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MBC HISTORY

Rufus William Bailey, a minister, educator, and writer, founded August Female Seminary in 1842. The school was renamed Mary Baldwin Seminary in 1895 and Mary Baldwin College in 1923.

MBC News

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Phoenix Project Rises on Student Optimism, Energy

1/25/2008

Because he believes in the optimism and energy of college and university students, Greg Werkheiser helped found The Phoenix Project in January 2006. As executive director of the statewide nonprofit organization, Werkheiser sees the potential for Virginia students to enable Virginia communities rise from the “ashes” of neglect and economic hardship, a metaphor for the mythical bird for which the agency is named. He will visit Mary Baldwin College at **7 p.m. January 28 in Francis Auditorium** to engage MBC and the community in a dialogue about the mission of the organization.

“[College students] are unafraid of imagining a better world, or of failing when trying to bring it about. Therefore, they are more likely than others to succeed when equipped and encouraged,” Werkheiser said. The Phoenix Project’s mission is to provide the equipment and encouragement.

“I hope students take away a greater appreciation of what it means to be a social entrepreneur, and a belief that they could be one, change the world, and still afford to eat,” he said. The organization is accepting applications now for its summer 2008 Nonprofit Leadership Program through its headquarters in Springfield, Virginia.

The agency’s pilot partnership in Petersburg, one of the Commonwealth’s most economically distressed communities, has helped preserve historic areas of the city, repair homes for low-income



homeowners, generate research about environmental issues related to the Appomattox River, donate books, and much more. Eight universities, led by Virginia State University and College of William and Mary, have engaged in Petersburg projects. In all, 25 Virginia institutions of higher education have volunteered with the Phoenix Project. In 2008, the Phoenix Project hopes to lay the groundwork for a statewide network of universities and distressed communities committed to mutual improvement.

Assistant Professor of Communication Bruce Dorries is confident MBC can add another college to the Phoenix Project's participation list. "Werkheiser's visit reinforces the college's commitment to promoting innovative approaches to leadership education, and promoting social business — more specifically social entrepreneurship. He is one of the Commonwealth's most engaging proponents of using practical skills to address pressing social issues," Dorries said.

MBC alumna Shanice Penn '00, operations manager for The Phoenix Project, and Phoenix Project Associate Director Marion Forsythe, will join Werkheiser in MBC classrooms during the day to enhance students' understanding of civic engagement.

Werkheiser is a lawyer and social entrepreneur recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as one of the nation's leading civic educators. He founded the Virginia Citizenship Institute while attending University of Virginia School of Law and led the organization for seven years until it merged with the Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership at the University of Virginia in 2003. From 2002 to 2005, Mr. Werkheiser chaired the Virginia Commission for National and Community Service by appointment of Governor Mark Warner. As an attorney with a prominent Washington DC firm, he served as lead litigation counsel to Fortune 500 companies and was named Pro Bono Attorney of the Year. Werkheiser also penned public remarks for Governor Mark Warner, President Bill Clinton, and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, among others.

The lecture is sponsored by the Spencer Center for Civic and Global Engagement and the Mary Baldwin College departments of political science, economics, and communication. Find out more about The Phoenix Project online at www.phoenixproject.org.

Front image: A student interviews a Petersburg, Virginia, resident as part of a Phoenix Project partnership in that area. Photo courtesy of The Phoenix Project.

Questions or comments? E-mail CoMPA@mbc.edu.

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