Donning a hard hat for the occasion, Donna Baron (pictured above) smiles broadly as she lifts a shovel signifying the official groundbreaking for the Five College Fiber Optic Network on November 4 in Northampton, beneath an underpass at the intersection of Route 9 and I-9. Baron, who is Five College Director of Information Technology, has been working with a committee representing all five campuses to oversee the design and implementation of a fiber optic telecommunications network for the schools. The network, which is expected to be completed in 2006, has been under discussion and in the works for nearly four years.

"After all these years of preparatory work, after all the negotiations with such a wide variety of individuals and institutions," Baron says, "it is wonderfully gratifying to see dirt move and to know that our cable will be placed." Roughly 53 miles in length when complete, the network is expected to provide the schools with the needed bandwidth to support high-speed communication among the five campuses and enable them to connect to carrier services, Internet "backbones," and other regional fiber networks out of Springfield. It will also in future extend to and serve local communities.

For most of the 53 miles, cable is being placed on existing utility poles or in underground conduits. In a few instances where there are no existing facilities for leasing space, the schools are putting in place their own conduits or setting new poles to accommodate the cable. Approximately 80% of the network will be aerial and consist of a loop connecting the schools and a leg linking that loop to a carrier-neutral facility at Federal Street in Springfield, which is the jump-off point to the wider world.

Discussion about the need for more bandwidth began in 2001 when the Board of Directors of Five Colleges, Incorporated identified this as a priority for the schools. Like other colleges and universities nationwide, the Five Colleges are confronted with increasing demand for capacity even as costs for network bandwidth continue to escalate. "Inadequate local infrastructure in our rural area," says Baron, "has contributed to the cost of leased circuits connecting to the nearest significant points of access for Internet 1 and Internet 2." The directors commissioned an infrastructure report that was completed a year later. That report analyzed current networking facilities and projected bandwidth requirements for the foreseeable future, outlined strategies for achieving Internet connectivity, and suggested options for management and governance of those strategies. The

Five College Fiber Optic Network: Building the Future

Five College Opera Project Brings Together Ravel and Caccini on Stage February 3, 4, and 5

A Five College opera is not something easily undertaken. Discussions about the project date to 2001, and have involved a score or more of faculty, including the chairs of music and many members of the music faculties. After several years in the making, however, this collaborative effort on a grand scale among five departments of music and the department of theater at Smith College is now taking shape and preparing to command center stage. The production, cast in November, will involve 23 students and two orchestras comprising students from all five colleges. It also brings together as one production two operas written centuries apart: L’Enfant et les Sortilèges, written by Maurice Ravel in 1925, and La Liberazione de Ruggiero by a relatively unknown composer of the 17th century, Francesca Caccini.

Drew Minter, who was brought in from New York by the planning committee for the opera to serve as staging director, originated the idea of joining the two pieces. He characterizes L’Enfant as "an established masterpiece in the repertoire." The Caccini, on the other hand, he says, "is familiar to nobody, but its music is harmonically interesting for the time, and the libretto quite formalized." While L’Enfant has the advantage of Colette’s libretto in the existing translation by Katherine Wolff, no English translation of the lesser-known Caccini piece exists, so Minter took on that task. "I’ve done a good deal of translation work," he says, "but

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equally important I’ve sung works in Italian so I feel comfortable with how something will actually sound.” In terms of plot, what’s common to both pieces, he says, is the element of magic and transformation, and the moral realization of a young man.

“Basically, what I’ve done,” says Minter, “is to include the Caccini piece in the Enfant stock, having found a00));

Minter, who directed Monteverdi's Orfeo five years ago when it was performed here as a co-production of the UMass Opera Workshop and the Five College Early Music Program, is on the faculty of music at Vassar College. With an established reputation as both a performer and a director, Minter is currently working on several other opera projects in various stages of design and production, including The Marriages of Mozart to be done by Boston Midsummer Opera in August and an undetermined work for Amherst Early Music in July. Those joining him on the production side for the Five College Opera Project include Robert Eisenstein, director of the Five College Early Music program, who is serving as musical director for the Caccini piece, and Stephen Radcliffe, music director of the University Symphony Orchestra for the University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Music and Dance, who is directing the music for the Ravel opera.

At this stage, Minter reports, “we’ve been able to assemble a solid cast, two fine orchestras, and we’re having fun with the design stage of the work.” Scenic design is being handed up by Ed Check of Smith College’s Department of Theatre, assisted by Smith costumer Emily Dunn, who is designing the costumes for both pieces. “I’ve been struck by the fairy tale element in both opera,” Check says. His designs for Enfant take inspiration, he says, from such well-known children's book illustrators as Eric Carle and Leo Lionni. “Both of them use collage and pattern in such an interesting way,” he observes ;and I saw this as an opportunity to try to take two-dimensional art and transform it into something three-dimensional.”

The set for Enfant, Check says, is “purposefully overscaled” to make the child seem as a siren in Ruggiero and as a shepherdess for L’Enfant. "Looking on are the production director, Drew Minter (right) and Stephen Radcliffe, musical director for L’Enfant.

The opera will have three performances in the Mandelhorn Center for the Performing Arts, Theatre 14, at Smith College February 3 and 4 at 8 p.m. and a matinee performance on February 5 at 3 p.m. Tickets are now available at the Smith College Theatre Box Office (413-585-ARTS) $7 for the general public and $5 for students.

L'Enfant

The opera project is being funded by the Five College Music Department, the Department of Theatre, the music departments, the Five College academic deans, and Five Colleges, Incorporated.

More information about the Five College Opera Project is now available at www.fivecolleges.edu/news/news_opera.html

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report, which recommended a collective approach to the problem, formed the basis for an RFP that Five Colleges issued in 2002 seeking to lease, lease to own, or design and build fiber optic facilities that would link the schools to each other and the wider world.

According to Baron, while many other schools are opting for long-term leases of fiber cable, responses to the RFP suggested it would be more economical for the five schools together to design and build their own facility. The directors agreed, and Five Colleges, Incorporated created Five College Net, LLC to manage the new network and two years later signed a contract with Adesta for its construction.

Between then and now, however, there have been nonstop negotiations, says Baron, “with our contractor, with six major utility companies, with seven different municipalities in the region, and with several state agencies.” Most of the work is now complete, she reports, with “only one or two agreements yet to be ironed out.” She credits the support and encouragement of agencies like Pioneer Valley Connect and a number of government officials with helping to pave the way for the network’s completion. “The market has not been eager to bring broadband Internet development to communities in the western portions of the commonwealth,” observed Senator Stan Rosenberg in a letter to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. “It is unfortunate,” he added, “that a region with such an attractive quality of life has not profited more from the technology revolution. . . .” Five College Net Fiber Optic Network is the solution for the University of Massachusetts Amherst and its college partners,” Rosenberg concluded.

Northampton Mayor Mary Clare Higgins was similarly supportive in viewing the network from the perspective of a local community. “The Five College fiber optic backbone will provide . . . essential broadband access for municipalities who are struggling to improve our own infrastructure to meet municipal technology needs . . . over the long term, it may also serve as a key link in a regional fiber optic infrastructure for business development in the region.”

In acknowledging what has been accomplished to date, Baron commented that “it is truly an affirmation of the power of collaboration that a small not-for-profit organization like Five Colleges, Incorporated can play such a critical role in the future of the region’s infrastructure”

Those serving with Baron on the Information Technology Governing Board for the project are: Greg Call, dean of faculty, and Peter Schilling, director of information technology, Amherst College; Gai Carpenter, director of library and information services, Hampshire College; Patricia Albanese, chief information officer and executive director of library, information, and technology services on the Katherine Johnson Hatchet Endowment, Mount Holyoke College; Ruth Constantine, vice president for finance and administration, and Herb Nickles, executive director, information technology services, Smith College; Rosio Alvarez, executive director, information technology, UMass Amherst; and Lorna M. Peterson, executive director, Five Colleges, Incorporated.

The groundbreaking site at I-91 and Route 9.

Fiber Optic Network—continued from cover

This spring, three departmental concerts will feature a seminal work by Trisha Brown (above) called Set and Reset/Reset. The performances are being supported by a grant from the National College Choreography Initiative (NCCI), awarded to the department earlier this year. The NCCI, a Leadership Initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts, is administered by Dance/USA, the national service organization for professional dance. The grant is enabling the department to have Brown’s work taught to an auditioned group of student dancers and performed at three campuses: February 9–11 at Hampshire College; March 9–11 at Amherst College; and April 6–8 at Smith College. The project is being co-sponsored with the Weissman Center for Leadership at Mount Holyoke College, which will host Trisha Brown for a lecture on February 10 as part of a series on Leading Women in the Arts. An icon of modern dance, Trisha Brown is the founding figure of the company that bears her name. Her work is synonymous with a search for the ways movements can be manipulated and the possibilities for developing structure and form. The goal of this project, says Smith College Professor of Dance Susan Waltner, is to provide students with “the experience of stepping inside Trisha Brown’s choreographic process, learning how the use of structure and form bring a dance into being.” Such a comprehensive dance experience, says Waltner, promises to challenge the students as dancers, improvisers, and choreographers.

The work will be set by Abigail Yager, who is both a former member of the Trisha Brown Dance Company and a graduate of the Five College Department of Dance. “We’re delighted to have one of our own alumni to teach Ms. Brown’s trademark silky and sequential core movement sequences,” says Waltner, and then use the original instructions given by Ms. Brown to her company in 1982 as a guide for their own interpretation. “The result will, we think, be an exciting variation on the original choreography.”

Five College Dance Department to Perform Work by Trisha Brown

An Invitation to Work in the Garden in January

The Botanic Garden of Smith College is now recruiting volunteers to carry out a variety of tasks, including leading tours through the greenhouse and gardens; staffing the reception and exhibition area; helping to develop thematic tours; assisting with hospitality for special events such as the opening of the bulb show exhibitions, and the international seed exchange. Volunteers will be asked to attend three full days of training sessions scheduled for January 25, 26, and 27 at the Lyman Conservatory from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The training features a history of the Botanic Garden, tours of the conservatories, review of basic botany and horticulture, introduction of commercial, medicinal, and food plants in the Lyman Plant House; and tips on guiding tours and school groups. Those who complete the training will be expected to serve as volunteers at the Botanic Garden for at least one year and to attend monthly meetings. Applications may be obtained online from www.smith.edu/garden or by phone: 585-2742.
GoDutch! Inspires Tulipmania

Looking ahead to March 2006 when the Five College area will be gearing up for GoDutch!, this fall members of the Five College Area Bed and Breakfast Association rolled up their sleeves and joined area chambers of commerce and other business establishments from Amherst and Northampton to Springfield and Greenfield in a mass planting of tulips.

The resulting and colorful “trail of tulips” will blaze the way to all that will be happening as part of GoDutch!—a region-wide celebration of Dutch art, culture, and horticulture designed to promote the area’s cultural and natural resources. Taking a leadership role in organizing the festival is Museums10, the new collaboration between seven college and university museums and three independent museums in the Five College area. GoDutch! gets under way in early March with the two spectacular bulb displays at the Smith and Mount Holyoke arboretums and continues throughout the spring with a series of exhibitions built around contemporary and classic Dutch works and Dutch ceramics in the museums’ collections. One of the highlights of the series will be “Dutch Treats,” an exhibition at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art featuring original drawings by 13 Dutch illustrators, including Dick Bruna. Among many other related events being planned is a new music/theater piece, Van Gogh’s Ear, being brought to the area in early May from New York City by the Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts (MIFA).

More information about GoDutch! is available online at www.museums10.org.

Candy Talley of the Stone House Farm B&B in Amherst took the lead in ordering more than 4,000 tulip bulbs for the 35 inns that make up the Five College Area Bed and Breakfast Association. The inn gardens will be in full bloom next spring for the region’s first thematically organized event—GoDutch!