

50 Memorable Mason Moments

A lot happens in 50 years. When compiling this list of moments, we tried to focus on events and discoveries that helped put George Mason University in a national spotlight. Enjoy a look back at some of our most memorable moments.

1972

On Friday, April 7, 1972, a group from George Mason College met with Virginia Governor A. Linwood Holton Jr., in Richmond. They were there to witness the governor sign into law Virginia General Assembly Bill H 210, which separated the college from the University of Virginia. With the stroke of a pen, George Mason University, as we know it today, was born.

1975

The Rat

The Rathskellar in Student Union Building I was the place to hang out when not in class.

1977

Student Apartments

The Student Apartments opened in October 1977 and was the university's first on-campus housing. It accommodated 496 students.

1978

George Johnson named president.

1979

In 1979, Mason acquired the International School of Law and moved it to Arlington. A year later the school received accreditation from the American Bar Association. In 2008, the law school made the top of the U.S. News & World Report list of up-and-coming law schools.

1984

Created in 1984, the Clarence J. Robinson Professors Program embodies Mason's commitment to making high-quality education accessible to undergraduate students. Established through a bequest from the late Clarence J. Robinson, the program attracts preeminent academics and award-winning scholars dedicated to teaching undergraduates.

1985

President George Johnson promised that the 1985 Commencement would take place in the Patriot Center "even if we all have to wear hard hats." Since that time, the 10,000-seat arena, which was renamed EagleBank Arena in 2015, has been home to many Mason Commencements, as well as local high school graduations, concerts, and other events. Since 1985, more than 12 million patrons have visited the Fairfax Campus for more than 3,500 events that have ranged from ultimate fighting to the Harlem Globetrotters.

1985

Women's Soccer Championship 1985

On Nov. 24, 1985, George Mason University women's soccer defeated North Carolina 2-0 to claim the first-ever NCAA National Championship at Mason. Pictured here (from left), women's soccer team members Sis Koskinen, Pam Baughman, and Meg Romaine lift the trophy. Mason was the host for the Final Four championship games, and the team played in front of a record crowd of 4,500. Baughman, who was voted MVP, said of the tournament, "I wanted to win the championship, but I really wanted my teammates and my coaches to be champions and they all deserved it. This was my motivation to work hard in training and to play my best in the games."

1986

In 1986, the media descended upon Mason when economist James Buchanan won the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his work on public choice theory. Buchanan led the Center for Public Choice at Mason until his retirement in 2007. He died in 2013.

1987

The George Mason Medal, the university's highest honorary award, was established. Those who receive the award are characterized by a record of service to their community, state, or nation consistent with the level and quality of George Mason's public service in his own time. Mason benefactor John T. Hazel was the first person to receive the medal in 1987. Since then, 39 people have received the recognition.

1987

Founded in 1987, the Early Identification Program supports the academic, career, and personal development of first-generation college-bound students. Each year EIP accepts a new class of rising eighth graders from seven school districts in Northern Virginia. Students "graduate" from the program after their senior year in high school. With its 2020 class, EIP saw 96 percent of students enroll in college. More than 200 EIP alumni currently attend Mason.

1990

After more than 10 years of fundraising and a few years of construction, the Center for the Arts Concert Hall opened on October 6, 1990, with award-winning composer Marvin Hamlisch serving as host on opening night. The star-studded concert featured Jean-Pierre Rampal, Robert Klein, and Roberta Peters, among others. Since then, the venue has welcomed millions for arts experiences with renowned artists from across the globe and has served as a cultural hub for Northern Virginia.

1992

In 1991, Mason biology professor Geoffrey Birchard was asked to take half of a "clutch" of Komodo dragon eggs from the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., because the zoo couldn't handle all of them. In 1992, after incubating for 220 days, the very first Komodo dragon born in captivity outside of Indonesia hatched. Named Kraken, she was on exhibit at the National Zoo until her death in 2004.

1994

In 1994, Mason history professor Roy Rosenzweig founded the Center for History and New Media with early support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the goal of democratizing history and making it accessible to everyone. Rosenzweig's multimedia CD-ROM, *Who Built America? From the Centennial Celebration of 1876 to the Great War of 1914*, was recognized as a finalist in the first Interactive Media Festival and won the James Harvey Robinson Prize of the American Historical Association. The center, which now bears his name, is the largest and most-funded digital humanities and history center in the world. More than a million people rely on its digital tools to teach, learn, and conduct research, and each year more than 16 million people visit its many websites.

1994

In 1994 Mason broke ground on 120 acres in Prince William County that was donated by IBM and local real-estate developers. Originally called the Prince William Institute, that parcel, now the Science and Technology Campus, anchors the Innovation Park in that county and is home to the Biomedical Research Laboratory, a Biosafety Level 3 research facility that is one of only 13 in the country, and an outdoor forensic science research laboratory that is one of only eight in the world.

1996

When the concept of the Johnson Center was first proposed in the late 1980s—combining a library, computer labs, a bookstore, a bank, and dining facilities in one building—the idea was

met with skepticism. The Washington Post glibly called it a "mall of knowledge" in an early review, but the JC, as it is affectionately called, quickly became the heart of the campus.

1996

The George Mason Statue was dedicated on April 12, 1996. Created by Wendy M. Ross, the seven-and-a-half-foot statue shows George Mason presenting his first draft of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, which was later the basis for the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights. Beside George Mason is a model of a writing table that is still in the study at Gunston Hall, Mason's Virginia estate. The books on the table-volumes of Hume, Locke, and Rousseau-represent influences in his thought. Ross later created a different sculpture of Mason for the Mason Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., which was unveiled in 2002.

1998

Mason was the first university to host the World Congress on Information Technology in 1998. The event featured former Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and publisher Steven Forbes of Forbes magazine as keynote speakers for the event.

1999

The Freedom Aquatic and Fitness Center on Mason's Science and Technology Campus is the result of an innovative partnership between Mason, Prince William County, and the City of Manassas and has been heralded as a national model for such endeavors. Freedom opened in September 1999 and remains one of the largest aquatic and fitness centers in the region.

1999

Based at Mason, Fall for the Book is an independent nonprofit literary arts organization that promotes reading by sponsoring year-round events, including a festival held every October. Partners include the Fairfax County Public Library, the Fairfax Library Foundation, and the City of Fairfax. Now in its 23rd year, Fall for the Book is Northern Virginia's oldest and largest festival of literature and the arts.

2000

Gift and Opening of Point of View

In 2000, Edwin and Helen Lynch, longtime supporters of the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution, donated their home and the surrounding 120 acres of woodland in Mason Neck, Virginia, to create the Point of View International Retreat and Research Center. Point of View serves as a "civilian Camp David" and provides a tranquil location

for conflict resolution and collaboration facilitated by the professionals of the Carter School. In cooperation with government partners, the Carter School has invested in facilities to host domestic and international conflict resolution conferences, workshops, and training sessions.

- [General information](#)
- [History](#)

2002

In 2002, Vernon L. Smith won the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences just two years after joining Mason. Founder of the Interdisciplinary Center for Economic Sciences, he went on to continue his pioneering work in the field of experimental economics. Currently professor emeritus of economics and law, Smith returned to campus in November 2016, just shy of his 90th birthday, for a ceremony renaming the Metropolitan Building on the Arlington Campus to Smith Hall.

2003

Mason and the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoo and Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI) joined forces in 2003 to educate the next generation of conservation leaders. During the Smithsonian-Mason Semester, students live at SCBI's 3,200-acre campus in Front Royal, Virginia, and learn directly from prominent conservation practitioners and Smithsonian scientists as they engage in hands-on research that's critical to saving endangered species and preserving biodiversity. Mason is one of the few universities to partner with the Smithsonian Institution in this way.

2004

Mason became the largest public university in Virginia as it entered the new academic year with the largest student head count of any of the commonwealth's four-year institutions. With an overall student enrollment of 28,750, Mason topped Virginia Tech, which had an enrollment of 27,755.

2004

In July, while an intern at Jamestown Rediscovery summer field school, Mason anthropology student Landon Yarrington, BA Anthropology '07, uncovered one of the most significant archaeological finds at historic Jamestown: a wine cellar complete with 10 unbroken glass wine bottles believed to have belonged to Francis Nicholson, governor of Virginia from 1698 to 1705.

2006

Final Four mania struck campus when the Mason men's basketball team became the original "Cinderella" team of March Madness as it made its exciting run from an at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament's Final Four.

2006

Alumna Anousheh Ansari, BS Computer and Electrical Engineering '88, was the world's first female private space explorer. Ansari traveled to the International Space Station in September 2006. An information technology entrepreneur, Ansari and her family established the Ansari X Prize Foundation to encourage private space travel. She shared her experiences on campus during National Engineers Week 2007 and was Mason's Winter Graduation speaker in 2012.

2006

Mason has hosted a number of television tapings. In 2006, Robert DeNiro and Matt Damon came to the Fairfax Campus to promote their film *The Good Shepherd* on a special taping of MSNBC's *Hardball* with Chris Matthews. In 2016, CNN chose Mason as the location for its televised town hall *Guns in America*, hosted by Anderson Cooper and featuring then-president Barack Obama.

2006

Naming of the Volgenau School

In 2006, the School of Information Technology and Engineering officially became the Volgenau School of Engineering in honor of a \$10 million gift to the school from Ernst and Sara Volgenau. The couple's gift was the largest-ever individual commitment to the university at the time. Ernst Volgenau, who founded SRA International, served as rector of the George Mason University Board of Visitors from 2007 to 2012. The Volgenau School became a part of the College of Engineering and Computing upon the college's creation in 2021.

- [Naming via College history page](#)
- [Philanthropy News article from Mason press release](#)

2007

The George Mason University Observatory on the roof of Research Hall officially opened on January 24, 2007. In 2011, the custom-built 32-inch Ritchey-Chretien telescope was installed by crane and had its "first light"-its first celestial observation after installation-on the evening of July 9.

2007

In 2007, Edward Maibach came to Mason to create Mason's Center for Climate Change Communication. Now in its 15th year, the center has been studying public perceptions of climate change issues and identifying effective ways to engage the public and other stakeholders on those issues. The center's national public opinion polls conducted with Yale have helped monitor attitudes and awareness about the climate crisis for more than a decade.

2007

Mason chemistry professor Abul Hussam won the \$1 million Grainger Challenge Prize for Sustainability Gold Award from the National Academy of Engineering for his inexpensive water filtration system designed to remove arsenic from drinking water in his native Bangladesh. His invention, the Sono Filter, made with easily available materials, also garnered him the Bangladesh American Society for Humanity Award and led Time magazine to name Hussam one of the 2007 Global Heroes of the Environment.

2007

The 2007 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and former vice president Al Gore "for their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change." University Professor and IPCC member Jagadish Shukla was a lead author on a chapter in the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report titled Climate Change 2007, The Physical Science Basis.

2007

Establishment of the Aspiring Scientists Summer Internship Program

The Aspiring Scientists Summer Internship Program (ASSIP) was founded in 2007 by Lance Liotta, Emanuel Petricoin, and Amy Adams of Mason's Center for Applied Proteomics and Molecular Medicine. The eight-week summer program provides high school and undergraduate students with hands-on research opportunities in a variety of scientific areas. Interns work under the direct guidance of faculty researchers at George Mason University and partner institutions on projects that can result in participants being published in scientific journals and other academic recognition.

- [ASSIP general information](#)
- [ASSIP FAQ page](#)

2008

In 2008, just two days into analyzing data as part of an astronomy field experience, Lisa Horne, BS '09, then a junior majoring in astronomy at Mason, discovered a galaxy. "There was this white blob on my screen. I had no idea what it was, but I knew it was unusual. Then a faculty member leaned over my shoulder and said, 'That's a galaxy. Congratulations.'"¹¹¹ Horne was part of a select group of undergraduate students involved in the Arecibo Legacy Fast ALFA (ALFALFA) Survey team, a major national project looking to map the sky. Her galaxy, called AGC #310842 (the number is based on when it was discovered) and sub-named "Lisa H," is about 500 million light years away.

2010

Opening of the Biomedical Research Lab

In 2010, the Biomedical Research Laboratory opened adjacent to the Science and Technology Campus, one of 14 biocontainment laboratories in the United States. The \$50 million, 52,000-square-foot facility, managed by Mason's Center for Infectious Disease Research, offers biosafety level-3 labs to researchers working on the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of infectious diseases as well as emerging and potential biothreat agents.

2011

In 2011, Mason researcher Alessandra Luchini was named to Popular Science's Brilliant 10 for her work on Nanotrap technology as part of a team at the Center for Applied Proteomic and Molecular Medicine using that technology to detect cancer. Luchini's team subsequently applied their research to create a nanotechnology to measure a sugar molecule in urine that identifies tuberculosis with high sensitivity and specificity.

2012

Mason PhD student Nathan Secrest became the talk of the science world in 2012 when he discovered one of the lowest mass supermassive black holes ever observed in the middle of a galaxy. Secrest, PhD Physics '14, made his observation as part of the research group led by Shobita Satyapal, a professor in Mason's School of Physics. The results and image were published in the July 1, 2012, issue of the *AstroPhysical Journal*.

2013

Mason formally joined the Atlantic 10 Conference on July 1, 2013, and began conference play in all sports starting in the 2013-14 school year. The move to the basketball-driven conference represented a huge step up in competition for Mason, which had been an original member of the Colonial Athletic Conference since that league's inception in 1985.

2014

First K-9 Officer

Lucy, a two-year-old purebred English springer spaniel, became Mason's first K-9 officer for Mason's University Police after she graduated from explosive ordnance detection school. Lucy could detect a multitude of bombs, firearms, and ammunition.

2014

Mason Korea launched in Songdo, South Korea, in 2014 as part of the Incheon Global Campus, a national project established by the Korean government and Incheon Metropolitan City to innovate the Korean education system and nurture the next generation of global leaders.

Mason Korea offers degrees in six undergraduate disciplines and encourages Korea-based students to experience one year of their college studies in the United States. More than 700 students, representing more than 20 countries, are currently studying at Mason Korea.

2015

Doc Nix and the Green Machine, Mason's pep band, topped the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Best Pep Bands list in 2015. The Green Machine's affinity for adding rappers, singers, and electronic violins to the pieces it performs is just one of the reasons the association cited in naming the band number one. This inclusive multidisciplinary arts ensemble is composed of musicians, dancers, dramatists, visual artists, choreographers, arts/business managers, educators, and music enthusiasts.

2015

Mason engineering students Viet Tran, BS Electrical Engineering '15, and Seth Robertson, BS Electrical Engineering '15, figured out that a thumping bass can do considerably more than getting a party started when they concocted a fire extinguisher that uses low-frequency sound waves to douse flames as their senior design project. The media went crazy for the idea, and the duo received calls from around the world. Mason helped the inventors obtain a patent, they started an LLC, and the two students later showcased their invention on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon.

2015

Mason's proximity to Washington, D.C., and Virginia's status as an important swing state have made George Mason University a popular campaign stop for local, state, and national political candidates. In the 2015-16 academic year alone, Bernie Sanders, Tim Kaine, John Kasich, Hillary

Clinton, and Barack and Michelle Obama visited Mason's Fairfax Campus. Mitt Romney, Bill Clinton, Ralph Nader, John McCain, John Kerry, Joe and Jill Biden, and many others have made appearances in election seasons past.

2015

Mason planetary scientist Mike Summers was part of an international team that helped propose, plan, and execute NASA's Pluto-bound New Horizons Pluto-Kuiper Belt Mission. NASA's New Horizons flyby of Pluto, the most distant object ever visited by spacecraft, happened in the summer of 2015. "New Horizons helped humanity complete its first reconnaissance of the solar system-our backyard in space," said Summers, who began studying Pluto in 1985 while he was a graduate student at CalTech.

2016

In 2016 Mason moved into the top level of research institutions in the country according to the rankings from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education after a review of 2013-14 data. Mason's total research expenditures grew from \$77 million in 2008-09 to \$99 million in 2013-14. In 2021, Mason's research funding surpassed \$218 million.

2016

With a gift of \$30 million to support the law school-the largest gift in Mason's history-the Board of Visitors approved renaming the school the Antonin Scalia Law School in 2016. Five U.S. Supreme Court justices joined the Mason community two years later to honor their late former colleague and the school's namesake at a celebration that culminated in the unveiling of a new statue of Scalia on the Arlington Campus.

2016

A \$10 million gift from businessman and philanthropist Dwight Schar in 2016 inspired the School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs to become the Schar School of Policy and Government. That same year, Mason began partnering with the Washington Post on the Washington Post-Schar School Poll, which combines the Post's first-rate reporting with the intellectual capital of Schar School experts to conduct high-quality political surveys locally and nationwide.

2016

In 2016, Mason students began a research project looking into the legacy of George Mason IV and the untold stories of those he enslaved. The findings resulted in the "Enslaved Children of George Mason" project, an online archive that help reveal the lives of the enslaved people who lived and worked at Gunston Hall, Mason's home in Northern Virginia. The project has

expanded in scope to the "Enslaved People of George Mason" and has led to the creation of the Center for Mason Legacies and the Enslaved People of George Mason Memorial on Wilkins Plaza, which aims to provide a more thorough view of the contradictory life led by the university's namesake.

2017

The 50,000-square-foot Potomac Science Center opened on the waterfront in Belmont Bay, Virginia. The center is home to the College of Science's Potomac Environmental Research and Education Center and other research initiatives.

2017

A senior design team of five Mason bioengineering students (now alumni)-Yasser Alhindi, Racha Salha, Mona Elkholy, Abdelrahman Gouda, and Ella Novoselsky-created a 3D-printed prosthetic bow arm that allowed fifth-grader Isabella Nicola, who was born without a left hand, to play the violin in 2017.

2018

More than 600 spectators crowded into the ballroom at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., to hear Homeland stars Claire Danes and Mandy Patinkin, as well as director Lesli Linka Glatter and co-creator and executive producer Howard Gordon, discuss the characters and the context of the show with General Michael V. Hayden. Hayden, the former head of the NSA and the CIA who is now a distinguished visiting professor at Mason's Schar School of Policy and Government, served as a consultant for Showtime's hit show.

2018

In 2018 Amazon selected Northern Virginia for its HQ2, knowing the region could generate top tech talent. In anticipation, Mason announced plans to transform the Arlington Campus and build a new building that would house the Institute for Digital InnovAtion and the new School of Computing, as well as anchor the innovation corridor there. Mason also pledged to invest more than \$360 million to grow the number of students graduating from computing programs, hire new faculty, and expand research and innovation in high-tech fields.

2018

Mason and Northern Virginia Community College partnered to create ADVANCE, which provides streamlined pathways to more than 100 four-year degrees, saving students time and tuition dollars. Cited by the Chronicle of Higher Education as "one of the nation's most successful transfer partnerships," ADVANCE also received the John N. Gardner Institutional Excellence for Students in Transition Award presented by the National Resource Center for the First Year

Experience and Students in Transition, and Education Dive named ADVANCE the Partnership of the Year for its four-year cloud computing degree pathway with Amazon Web Services. More than 1,800 students participate in the program, which graduated its first students in 2020. Mason plans to expand the successful partnership to include other Virginia community college systems.

2019

Starship robots first rolled onto the Fairfax Campus in January 2019, delivering food from campus eateries to hungry students, faculty, and staff. Mason was the first college campus to partner with Starship Technologies, and other universities soon followed. During the pandemic, the Starship robots helped many in the campus community keep their "social" distance.

2020

In 2020, Mason's School of Music was renamed the Reva and Sid Dewberry Family School of Music in honor of the Dewberrys' lifetime legacy of giving. In addition to the most recent \$1.8 million Dewberry gift to Mason for a scholarship endowment, prior contributions include creating the Linda Apple Monson Scholars Endowed Fund and spearheading the Steinway Initiative, which elevated the school's status to an All-Steinway School in 2007. Their support for engineering led the Volgenau School of Engineering to name the Department of Civil, Infrastructure, and Environmental Engineering for them.

2020

Naming of the Carter School

Founded in 1981 as the Center for Conflict Resolution, the present Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution is the world's largest degree-granting institution dedicated to peace and conflict studies. What began as a center (1981-1989) grew into an institute (1989-2012) and eventually became the first school to have four degree programs at the bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and graduate and professional certificate levels. The school was renamed the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution on July 1, 2020, to honor the Carters' lifelong dedication to the peaceful resolution of conflict and to mark the beginning of a new era of the school's leadership in conflict resolution.

- [Status of school and decision to rename](#)
- [History](#)
- [On the school being named for the Carters](#)

2021

Mason was responsible for vaccinating more than 110,000 individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic, a testament to its longstanding commitment to public health. The Emergent Ventures Fast Grants program, led by Mason economist Tyler Cowen, BA Economics '83, helped streamline research into the coronavirus, and Mason researchers innovated to help protect the Mason community and others, including by developing diagnostic and antibody tests.