

# Back to the Future:

## A visit to UAlbany evokes memories, smiles

By Alan D. Abbey, B.A.'75



Christine McKnight

**Editor's Note:** In this issue of *UAlbany*, we are delighted to introduce a new column, "The Last Word," an opinion piece focusing on a graduate's strong connection with the University. Alan D. Abbey, president of Abbey Content Services, Ltd., an outsourced content services provider to businesses and organizations, penned the first installment. Abbey lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.

After graduating from the University, I traveled around the U.S. as a journalist. In the 1990s, I was in Albany working as a reporter, and then as business editor, at the *Times Union*. I occasionally visited campus to attend events, conduct interviews and do some reporting.

But I maintained a professional distance and never made an effort to connect emotionally with the campus and the life there. What I saw did concern me, though: The physical infrastructure seemed to be deteriorating, and the air seemed one of defensiveness and hunkering down.

It was only after I moved away from Albany again – this time to Israel – that I began to feel an emotional tug to Albany and, particularly, the University. From time to time, I have run across UAlbany graduates who have made their lives in Israel. I hired one to work with me at *The Jerusalem Post*; then it turned out that a friend of his from UAlbany worked with my wife. By rough estimates, there are at least 50 UAlbany graduates in Israel. We occasionally talk about organizing ourselves into a true Alumni Association chapter, but we haven't gotten there yet.

That strong connection with the University drew me back to campus last fall to lecture to students in the newly accredited degree-granting journalism program directed by Professor William Rainbolt. When I was a student, the journalism program, run by the late Professor William Rowley, was a small subset of the English department. A hidden gem was William Kennedy, an instructor who was still getting established as an author. I have carried his lessons, Rowley's and those of my future *Times Union* colleague Fred LeBrun with me throughout my career.

Before I spoke to the students that day, I took a guided stroll around the campus, and I was pleased to see it looking so good. The burst of new construction in the last 10 years has invigorated the place, and regular maintenance seems to have improved. The new buildings blend in well with the original architecture, and Edward Durell Stone's design is aging more gracefully than I would have imagined.

The students at my lecture were also impressive: up to speed on current events in Israel and the Middle East, and savvy about media in general. It was a great pleasure to see the energy of current *ASP* members who attended my talk, and of the journalism program itself.

If you'll have me, I'll be back.