

# Urban Partnership

## UAlbany Invests in the Neighborhoods Where Its Students Live and Learn

By Paul Grondahl

Photography: Mark Schmidt

“My goal is to make the University at Albany a little more like the University of Albany. I don’t think there’s any more important issue in terms of the civic role of the University today.”

— President Kermit L. Hall

**A**lbany High School freshman Angali Francis had often passed by the University at Albany’s sprawling uptown campus on her way to Crossgates Mall to shop or watch a movie. But she never bothered to ask her parents to pull off Western or Washington avenue to investigate.



“I’d always wanted to go to Boston for college, but now I’m interested in going to UAlbany.”  
— Angali Francis

Neither did classmate Naketa Jones, who felt intimidated by the tall towers and modernistic architecture. “It looked kind of scary,” Jones said. Now, those misperceptions are changing.

Francis and Jones were among the first freshmen from their school to visit the University’s main campus last fall as part of a new initiative called the Albany High School-UAlbany Alliance for Young Talent. The half-day campus program helped them to replace old views with positive opinions about the University. “I’d always wanted to go to Boston for college, but now I’m interested in going to UAlbany,” said Francis, who was born in Pakistan and came to

Albany three years ago with her family. “The professors were nice, the students were happy to be there and the nano-technology buildings were impressive.”

A campus visit for the entire freshman class at Albany High is part of President Kermit L. Hall’s multi-faceted “urban initiative,” which aims to strengthen UAlbany’s historical roles as neighbor, partner and ally with the City of Albany and the Albany School District. The alliance with Albany High is expected to help foster student success at both campuses while supporting far-reaching revitalization efforts planned for the city’s Midtown area. Such neighborhood improvement efforts are a major part of Hall’s dedication to renewing the University’s urban mission.

UAlbany is partnering with the city, other colleges and a major business on the Midtown Plan, which was unveiled last fall with \$600,000 in investments for homeownership. The University (through The University at Albany Foundation) and its five college partners are each investing \$50,000 to assist full-time employees who purchase homes in Midtown. The colleges are Albany Medical College, Albany College of Pharmacy, The Sage Colleges, Albany Law School and The College of Saint Rose. Citizens Bank doubled the impact



Naketa Jones: Her perceptions of UAlbany changed after a campus visit.

with its \$300,000 challenge grant for other eligible buyers. In addition to neighborhood improvement, Hall is emphasizing the role of UAlbany’s students in strengthening the community.

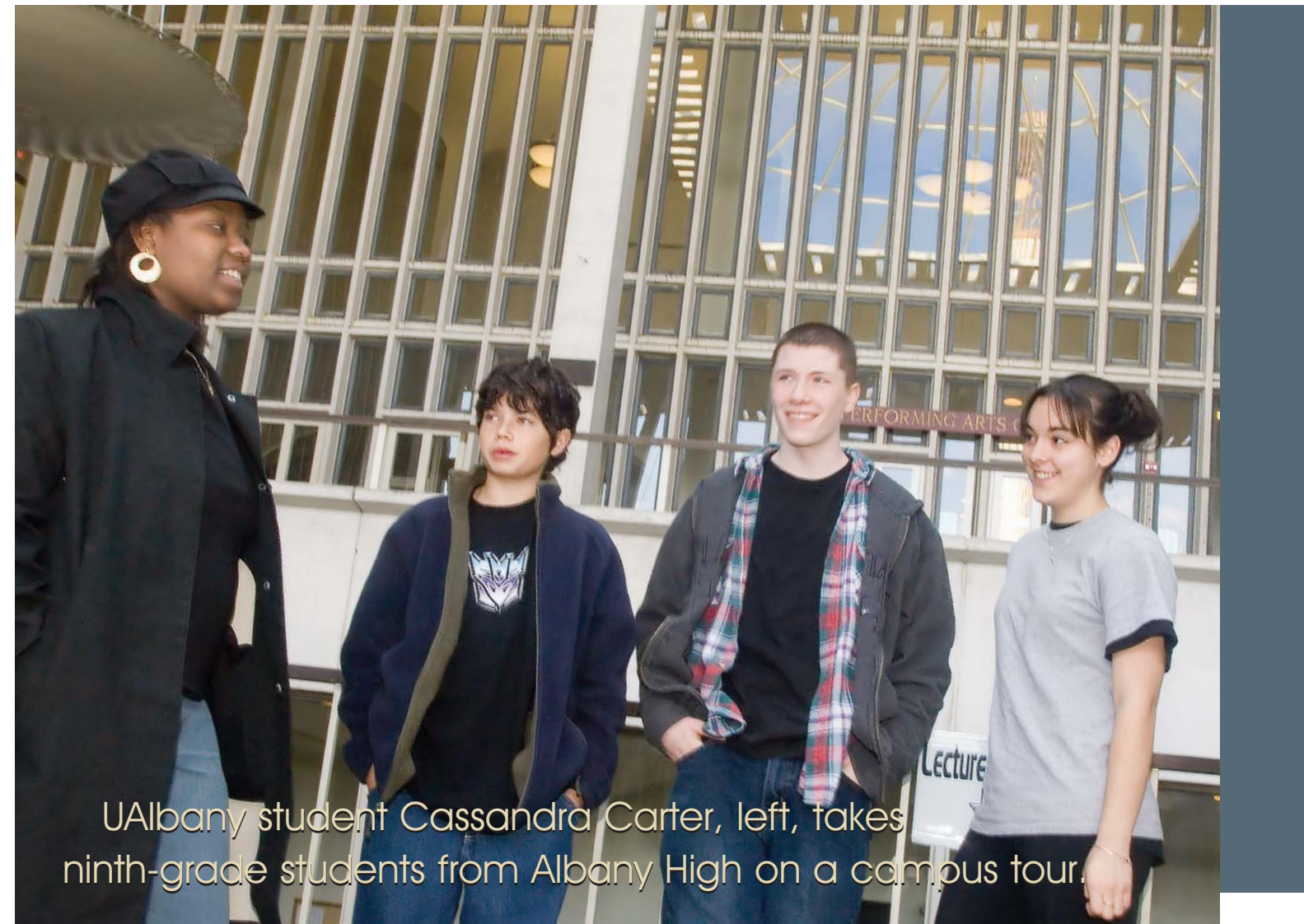
“My goal is to make the University at Albany a little more like the University of Albany,” he said. “I don’t think there’s

any more important issue in terms of the civic role of the University today. We must open the doors of higher education to students for whom, without our help, those doors would remain shut.”

Hall hopes to change a common misperception about UAlbany as a semi-suburban, large and seemingly aloof institution and replace it with an image from an earlier era, when the University had only its Western Avenue campus in the Midtown area and it was the New York State College for Teachers. He said that the University must actively engage its community,

particularly given the fact that thousands of its students live in the Alumni Quadrangle residence halls directly across from Albany High School — which, in turn, is situated just three miles east of the main uptown campus on Washington Avenue. “It’s crucial that we invest in the well-being of those neighborhoods of the city where our students live and learn,” he said.

**T**he march of the Albany High freshmen has already begun. “The corridor of opportunity we long anticipated between Albany High School and UAlbany is now about



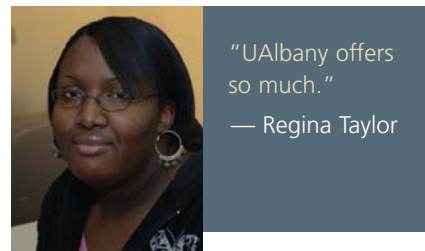
UAlbany student Cassandra Carter, left, takes ninth-grade students from Albany High on a campus tour.

# Neighbor, Partner, Ally



Revitalizing Albany's Midtown Neighborhood: President Kermit L. Hall, right, was joined by College of Saint Rose President Mark Sullivan, left, and The Sage Colleges President Jeanne Neff as he announced UAlbany's participation in the Midtown Employer Assisted Homeownership Program. The \$13 million neighborhood investment effort developed by the City of Albany involves the University, five colleges and Citizens Bank.

to be well traveled," said Albany High School Principal Michael Cioffi. A new group of freshmen comes to campus each Friday. Their visit lasts several hours, includes an orientation program, a campus tour, lunch in the Indian Quad cafeteria and a UAlbany student panel discussion. The ninth graders also bring home a packet of material describing college life in general, as well as the academic programs and opportunities available at UAlbany.



"UAlbany offers so much."  
— Regina Taylor

"We're making a major, long-term commitment to Albany High School and the City of Albany," said James Anderson, the University's new vice president for Student Success, who is helping to develop the initiative. Hall

and Anderson were administrative colleagues at North Carolina State, where they developed a successful collaboration program that targeted at-risk youth in urban areas around that campus.

Despite their proximity, just 14 Albany High graduates from a Class of 2005 that numbered about 500 ended up attending UAlbany, Anderson said. "We need to do our part to show Albany High School students that UAlbany is a very viable next step for them," Anderson said. He said that, with a student body made up of approximately 67 percent minority students, Albany High represents a potential pool of incoming freshmen that could further advance UAlbany's desire to achieve greater diversity in its student body. "One of our biggest obstacles is a perception that UAlbany isn't for them," Anderson said. He said the larger challenge is to convince Albany High students that higher education is within their reach academically and economically, even if nobody in their family has ever attended college.

School District Superintendent Eva

Joseph believes that the freshman trips to UAlbany are a good first step. "Visits such as these make the idea of attending college that much more attainable for our students," Joseph said.

**"P**resident Hall is lighting a fire under our efforts and helping the Albany High students to believe that they can achieve a college education," said Carson Carr, associate vice president for Academic Affairs and head of the University's Educational Opportunities Program. "Albany High students are our neighbors. We should be doing more to get them focused on attending college. The first step is bringing them to campus to show them what we've got here."



"My parents told me it was a really good school and now I've seen it for myself."  
— Thanasi Athanassiadis

So far, the response from the high school students has been encouraging. "My parents told me it was a really good school and now I've seen it for myself," said Albany High freshman Thanasi Athanassiadis. His dad, Georgios, traveled from Greece to attend graduate school at UAlbany and met his future wife, Nancy, there. Both his parents are alumni, and they told their son about the strong academic offerings.

"It's a really good school and offers so much," said Albany High freshman Regina Taylor, who hopes to become a veterinarian. "I liked that people were really friendly, too." ■