The Pitt women’s basketball team worked its way to the Sweet 16 for the first time in school history. The Panthers stunned Baylor University with a 67-59 victory in the NCAA Tournament second round on March 24. Led by Shavonte Zellous, a former track sprinter turned shooting guard, the Panthers climbed from a 28-26 halftime deficit to a 52-41 lead midway through the second half, and held on.

As of press time, the Pitt Panthers were headed to the regional round in Spokane, second half, and held on.

The Pitt women’s basketball team headed to the regional round in Spokane, second half, and held on.

University of Pittsburgh Honors College junior Eleanor Ott—a triple major in chemistry, history, and French—has been named a 2008 Harry S. Truman Scholarship winner for her superior academic and leadership abilities.

The scholarship was announced by former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, president of The Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation. Pitt is the only public university in Pennsylvania with a 2008 Truman Scholar.

Ott, a Chancellor’s Scholar and a Law College junior, is Pitt’s 11th Truman winner. She is one of 65 students from 55 U.S. colleges and universities to have been chosen as a 2008 Truman Scholar. The recipients were selected from 959 candidates from 283 institutions across the country.

“The University of Pittsburgh is one of this country’s most consistent producers of high-achieving students,” said Pitt Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg. “Ellie Ott’s selection as a Truman Scholar extends that enviable record. She is a very worthy recipient of this high national honor, given her exemplary record as an outstanding student, a committed contributor to the broader community, and a highly effective leader. Her selection also is a tribute to our Honors College, which has helped create an institutional culture that inspires academic accomplishment and also encourages service to the greater good.”

G. Alec Stewart, Pitt Honors College dean and Truman faculty representative, said, “Ellie represents a stunning combination of intellectual and leadership attainment. Anyone who knows Ellie would not be surprised that the Truman Foundation found this combination compelling. “Ellie is a leader because she gets things done and finds the mechanism to ensure the future health and sustainability of an organization,” said Stewart. “She is deliberate and determined, easily sacrificing personal recognition to get the job done. In this regard, she is not unlike the namesake of this scholarship.”

At Pitt, Ott is a copresident and education chair for FORGE (Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Empowerment), a refugee advocacy organization that she helped found in 2005. In cooperation with this organization and Catholic Charities, Ott has been instrumental in assisting local refugees to obtain clothing and in starting a mentoring program to develop job skills, in which Pitt students work one-on-one with refugees.

In addition to pursuing work with refugees, Ott is dedicated to working with youth in local schools. She is an aide for the English as a Second Language class at Schenley High School and has mentored at-risk elementary and middle school students with the Beginning With Books and First Step After School programs.

Ott’s long-term goals are to earn a master’s degree in international affairs as well as a master’s degree in public administration and work with Human Rights Watch, a nongovernmental organization dedicated to protecting all human rights. She aspires to one day be a United Nations Protection Officer in a refugee camp as an advocate for the refugees.

Congress established the Truman Scholarship in 1975 in memory of the 33rd U.S. president. It is a highly competitive, merit-based federal award to college juniors who wish to attend graduate or professional school in preparation for careers in government, the nonprofit sector, or elsewhere in public service. The scholarship, which can total up to $30,000, will benefit this year’s 65 winners, who will pursue graduate studies in the United States or abroad in a wide variety of fields.

Award recipients also receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Truman Scholars Leadership Week May 13-18 at William Jewell College in Liberty, Mo., and the awards ceremony May 18 at the Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Mo.
Women’s History Month

Making a Difference

Sister Margery Kundar, principal of St. Benedict the Moor School in the Hill District, turned her childhood passion of playing school into her life’s work.

After years of making her sisters and neighborhood friends “play school,” Kundar took a major step toward becoming a teacher during her senior year at Mount Gallitzin High School in Bader, which was staffed by Sisters of St. Joseph nuns. Kundar decided to join the Sisters of St. Joseph, an order that designates education as one of its many ministries.

It was a move that garnered some skepticism, Kundar remembered with a smile.

“I prayed about” entering the convent, she said. “My Dad said, ‘Margaret, I’ll give you six months.’”

Her father’s skepticism was understandable, Kundar acknowledged. “I went to all the proms, and I never wanted to miss or be left out of anything, but joining the order was something I felt I needed to consider.”

The decision was one that has served Kundar—and hundreds of her students—well. In 2008, she celebrated 50 years as a Sister of St. Joseph. She began her teaching career in 1959 and taught at various schools throughout the Pittsburgh and Altoona-Johnstown dioceses. For the past 29 years, she has served as St. Benedict’s principal.

She attributes her commitment to service to her parents. “My parents were St. Benedict’s principal. For the past 29 years, she has served as the principal of the schools in the Hill District, including St. Benedict. The schools are located in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, and the students are primarily African American. About three-fourths of the 800 students at these schools qualify for the free- or reduced-price lunch program, and 60 percent of them live in single-family homes.

“Without the help of Extra Mile, the school would have to close,” Kundar said.

Ambrose Murray, Extra Mile executive director, said the schools are known for their quality of education, discipline, and mutual respect. Ninety-five percent of Extra Mile students attend school daily, and parent participation in education conferences is about 98 percent.

Murray calls Kundar an exceptional education leader. “She knows what to do and how to get it done. She has a little inclination towards perfection, near perfection. She wants what’s best so that these kids succeed.”

Like any other school, St. Benedict faces its share of problems. Murray said Kundar is an exceptional problem solver. Kundar said she encourages teachers to keep an open line of communication with parents, calling when student’s grades are going down, but also when students are doing well.

“People don’t forget Margery,” Murray noted, recalling the time when a former student wrote her as he was finishing Temple Medical School in Philadelphia. “I’m graduating, the student wrote, ‘and I’m graduating because of you.’”

Adam Iddirissi, another former St. Benedict student, described Kundar “as a sincere and thoughtful educator.”

Iddirissi, a 2006 Truman Scholar at Pitt and a Pitt graduate, is finishing his first year of medical school at Johns Hopkins University. “She has a passion for education and cares deeply about the students and the school. She is well respected by students and teachers,” he said.

Iddirissi credits his success, in part, to Kundar’s influence. “The combination of Sister Margery and the environment that she cultivates helps to foster success at St. Benedict and beyond,” he said.

Kundar said that today’s students participate in more activities and are more knowledgeable than their predecessors. Their learning needs to be challenging. Kundar said, adding that the teacher is still the key to successful learning.

“If the teacher is enthusiastic and conveys that message to her students, they will be successful,” she said. “I tell my teachers, ‘Don’t discount anyone.’”

As principal, Kundar maintains structure for the students and the teachers. She also enlists the help of parents. “St. Benedict’s believes in getting the parents involved,” she said. “All are asked to volunteer, and they do so in the classroom, cafeteria, and library. We have a grandparent on the playground and, in the summer, parents help to get the school ready for the coming year.” Parents are also required to personally pick up students’ report cards.

Kundar aims to create a network, where St. Benedict’s students receive support from their families, the school’s teachers, religious guidance, and the community through Extra Mile.

“I feel good about walking into the school every day. And I’m truly happy when I see the students come back after graduation to tell us what they are doing.”
Happenings

SHANGHAI, CHINA: Shanghai Quartet, through June 1, 601 Wood St., Downtown. Register at rubin math.pitt.edu. For more information, call 412-624-1052, www.citytheatrecompany.org.

Andrew Chen and Frederic Blondy, improvisational experimental music on cello and prepared piano, 8 p.m. April 2, Frick Fine Arts Auditorium, Oakland. Music on the Edge. Pitt Department of Music, 412-361-2622.

Exhibitions


Silver Eye Center for Photography, In Search of America, photographs by David Graham, through April 12, 1025 E. Carson St., South Side, 412-431-1810, www.silvereye.org.


Lectures/ Seminars/Readings


“Shabbos Goyim and the Re-creation of Jewish Space in Present-day Poland,” Eric Lehrer, professor in Con- cordia University’s Department of History, 3:10 p.m., 2500 Posvar Hall, Pitt’s Center for Russian and East European Studies and Jewish Studies Program, 412-648-7404, eecs14@pitt.edu.

“When the Waves Ruled Britain: Geography, Empire, and the Discipline of the Sea,” Jonathan Scott, professor in Pitt’s Department of History, 4 p.m. today, 3701 Posvar Hall, Pitt’s Department of History and the European Studies Center, 412-648-7404.

“Mathematical Representation,” Emily Grodzeski, professor of philosophy at Pennsylvania State University, 12:00 p.m. April 4, 4117 Cathedral of Learning, 412-624-1052, www.pitt.edu/~pittcntr.math.pitt.edu.


Late Night Catechism, through April 28, City Theater’s Hamburg Studio, 1300 Bingham St., South Side, 412-431-2489, www.citytheatrecompany. org.


Miscellaneous

A Symposium: The Slave Ship in His- tory and Life, through April 6, invited visitor Barry Unsworth, professor Marcus Radcliffe and others, 2 p.m. April 2, Chancell- or’s Conference Room, 2500 Forbes Ave., Department of History and School of Arts and Sciences, 412-648-7451.

Pitt PhD Dissertation Defenses

Avi Parvin, School of Nursing, “Effect of Short Periods of Normobaric Hyper- oxia on Brain Tissue Oxygenation and Cerebrospinal Fluid Oxidative Stress Markers in Severe Traumatic Brain Injury,” 9 a.m. today, Room 331 Victoria Building.

John B. Shaffer, Department of Human Genetics in the Graduate School of Public Health, “Genetic Epidemiology of Thyroid Nodule Susceptibility,” 9 a.m. today, Room 312 Cranberry Hall.

Jean A. Grace, Department of English, “Seeking a Knowledge: Composition and the Teaching of Professional Writing,” 2 p.m. today, Room 327 Cathedral of Learning.

Molly Stitt-Fischer, Department of Environmental and Occupational Health, “NTRIC: National Training in Remote Imaging for Pulmonary Endothelial Cells,” 2 p.m. today, Room 105 Conference Room, Bridgeport Side.

Wenpeng Feng, Department of Biotas- tistics, “Inference, Power and Sample Size for Adaptive Two-Stage Treatment Strategies,” 10 a.m. today, Room 406 Forbes Tower.

Jesseon H. arrow, School of Medi- cine’s Molecular Virology and Micro- biology Graduate Program, “Rovilina buki, rovina buki Surface-Located Proteins Expressed During Persistent Murine Infection and the Importance of BBA 66 During Infection of C3H Hej Mice,” 2 p.m. today, Room S29 Biomedical Science Tower.

Ziel Bienew, Department of History and Literature, “The Geographical Dimension of Science in Early-Moder Philosophy: Ethics, Space, and the Geographical Geometrician in Late Schol- asticism, Galileo, and Descartes,” 2 p.m. today, Room 628 Cathedral of Learning.

Jennifer Keating-Miller, Department of History and Literature, “Representations of Identity in Chinese Contemporary Literature,” 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. today, Room 405 Cathedral of Learning.

Ruth A. Helmus, School of Medicine, “Generation and Characterization of the Cel- lular Immune Response to New and/or Emerging Pathogens,” Anti-SIV Mucosal Vaccine,” 2 p.m. April 4, Room 195 Biomedical Science Tower.
Pitt Grad Programs Advance in U.S. News Rankings

By John Harvith

The latest edition of the U.S. News & World Report newstand book America’s Best Graduate Schools contains rankings that show advances in a number of Pitt graduate programs, according to that publication’s 2008 methodology.

Highlights of these rankings will appear in the April 7-14 U.S. News & World Report magazine, on sale at newstands on March 31.

The book, which goes on sale April 1, shows that Pitt’s School of Medicine moved to 14th place from its ranking of 15th last year in the Schools of Medicine-Research category, tied with the University of California-San Diego. The Pitt School of Pharmacy advanced to the 19th place from its ranking of 24th in 2005 in the Pharmacy-Pharm. D. category, tied this year with the University of Kansas. The Swanson School of Engineering advanced to 48th place from its ranking of 50th last year in the Schools of Engineering category. For the first time since 2004, a number of health disciplines were ranked by program directors and faculty, and among them Pitt was ranked 9th in the Clinical Psychology-Doctorate category, up from 20th in 2004, tied this year with Duke University, Penn State, SUNY-Stony Brook, the University of Illinois, the University of Iowa, and Penn, in the Occupational Therapy-Master’s/Doctorate category, Pitt also was ranked 9th, up from 14th place in 2001, tied this year with New York University and the University of Washington; and in the Physical Therapy-Master’s/Doctorate category, Pitt was ranked second, up from 3rd in 2004, tied this year with Washington University in St. Louis.

In the Medical Specialties category of Women’s Health, Pitt was ranked 4th, unchanged from last year. And in the Social Work-Master’s category, Pitt’s ranking of 14th was unchanged from 2004, tied this year with Boston College, Penn, and Virginia Commonwealth University.

Also, a Best Graduate Schools article titled “Critical Care Is a Rising Med School Specialty” highlights Pitt’s Department of Critical Care Medicine, quoting its chair, Professor Derek Angus, and noting, among other things, that the Pitt program is a pioneer in the field “and, with about 40 fellows, one of the largest in the country” that “now runs simulations in a multilevel facility using actors and ‘robotic’ humans.”