the University of Pittsburgh community—students, faculty, alumni, staff, administrators, and friends—are looking inward and reaching out to one another during a time of uncertainty on the Oakland campus as a rash of bomb threats against campus buildings has occurred since Feb. 13:

• Professors have opened their homes to hold classes.
• Pitt police are being showered with praise by students, staff, and faculty for their vigilance.
• Students are actively watching out for one another during evacuations.
• The chancellor and other senior administrators are visiting with students at middle-of-the-night residence hall evacuation sites.
• More than 200 local alumni, upperclassmen, and concerned citizens have offered spare couches to those wanting off-campus accommodations.

This coming together has reinforced for many Pitt people the intrinsic value of their University and the importance of maintaining the Pitt community’s strengths, especially during times of uncertainty. What follows is a look at just a few segments of this effort.

Student Government Board

Pitt’s Student Government Board (SGB) has initiated two campuswide campaigns: “Keep Calm and Hail to Pitt” and “See Something, Say Something,” designed to “Keep Calm and Hail to Pitt” and “See Something, Say Something,” designed to

“Keep Calm and Hail to Pitt” and “See Something, Say Something,” designed to keep students off campus accommodations.

activity to the police, according to Kenyon Bonner. Pitt associate dean and director of student life as well as an SGB advisor. SGB members continue to spread the mottos on Facebook and Twitter accounts—and, soon, on T-shirts.

On April 9, SGB hosted a “Pitt Pride Day” event on the veranda of the William Pitt Union. Students wearing blue and gold were treated to free pizza and popcorn. More than 600 students emptied 45 boxes of pizza and signed a thank-you poster for the Pitt police.

“It helped students get their minds off everything,” said Pitt junior Richard White, a political science major who chairs SGB’s Transportation and Safety Committee. “It was an opportunity to have a good time and a political science major who chairs SGB’s Transportation and Safety Committee. “It was an opportunity to have a good time and be proud of this university.”

The thank-you poster will be presented to the University of Pittsburgh Police Department this week, along with a resolution of gratitude drafted by White’s committee and a collection of doggie treats for the bomb-sniffing police dogs.

Visible Support for Pitt Police

Pitt students Alexander Rhodes and JIM BURKE/CIDDE

Continued on page 3

Continued on page 3

The Ties That Bind

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During Spring Fair 2012, Pitt students signed thank-you cards for the University’s police officers as well as for the bomb-sniffing dogs used to search buildings during threats. The fair was held April 12 in Schenley Quadrangle.

The University has done more than George Klinzing to foster collaboration among the best and brightest of Pitt researchers,” said Beeson. “He has played a key role in the development and expansion of interdisciplinary research through the creation of centers such as the Peterson Institute for Nanoscience and Engineering, the Simulation and Modeling Center, the Center for National Preparedness, and the Center for Energy. He also has facilitated the development of many other interdisciplinary research areas across Pitt with researchers who have successfully obtained outside funding, and he has continued to lead efforts to expand the capability of the Office of

George E. Klinzing, Pitt Vice Provost for Research, to Return to Faculty

By John Harvith and B. Rose Huber

George E. Klinzing, vice provost for research at the University of Pittsburgh since 1995, has requested to return to the University’s faculty, Pitt Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor Patricia E. Beeson has announced. Klinzing—who has been Whiteford Energy Professor since 1990 and professor of chemical and petroleum engineering since 1986—will resume his faculty duties full-time in September 2012.

During his 17 years as Pitt’s vice provost for research, Klinzing has helped the University community navigate a period of tremendous growth in funded research and increased government regulation of the research enterprise.

“George Klinzing has been a University’s chief research officer during a period in which Pitt’s research has more than quadrupled, resulting in hundreds of millions of additional dollars flowing into the Commonwealth annually, creating not only unprecedented advances in the health sciences, basic science, and engineering, but thousands of new jobs,” said Pitt Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg.

“George’s personal and creative approach has helped shape the research landscape at Pitt, and he has headed a number of initiatives that have brought the fruits of Pitt researchers out of the laboratories and into the marketplace,” the Chancellor added. “In 2001, for instance, he oversaw the development of the Technology Commercialization Alliance’s successful process to commercialize the research work of Pitt faculty, staff, and students. Since then, the number of invention disclosures at Pitt has increased sixfold.

“The University will always be grateful for the extraordinary range and impact of George’s service.”

“No one at the University has done more than George Klinzing to foster collaboration among the best and brightest of Pitt researchers,” said Beeson. “He has played a key role in the development and expansion of interdisciplinary research through the creation of centers such as the Peterson Institute for Nanoscience and Engineering, the Simulation and Modeling Center, the Center for National Preparedness, and the Center for Energy. He also has facilitated the development of many other interdisciplinary research areas across Pitt with researchers who have successfully obtained outside funding, and he has continued to lead efforts to expand the capability of the Office of

Pitt Is 3rd Among Publics, 5th Among All Universities In Federal R&D Spending

By John Harvith

Pitt ranks third among the nation’s public institutions of higher education and fifth among all universities, public and private, in its federally financed research and development (R&D) expenditures, according to the latest findings by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF).

The annual rankings, just released by the NSF, cover fiscal year 2010. Pitt’s federally derived R&D expenditures for that period totaled $594.7 million. Its total FY 2010 R&D expenditures added up to $822.5 million. The other two top public universities in the rankings of federally financed R&D expenditures were the University of Washington-Seattle and the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor; the top two private institutions in the rankings were Johns Hopkins University and the University of Pennsylvania.

In rank order, the top five universities in the NSF’s annual survey were Johns Hopkins, Washington, Michigan, Penn, and Pitt. The universities ranked in the second five were Stanford, the University of California at San Diego, Columbia, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of Wisconsin.

“The rankings from the National Science Foundation are a testament to the talent and commitment of our researchers, who compete for this funding against the very best faculty members at the very best universities in the country. But these rankings also are very good news for Southwestern Pennsylvania and the Commonwealth as a whole, because they present in clear and concrete terms the major dollars-and-cents impact of Pitt through its power to import hundreds of millions of dollars into the state, funds that now support, directly and indirectly, some 28,000 local jobs,” commented Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg.

“The rankings also unmistakably demonstrate the enormous return on investment the Commonwealth receives through its support of this university as a public institution,” added Nordenberg. “The comparison between $822.5 million in research support with our current state appropriation of $144.5 million is stark. It is unlikely that the Commonwealth achieves anything close to that level of return on any of its other investments.

In addition, these rankings clearly reveal the elite institutions, both research and private, with which Pitt now keeps company, and it is widely recognized around the world that the kind of innovation associated with top research universities will be a key to economic success in the 21st century.”

“The University of Pittsburgh’s remarkable success in attracting increasingly large amounts of federal support stems directly from the indefatigable efforts of our world-class faculty in pursuing trailblazing research that has made and continues to make life better for millions worldwide, from the development of the Salk polio vaccine in the 1950s to today’s advances in the health sciences, basic sciences, and engineering,” said Pitt Vice Provost for Research George E. Klinzing. “All of this is as it should be, since Pitt, as our region’s premier public research university, not only makes it possible for its students to learn in an atmosphere alive with creative ferment, but also, as part of its public mission, acts as a powerful economic engine.”

INSIDE

Pesticides can spur morphological change.......2

The holy grail in robotics ............5
Relyea Study Is First to Show That Pesticides Can Induce Morphological Changes in Vertebrate Animals

By B. Rose Huber

The world’s most popular weed killer, Roundup®, can cause amphibians to change shape, according to research published in the March issue of Ecological Applications.

Relyea, University of Pittsburgh professor of biological sciences in the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences and director of Pitt’s Pymatuning Laboratory of Ecology, demonstrated that sublethal and environmentally relevant concentrations of Roundup® caused two species of amphibians to alter their morphology. According to Relyea, this is the first study to show that a pesticide can induce morphological changes in a vertebrate animal.

Relyea set up large outdoor water tanks in a laboratory that contained many of the components of natural wetlands. Some tanks contained caged predators, which emit chemicals that naturally induce changes in tadpole morphology. This causes tadpoles to be larger tails to better escape predators. After adding tadpoles to each tank, he exposed them to a range of Roundup® concentrations. After 3 weeks, the tadpoles were removed from the tanks.

“It was not surprising to see that the smell of predators in the water induced larger tadpole tails,” says Relyea. “That is a normal, adaptive response. What shocked us was that the Roundup® induced the same changes. Moreover, the combination of predators and Roundup® caused the tail changes to be twice as large.” Because tadpoles alter their body shape to match their environment, having a body shape that does not fit the environment can put the animals at a distinct disadvantage.

Predictors can cause tadpoles to change shape by altering the stress hormones of tadpoles, says Relyea. His similar changes when exposed to Roundup® suggest that Roundup® may interfere with the hormones of tadpoles and potentially many other animals.

“This discovery highlights the fact that pesticides, which are important for crop production and human health, can have unintended consequences for species that are not the pesticide’s target,” says Relyea. “It is considered not designed to affect animals, but we are learning that they can have a wide range of surprising effects by altering how hormones work in the bodies of animals. This is important because amphibians not only serve as a barometer of the ecosystem’s health, but also as an indicator of potential dangers to other species in the food chain, including humans.”

For two decades, Relyea has studied community ecology, evolution, disease ecology, and ecotoxicology. He has authored more than 80 scientific articles and book chapters and has presented research seminars around the world. For more information about his laboratory, visit www.pitt.edu/relyea.

No More Virtual Pickpocketing of Credit Cards, Thanks to Technology Developed by Swanson School Researchers

By B. Rose Huber

With technology has come ease. These days, thanks to near-field communications (NFC) and radio frequency identification (RFID), consumers no longer have to swipe credit cards through an interrogative machine—they are able to simply wave their credit cards to make purchases or withdraw money from their bank accounts.

Such ease, however, also has brought with it theft and fraud. Researcher at the University of Pittsburgh’s Swanson School of Engineering have come up with a method to improve security through a new credit card design that allows a card to turn “on” and “off.”

RFID tags and NFC credit cards are currently enabled to operate any time they’re placed in an electromagnetic field. However, that can be dangerous. For instance, Marlin Mickel, the Nickolas A. DeCocco Professor of Engineering and executive director of the RFID Center for Excellence in the Swanson School. That’s because portable cards are available for less than several hundred dollars, making it possible for thieves to simply pass a reader near an NFC credit card and charge purchases to it or extract cash from a bank account.

“Our new design integrates an antenna and other electrical circuitry that can be interrupted by a simple switch, like turning off the lights in the home or office,” says Mickel. “The RFID or NFC credit card is disabled if left in a pocket or lying on a surface and unreadable by thieves using portable scanners.”

With this new technology, consumers would simply hold an RFID or NFC credit card in a specified area—for example, on an emblem or some other object that can be marked—when making a transaction. As long as the switch is held, the card is turned “on.” When returned to a wallet or purse and a plastic or cloth contact is disrupted, the card automatically turns “off.”

“This solution is simple and very inexpensive to integrate into the RFID and NFC credit card manufacturing process,” Mickel says. “We have filed a patent application and hope to see the technology quickly adopted, once approved.
Online Connection Is Modern-Day Town Hall Meeting

Many in the Pitt community have turned to existing and newly created online communities in their daily quest for the latest information about the bomb threats on Pitt's campus.

Pitt's official Facebook and Twitter pages have provided a forum for many, primarily students, to express their opinions and concerns about the spate of threats that began on Feb 13. A Facebook and Twitter page that have sprung up include various Pitt-related pages on Reddit as well as the "We Support the Pitt Police" Facebook group (www.facebook.com/WeSupportthePittPolice), founded by Pitt student Alexander Rhodes and Sarah Halperin.

"This page is a small step to show the Pitt Police that their work is noticed and appreciated" during both the Western Psych shooting in March and the continued bomb-threat evacuations, Rhodes said.

Stephen A. Posner, professor of history and urban studies and former Pitt provost, likened the user activity on these Facebook and Twitter sites to "an unofficial forum for Pitt community members to voice their praise for the Pitt Police." Posner said he was "surprised by the enthusiasm that people are expressing for the efforts of the police department to keep us safe and to protect our community." Posner praised the qualities of the people who have been involved in managing the response to the bomb threats and the vigilance of the police force.

Another Pitt-related Facebook page, called Stop the Pitt Bomb Threats, was created by an anonymous user on April 3. "I thought it was a bad joke at first," says the group's creator, "but then I realized that this is something we are going to have to live with." The page has more than 700 page views from posters, some of whom self-identify as Pitt students as well as, on occasion, Pitt professors and Pitt parents. The site includes a detailed listing of the bomb threats as well as a map pinpointing the location(s) of threats.

Christine Whelan, a visiting assistant professor in the Pitt Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences Department of Sociology, said the online communities "provide a safe forum for a modern town hall meeting." Whelan added that the "language of this generation" is Facebook and Twitter. "People can connect with their opinions and concerns about the spate of threats that began on Feb 13. These are valuable communities," she said, adding that "they're really no different than communities that have town hall meetings 30 or 40 years ago. But this is the language of this generation." Whelan said the author of GetLevelWSP: "...not sure if the WSP is going to win," is a friend who posted a reminder about perspective and said that "high school is supposed to be fun." Whelan, who is the author of the online columns "...though it's (obviously) frustrating to deal with the bomb threats, shouldn't we all be thankful that ... the pitt community is becoming so close that students are offering others they've never met couches to sleep at night? don't think anyone realized the sense of community we have around us and how lucky we are to be part of such a wonderful university. just a thought... loving on my fellow panthers. H2P!!

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Newsmakers

Chancellor Hosts British Delegation

Pitt Chancellor (and British Honorary Consul in Pittsburgh) Mark A. Nordenberg hosted a breakfast for a visiting British governmental delegation seeking information on how Pittsburgh became a model for achieving an economic renaissance. The March 29 breakfast, held in the O’Hara Student Center Ballroom, also included as guests: Pittsburgh Mayor Luke Ravenstahl and members of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, among others. Pictured are, from left, Chancellor Nordenberg, The Right Honorable Lord David Trimble, Member of Parliament (MP) Angela C. Smith, MP Christopher Pincher, and MP Derek Twigg.

4th Annual Inclusive Voices

Several Pitt alumni served as designated “conversationalists” during the 4th Annual Inclusive Voices luncheon, a signature event of the Program to Aid Citizen Enterprise (PACE), which brings together individuals from different backgrounds, fields, and disciplines to explore ideas with community leaders in various fields. PACE works with local neighborhood-based nonprofits that support African American and economically disadvantaged communities. The March 30 event was held in the Omni William Penn Grand Ballroom, Downtown. Pictured from left are Kevin L. Jenkins (SOC WK ’90G), senior program officer and director of community initiatives, The Pittsburgh Foundation; Kelly Kochamba (KATZ ’07), a community outreach specialist, FBI Pittsburgh Field Office; and Mario C. Browne (GSPH ’05), director, Office of Health Sciences Diversity Programs, University of Pittsburgh.

NUCLEAR CONFERENCE


C.F. REYNOLDS MEDICAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The C.F. Reynolds Medical History Society recently recognized Jonathan Erlen (third from left) for his longtime service to the organization, including his roles as financial officer, membership chair, and, for the past 20 years, the society’s meetings planner. The society is one of the largest regional history-of-medicine societies in the United States. Seen, from left, are David K.C. Cooper, the society’s immediate past president and a professor of surgery in the PittUPMC Thomas E. Starzl Transplantation Institute; James Johnston, society president and a professor of medicine in the Renal-Electrolyte Division of the Pitt School of Medicine; Erlen, who also served as the society’s honorary secretary and who is the curator of the History of Medicine Collection of the Falk Library and an adjunct assistant professor in the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences’ Department of History; and George Dieter, society president-elect and an assistant professor in the Department of Cell Biology and Physiology in the Pitt School of Medicine. The society presented Erlen with the award he is holding and also voted to designate an annual lecture in his name.
Oscillating Gel Acts Like Artificial Skin, Giving Robots Potential Ability to “Feel”

By B. Rose Huber

Sooner than later, robots may have the ability to “feel.” In a paper published online March 26 in Advanced Functional Materials, a team of researchers from the University of Pittsburgh and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) demonstrated that a nonscissoring gel can be resuscitated in a fashion similar to a medical cardiopulmonary resuscitation. These findings pave the way for the development of a wide range of new applications that sense mechanical stimuli and respond chemically in a natural phenomenon few materials have been able to mimic.

A team of researchers at Pitt made predictions regarding the behavior of Belousov-Zhabotinsky (BZ) gel, a material that was first fabricated in the late 1990s and shown to pulsate in the absence of any external stimuli. In fact, under certain conditions, the gel sitting in a petri dish resembles a beating heart.

Along with her colleagues, Anna Balazs, Distinguished Professor of Chemical and Petroleum Engineering in Pitt’s Swanson School of Engineering, predicted that BZ gel not previously oscillating could be re-oscillating by mechanical pressure. The prediction was actualized by MIT researchers, who proved that chemical oscillations can be triggered by mechanically compressing the BZ gel beyond a critical stress. A video from the MIT group showing this unique behavior can be accessed at http://vvgroup.scripts.mit.edu/WP/?p=1078.

“Think of it like human skin, which can provide signals to the brain that something on the body is deformed or hurt,” says Balazs. “As a result, I became fascinated with the plant and its unique hide-and-seek qualities—the plant leaves fold inward and droop when touched or shaken, reopening just minutes later. I knew there had to be a scientific application regarding touch, which led me to study this in mechanical and chemical energy.”

Also on Balazs’s research team were Olga Kuksenok, research associate professor, and Victor Yashin, visiting research professor, both in Pitt’s Swanson School of Engineering. At MIT, the work was performed by Krystyn Van Vliet, Paul M. Cook Career Development Associate Professor of Material Sciences and Engineering, and graduate student Irene Chen. (Group Web site: http://vvgroup.scripts.mit.edu/WP).

Funding for this research was provided by the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Army.

A big challenge in neuroscience is translating variability expressed at the cellular and brain-circuit level with that in cognitive behaviors,” said Brent Doiron, assistant professor of mathematics in Pitt’s Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences and the project’s principal investigator. “It’s a fact that short-term memory degrades over time. If you try to recall a stored memory, there likely will be errors, and these cognitive imperfections increase the longer that short-term memory is engaged.”

Doiron explains that brain cells increase activity during short-term memory functions. But this activity randomly drifts over time as a result of stochastic (or chance) forces in the brain. This drifting is what Doiron’s team is trying to better understand.

“As mathematicians, what we’re really trying to do is relate the structure and dynamics of this stochastic variability of brain activity to the variability in cognitive performance,” said Doiron. “Linking the variability at these two levels will give important clues about the neural mechanisms that support cognition.”

Using a combination of statistical mechanics and nonlinear system theory, the Pitt team examined the responses of a model of a simplified memory network proposed to be operable in the prefrontal cortex. When sources of neural variability were distributed over the entire network, as opposed to only over subsections, the performance of the memory network was enhanced. This helped the Pitt team make the prediction published in PNAS, that brain wiring affects how neural networks tend with—and ultimately express—variability in memory and decision making.

Recently, experimental neuroscientists are getting a better understanding of how the brain is wired, and theories like those published in PNAS by Doiron’s group give a context for their findings within a cognitive framework. The Doiron group plans to apply the general principle of linking brain circuitry to neural variability in a variety of sensory, motor, and memory decision-making frameworks.

Two Pitt students participated in Doiron’s research: Amber Polk (A&S ’11), an undergraduate at the time the research took place and now a law student at the University of Illinois, and Ashok Litwin-Kumar, a neural computational PhD candidate with the Center for the Neural Basis of Cognition, a partnership of the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University.

Funding for this research was provided by the National Science Foundation and Sloan Foundations. For more information on Doiron’s lab, visit www.math.pitt.edu/~bdoiron/Welcome.html.
Happenings

Concerts
Graduate Student Composers Concert, with IonSound Project, Pitt's ensemble-in-residence, performing new music by Pitt's graduate student composers, 8 p.m. April 19, free, Bellefield Hall Auditorium, Pitt Department of Music, 412-624-4125.


University of Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra performing works by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, 8 p.m. April 18, free, Bellefield Hall Auditorium, Pitt Department of Music, 412-624-4125.


2012 Pitt Jazz Ensemble Concert, annual spring concert, 8 p.m. April 20, Pitt students free with ID, Bellefield Hall Auditorium, Pitt Department of Music, 412-394-3353, www.pittarts.pitt.edu.

African Music and Dance Ensemble, annual spring concert, 8 p.m. April 20, Pitt students free with ID, Bellefield Hall Auditorium, Pitt Department of Music, 412-394-3353, www.pittarts.pitt.edu.


Imagination Movers in Concert! Rock-O-Matic 2012, described as “high-octane rock concert for entire family,” 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. April 21, Benedum Center, 237 7th St., Downtown, Pittsburgh Children’s Choir, 412-456-6666, www.trustarts.org.


Pitt Men’s Glee Club performing a program of classical, folk, and popular music, 9 p.m. April 21, Pitt students free with ID, First Baptist Church of Pittsburgh, 559 N. Bellefield Ave., Oakland, Pitt Department of Music, 412-394-3353, www.pittarts.pitt.edu.

Pitt Women’s Choral Ensemble performing a program of classical, popular, and folk music, 3 p.m. April 22, free, Heinz Chapel, Pitt Department of Music, www.music.pitt.edu.

Ascension Day Evensong, featuring The Oberlin Collegium Musicium, 5 p.m. April 22, Calvary Episcopal Church, 315 Shady Ave., Shadyside, Music at Calvary, Calvary Episcopal Church, www.calvaryph.org.


Exhibitions

Carnegie Museum of Art, Duncan Campbell, filmic portraits, each unraveling historical narrative through one protagonist, beginning April 20; Maeve Lin: recreations of natural forms transformed into objects of contemplation, through May 13; Henri Matisse: The Tearoom and One Night, multi-panel, painted paper cut-out, created when the artist was 81 and confined to his bed, through July 13; Hand Made: Contemporary Ceramics, Glass, and Wood, ongoing, 4400 Forbes Ave., Oakland, 412-622-3131, www.cmoa.org.


Hillman Library, an exhibition of first editions and significant works of famed novelist Charles Dickens, through May 1, Room 363; Pitt—225 Years of Building Better Lives—1787-2012, exhibition of vintage photographs, maps, and copies of front pages of Pitt’s two original state charters, on loan from Pennsylvania’s state archives, through May 18; ground floor; also on display in glass Audubon case are actual front pages of Pitt’s original state charters, University’s 225th anniversary commemoration, through May 18, 412-953-3298, jeanneann@pitt.edu.

The Frick Art & Historical Center, Draw Me a Story, A Children’s Book Illustration, survey of drawing styles and techniques spanning more than 100 years, including watercolors, pen drawings, and experimental combinations from artists like Randolph Caldecott, Chris van Allsburg, Ernie Shepard, and Maurice Sendak, through May 26, 7227 Reynolds St., Point Breeze, 412-371-6155, www.thefrick.org.

August Wilson Center for African American Arts, Soul Glo: Negro League Legend, features a 100-year time-line and photographs of the life of Negro League baseball player Josh Gibson and his continuing legacy, through June 30; Strength in the Struggle: Civil Rights featuring two distinct displays with text, photography, memorabilia, and film relating to the civil rights movement and women’s movement in Pittsburgh and the nation from 1967 to 1987, through June 30, 980 Liberty Ave., Downtown, 412-258-2700, www.augustwilsoncenter.org.


Pitt Jazz Ensemble’s Annual Spring Concert April 19 to Feature International Guest Artists Jimmy Owens, Curtis Fuller

By Sharon S. Blake

The Pitt Jazz Ensemble—a student ensemble comprising nearly 30 musicians—will hold its annual spring concert at 8 p.m. April 19 in the Assembly Room of the William Pitt Union.

Featured guest performers will include legendary trumpeter Jimmy Owens and renowned jazz trombonist Curtis Fuller, both of whom have been frequent guests at Pitt’s annual fall Jazz Seminar and Concert. Accompanying Owens and Fuller will be Pitt’s annual fall Jazz Seminar and Concert. Both of whom have been frequent guests at legendary jazz trombonist Curtis Fuller, renowned trumpeter Jimmy Owens and the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland and has toured the southern United States and Trinidad.

Jimmy Owens (above) and Curtis Fuller

Curtis Fuller, who was born and raised in Detroit, picked up the trombone at age 16. Soon, he was playing in a U.S. Army Band led by Cannonball Adderly. When he returned from the service in 1955, he settled in New York City, where word about his unique style and sound spread quickly. A month later, in his early 20s, he recorded his first album as a leader. He performed with Miles Davis, Jimmy Smith, and Bud Powell, and then recorded the celebrated Blue Train album with jazz legend John Coltrane.

The Pitt Jazz Ensemble will perform under the direction of interim ensemble director Ralph Guzzi. The group has played at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland and has toured the southern United States and Trinidad.

After only eight months in New York City, Curtis had recorded six albums as a leader and was featured on 15 others. He was an original member of the Art Farmer-Benny Golson Jazztet, and his career included stints with Dizzy Gillespie, Lester Young, James Moody, and Quincy Jones. But it was with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers that Curtis would reach the pinnacle of his career, contributing A La Mode and several other classics to the band’s repertoire.

With his legacy as one of the most influential trombonists in jazz well established, Curtis spent the following years performing with jazz greats Count Basie and Jimmy Heath, among many others.