For 80 years SU’s ROTC program has instilled the values of teamwork, leadership, and patriotism in students, while providing the financial support they need to complete their degrees.

BY PAULA MESEROLL

"It should be the aim of Syracuse University to maintain one or more units of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) in order that in time of national emergency there may be a sufficient number of educated men, trained in Military Science and Tactics, to officer and lead intelligently the units of the large armies upon which the safety of the country will depend."

Major Sidney F. Mashbir, the first ROTC commander at Syracuse University, wrote these words in 1919 to announce the U.S. War Department’s reorganization of SU’s Student Army Training Corps, which had been activated the year before. The ROTC unit became a permanent military department, with the original class of 120 cadets receiving infantry training.

For 80 years, ROTC at SU has fulfilled Mashbir’s mission, training thousands of military officers for service to their country. Today, there are two ROTC Corps of Cadets at Syracuse University, Army and Air Force. They train both women and men to take leadership positions in military careers and in civilian life. "There is a benefit to the United States and to the United States Armed Forces to have officers trained in civilian/secular institutions around the country, as opposed to training all military officers in select all-military institutions," says Ronald Cavanagh, SU’s vice president for undergraduate studies, whose office oversees the ROTC program. "I think it makes for a breadth of thought and perspective that is far greater than what could conceivably be achieved at one, two, or three national military institutions. I think the people of the United States are well served by the program. Syracuse University trained more Army/Air Force officers during World War II than any other institution in the United States."

The University also benefits greatly from having an ROTC presence on campus, according to Cavanagh. "It gives our students an opportunity to look at the military as a career," he says. "It’s a chance for our student body to engage in conversation with folks considering the military as well as the highly educated military officers that serve as military science professors at Syracuse."

According to Lt. Col. Ray Eldridge, professor of military science and commander of the Army ROTC at SU, his branch of service gets 75 percent of its officers through ROTC training. "It’s becoming an even more important avenue for the Army in training its officers," Eldridge says. "Only about 25 percent of Army officers come from military academies. That’s significant for the Army, because it’s one way we keep ties with the civilian population we support. We’re a volunteer army and there are fewer and fewer in each generation who have military experience. This is one way to bring in officers that come from more than 300 colleges with thoughts, values, and diversity of the civilian population."

Col. Eugene Famulare is commander of the Air Force ROTC detachment at SU, which this year had its largest graduating class in nine years, commissioning 16 officers as second lieutenants. He sees the ROTC as an excellent opportunity for young people to get a degree and to serve their country. "If students are interested in serving their country and are interested in what is virtually a guaranteed job after graduation, we offer the opportunity to pursue a degree and a commission in the Air Force," Famulare says.

Various types of merit scholarships are available through ROTC, or students can opt to attend on a non-scholarship basis. "SU is one of the more generous universities when it comes to supporting ROTC," Famulare says. "From the financial aspect, they offer every Air Force and Army ROTC scholarship winner a $6,000 grant. The University works hard to make us feel at home here and they help us attract quality students to come and join our program."

"We do provide students with stipends and it represents a response from the University to the amount of money the government invests in the program here at SU," Cavanagh says. "We think the government is making a significant investment, which makes it possible for a number of students to come here who could not otherwise consider Syracuse at all."

The Army ROTC has a staff of 11, with 9 full-time military personnel and 2 civilians. The Air Force ROTC staff includes 5 military personnel and 2 civilians. ROTC cadets are trained in military history and deportment, in addition to their chosen majors. Cadets are also charged with running their Army
or Air Force Corps, under the guidance of teachers, who are called the cadre. "We teach and train leadership," Eldridge says.

"We do it by not only talking about it, but by putting cadets in roles and positions where they actually lead other cadets."

Joshua Feldmann '98, who graduated in May with a civil engineering degree from the L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science, served as corps commander—the highest ranking cadet—in his last semester in the Army ROTC. He sees ROTC as a positive experience, one that should "always be welcomed on campus.

"I got into ROTC because the scholarship was so good," Feldmann says. "It turns out there's so much more that it has to offer, which is why I stuck with it. I love it—I love the leadership opportunities it provides."

For a cadet, one of the important factors in learning leadership skills is the professionalism of ROTC staff. "The cadre are the guiding force of ROTC," Feldmann says. "The battalion is cadet run, but there needs to be some guidance because cadets come in with no military experience. The cadre are all on active duty and are always there if you need advice. They're all very personable."

ROTC isn't all drilling and saluting and no fun, Feldmann notes. There are many social functions for cadets to enjoy. "Some are sponsored by the Army, such as the military ball that is open to military personnel and their dates," he says. "There is also what's called dining in, for cadets only. It is our shared dining time.

We've had ski trips, white-water rafting trips, and cookouts. There is a lot of camaraderie in the corps."

In celebration of the ROTC's 80th anniversary at SU, the corps plans a number of activities, including a military ball to be held on Parents Weekend in October. Andrea Parini '98, a math major in The College of Arts and Sciences, served as wing commander for the Air Force ROTC this past semester. The wing commander is always a senior and those vying for the position must submit a letter of intent and be interviewed and selected by the cadre. "Our cadet corps is set up as a wing would be on an Air Force base," Parini says. "We have four groups, and within the groups there are squadrons. Within the squadrons, there is staff. Each semester we change positions. The wing commander has to choose staff to fill in all the positions."

It's a big job, Parini admits, but an invaluable part of her training to become an Air Force officer. "It's a really good experience, a way to test your leadership skills," she says. "It's a lot of responsibility; the wing commander is responsible for everything that goes on. Upper classmen are charged with training the underclassmen, to get them ready to go to camp in the summer of their junior year. It's hard to describe how much I've learned in the past four years."

With graduation from SU and commissioning as an Air Force second lieutenant, Parini has begun flight school training to become a pilot.

Women were not permitted to go directly from college to flight school when astronaut Eileen Collins '78 was an SU Air Force ROTC cadet. That rule changed toward the end of her senior year and Collins became one of the first women chosen for flight school immediately upon graduation. "I wanted to fly and I wanted to go into the Air Force from the time I was about 15 years old," says Collins, now a lieutenant
colnel in the Air Force and the first female space shuttle commander. "I joined the ROTC because I wanted to be part of the military; I wanted to be an officer."

Collins sees the SU ROTC program as an important stepping stone in her career. "The whole experience at SU had an impact on me," Collins says. "Being an SU student, living in the dorms, the hours I spent in the library studying, I learned discipline and leadership in the ROTC. It was a way to perfect your leadership skills in a laboratory atmosphere before you had to use them in the real world."

Collins still recalls the first time she made a presentation to her fellow ROTC cadets. "I gave a talk on leadership to about 20 people and I was scared to death," she says. "But since I've graduated from ROTC, I've been an instructor in three different kinds of airplanes, I've been a classroom instructor. When I was honored as the first woman shuttle commander in a White House ceremony, I stood up with the President and Mrs. Clinton and gave a talk. I wasn't even nervous. I wanted to say the right thing to the people in the audience, but I wasn't nearly as nervous as I was in that ROTC class back in 1976."

College of Visual and Performing Arts alumnus Donald Rorke '54, G'64, is president and chief executive officer of Steuben, a division of Corning Incorporated. He was an Army ROTC cadet for two years during his undergraduate studies in industrial design. With Maj. Gen. Max Baratz, Rorke is one of two former cadets named last year to the SU Army ROTC Hall of Fame. For Rorke, ROTC was where he grew up.

"The leadership elements and principles that were taught in ROTC were certainly part of my maturing process," he says. "For me ROTC and design represented the transition from theoretical, purely academic work, to the applied, where you were actually dealing with circumstances that were real. ROTC helped me in the transition from being a young student in a fraternity on a college campus to being an adult with a lot of direct responsibility, dealing with a lot of people and their morale and welfare. After graduation and going on active duty, there you are, faced with a couple hundred people who you're responsible for. There is a dramatic and quick maturing process that takes place because it is so real."

Army Maj. Gen. Max Baratz '56 is a College of Arts and Sciences graduate who recently retired from his post as chief of Army Reserve and commander of the Army Reserve Command. He remembers meeting on the SU Quad "before it was all full of buildings" and when Skytop was nothing but prefabricated structures left over from World War II. Of the 11,000 undergraduate students on campus at the time, 1,500 were ROTC cadets, according to Baratz. "If you were a freshman or sophomore, you could go to a large class and find 20 percent of the class in uniform," he says. "In those days, there was both the draft and a commitment when you left college. I graduated in uniform under my cap and gown and was commissioned as a
second lieutenant that same day. I went into active duty, then came out and went into the Army Reserve. All of that helped me throughout my career. I owned a seat on the Midwest Stock Exchange, now the Chicago Stock Exchange, for years. But I stayed in the reserves all that time."

When the Army prepared for the Desert Shield and Desert Storm operations in the Middle East, Baratz was the first person called back into service, as deputy commanding general of Forces Command to run the Reserve Mobilization. After that, he returned to active duty and was selected as chief of the Army Reserve. "I have 42 years of commissioned service," Baratz says. "I am the oldest serving general officer on active duty in age, time, and grade as a major general."

Being in the Reserves allowed Baratz to pursue two careers and to serve his country at the same time. "My father always told me that democracy is not self-perpetuating," he says. "When I had time to go back to the Army, I did, because I felt I owed that for everything they've done for me. And ROTC at SU was where it all started."

Brig. Gen. Franklin "Judd" Blaisdell, a 1971 graduate of The College of Arts and Sciences, is commander of the 21st Space Wing at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colorado. His command includes 50 units and 40 squadrons in 10 foreign countries and 14 time zones, geographically and organizationally the largest wing in the United States Air Force. The units are responsible for missile warning and space control systems worldwide.

Blaisdell was an ROTC student at SU during the turbulent Vietnam War years in the late 1960s and early 1970s. "It was a little sporty then, wearing your uniform on the Syracuse campus," Blaisdell says. "In 1970, we invited Richard Nixon to speak and that's when SU had all the riots and everything. The campus shut down. I was there with several of my classmates, paired with the Army ROTCs and the stumpies from the forestry school and we had ax handles and two-by-fours because the rioters were threatening to burn down the men's gym. But we prevented that."

Blaisdell recalls many lessons learned from his ROTC advisors at the time. "The detachment at Syracuse University served me well," he says. "I learned leadership up close and personal from some folks who had been in Vietnam, such as taking care of business today, never walking by a mistake, being the one to set a new standard. Those kinds of things stayed with me."

Being in the Air Force ROTC made Syracuse University seem a little smaller and more friendly to Ben Brattebo '01, an environmental engineering student at the L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science. "ROTC brings a group of people together with a common interest," Brattebo says. "It builds a team with good friends, good people that you can trust. It's a big help for a freshman to know such a great group of people."

Brattebo cites the support of the upperclassmen as one of the major benefits to being in the ROTC. He also notes that the ROTC does not have the "in-your-face" discipline he feels is so much a part of the military school experience. "It is a military training environment, where there is higher ranking with discipline and courtesies that have to be followed," he says. "But it's not a situation where if you mess up, they'll yell at you. They will correct you, that's
necessary. We're there to learn. The upperclassmen are more like mentors, they can help you out or answer your questions."

No one in Pia Smith's family had ever been in the military, so an Army ROTC scholarship was the furthest thing from her mind when she was looking for ways to finance a college education. But the terms of the scholarship seemed much too good to pass up. "The Army offered me a four-year merit scholarship to the college of my choice," says Smith, a 1998 graduate of the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. "I wanted to come to Syracuse for the journalism school. The Army told me I could try the scholarship and they would pay 80 percent of my tuition for my first year. If I didn't like it, I could renege on my contract without owing them any obligations. I thought that was a pretty good deal, so I gave it a try."

Smith admits she didn't "have a clue" what she was getting into and was completely unaware of the scope of physical training required of ROTC cadets. That turned out to be a bit of a shock. "On my first day of physical training we had to run two miles," she says. "I had never run two miles before in my life, so I told the captain I didn't think I'd be able to make it. He looked at me and said, 'Cadet Smith, you are going to run these two miles. If you let me catch you, you're going to have to run it again.' I was terrified and began running like you wouldn't believe. At the end, I was exhausted and angry. I called my mother and told her that this ROTC program was not for me. But she said to me, 'Pia, you made it.' And she was right. ROTC taught me that I could do anything once I set my mind to it."

These days, two-mile runs are nothing extraordinary for Smith, who has the stamina to pursue a number of extracurricular activities, including being one of the Otto the Orange mascots on the varsity cheerleading squad. Smith graduated in May and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Army. She is delaying her active duty service so she can continue her education by attending law school, with an eye toward becoming a military lawyer in the Judicial Advocate General Corps. Smith was pleased with her ROTC experience and recommends it to other students. "It's a really great program," she says. "It will teach you a lot about yourself, as well as enhance your ability to work with other people. You learn to pull together as a team in a way that you really won't do in other organizations."