

# AU's Latest Click

Andrews Unveils New-Look Web Design

By Elizabeth Lechleitner

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**If You've Visited** Andrews University's online home since April 19, you might have blinked and thought you'd typed in the wrong url, thanks to its newly streamlined features and synchronized format. But then you would have noticed links to Howard Performing Arts Center, the Passion Play, and other familiar Andrews landmarks and goings-on. Perhaps you clicked on the new calendar and realized upcoming events are finally organized and easily accessible—so long to the days of wrestling with wrinkled, bescribbled paper calendars! You might also have clicked your way to the future students' page and smiled over Enrollment Vice-President Stephen Payne (a.k.a. the "gum guy") and his trademark handful of minty-fresh Wrigley's and cinnamon-spiced Big Red. At the very least, you must have admitted [www.andrews.edu](http://www.andrews.edu) has come remarkably far since **GERALD MAIER** (BS '95, MS '00), a student with an eye for the future, launched "Our Dear AU" into cyberspace in the early '90s.

After Maier pioneered that first rudimentary website, Jerry Burr and **SHARON PREST** (BS '96, MA '99) orchestrated two subsequent overhauls which have accounted for the university's online presence until this April 19. As web-coordinator and assistant web-coordinator respectively, Burr and Prest began that first redesign in the fall of '98. It was around this time that the Diaspora-ed web team moved to one official, central location: University Relations. There, Burr and Prest collaborated with **MARK COOK** (BFA '99), **ROBERT MASON** (BFA '90), and **CHRIS WILSON** (BS '00) to update [www.andrews.edu](http://www.andrews.edu). With Dreamweaver, Photoshop, and much dedication to the project, the team worked through many late nights during the final days of the redesign. None of the team were professional web designers, so Prest refers to that first redesign as a "learn-as-you-go" process—one that was "exciting to work on" despite the inevitable glitches. Even though Prest left the website project during the fall of '00 to teach full-time in the College of Technology, she has kept tabs on subsequent website redesigns. Speaking of April 19th's unveiling, she says, "The new design is exciting to see, not only because it's much more user-friendly, but also because it gives Andrews a professional-looking web presence."

And that look is intentional. According to Rebecca May, director of University Relations, a website's appear-

ance is as important as its content when it comes to snagging and satisfying web surfers. While current students, faculty, and even alumni might be willing to wade through misleading links and inconsistent design formats to access online information, virtual visitors aren't likely to be as patient. In fact, May estimates websites have a "New York minute"—about 15 seconds—to interest internet guests, especially prospective students and their parents. Thus, the redesign aimed to transform Andrews University's website into a visually stimulating marketing tool meant to attract this potential audience. This meant adding dynamic, distinctive, and updatable





graphics; brief student and faculty profiles; vibrant color photos and illustrations; a live webcam; and much more. Also included with the recent launch is a President's Page designed to make Dr. Andreasen more accessible to current and prospective students. Of the redesign, Andreasen says, "[Andrews University's website] is now a convenient place to visit. So browse, discover, check out our resources, and apply!"

But the benefits of the redesign are not purely aesthetic. One of the most innovative aspects of the revamped website is that it allows university departments to edit their respective pages' content without having any programming knowledge. Prior to the overhaul, it was virtually impossible for anyone other than Martin Lee, his authorized assistant, or a hacker, to edit site content. This meant department heads needed to hire student workers with programming know-how to make all updates—even ones as simple as switching the digits of faculty phone numbers (unfortunately, hackers were never too interested in updating English professors' contact info or correcting misspellings in online *Student Movement* articles). But such students would inevitably graduate, leaving page after webpage lamentably neglected. The result: old, inaccurate, and incomplete information—a "totally unacceptable, extremely outdated, and very understaffed system," according to Patricia Spangler, assistant University Relations director.

But thanks to the new Content Management System (CMS), that is about to change. Soon, any authorized

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▶ *Andrews University was the first Adventist institution to establish an online presence*

▶ *The new server is capable of handling 160 page requests per second (800 per second for images)*

▶ *Approximately 15,000 pages make up the AU website*

▶ *The site receives roughly 75,000 hits per day (about 28,000,000 hits per year)*

▶ *The new webcam is perched atop the James White Library*  
[www.andrews.edu/life/webcams/](http://www.andrews.edu/life/webcams/)

▶ *Under ideal conditions and depending on your connection, the new website should load twice as quickly as the old one*

person can log on to the CMS and access a Microsoft Word-like editing interface. No matter if XHTML, CSS, Java, and Perl sound like geekspeak; with CMS's intuitive toolbar and instructional headings, amateur editors can not only revise existing content using this program, they can also easily add additional text, graphics, and links. While Lee admits departments may need an initial period of training, afterward he expects they'll be able to keep their content up-to-date without his looking over their shoulder. After three years of essentially being the website's sole coder, programmer, coordinator, and designer, Lee breathes a sigh of relief at these prospects. Speaking of the redesign, he says, "It's been a long time coming." Of course, there are some limits to the freedom departments will now have with their sites. For example, if the Psychology department decides it wants Freudian couch wallpaper, it will soon realize certain functions, fonts, and options have been blocked to ensure their modifications consistently compliment the website's overall design format/scheme.

In fact, consistency was one of the main goals for the new site. And for good reason. Prior to April 19, haphazardly-formatted and incongruently-

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designed pages resulted in a mishmash, reflecting several years' worth of sincere but here-and-there revisions. Department pages featured such varied designs, according to Spangler, that a virtual visitor would hardly have recognized these pages were part of the same institution. And first impressions are essential, since a website serves as an institution's "face to the world." Given that the website had only undergone two revisions since its initial launch, Spangler emphasizes that it was overdue for a comprehensive redesign—especially since comparative sites get a "reskinning" every one to two years. Andrews University's website hadn't received one for five years. Spangler cringes when she tells me this, as though it's

University Relation's skeleton in the virtual closet. She's quick to add, however, that this was not an intentional attention lapse. Institutional websites comparable to Andrews University's typically run on a staff of at least four persons: a programmer, a coordinator, and two designers. Since Andrews' website was running on, at the very most, one and a half persons—Martin and whoever he could finagle for momentary help—regular and comprehensive upkeep was simply impossible.

Now that AU's website has received its long-anticipated and much-needed virtual face-lift, Lee and Spangler expect the redesign to be an ongoing, dynamic process. By the time you read this issue of *Focus*, Lee and his assistants will have overhauled the Alumni page's design in keeping with the main site while simultaneously adding several new and promising features. The current Alumni page features a directory of former students and their contact information, but Lee hopes to expand the existing system to make it more functional and intuitive. Tami Condon, Alumni director, says other plans for the site include offering a line of Alumni merchandise, and making available online registration and meal ticket purchase options for

## <code-dependent>

Plummeting 3000 feet from a loose Cessna hatch isn't a risk regularly associated with a career in website design and development. However, that's exactly what Martin Lee, AU's website coordinator and the man responsible for its recent redesign, faced while shooting an aerial view of campus for the web. "I was buckled in pretty well," Lee says, unruffled.

This comes from a guy who found developing International Speedway Corporation's website fairly "routine" work. With more than thirty people on that job at critical moments, Lee knows what it's like to finish an intense web design project. Just prior to coming to Andrews three years ago, Lee worked at Bayshore Solutions in Tampa, Fla. Some of their major accounts included the State of Florida, Disney, Chase Manhattan, and Peoplesoft.

Tired of dealing with the sometimes-ridiculous requests of multiple corporate clients, the Canadian native felt God's call to leave his position as Creative Director, and come to Andrews as the university's web coordinator. Of course, working as practically the sole designer and developer of a sorely outdated [www.andrews.edu](http://www.andrews.edu) turned into a considerable undertaking. Yet despite the increased workload and the challenge of satisfying an eclectic audience—ranging





Homecoming events, Chapter meetings, and other alumni events. She also hopes to add postings of networking and internship possibilities in an effort to connect current students with alumni. And, while Lee refuses to name a time more specific than “sometime this summer,” he promises that *FOCUS* magazine will soon get its very own webpage, which will be linked to the Alumni page. “We want the new Alumni website to be a beneficial resource

for you,” Condon says, urging any alumni who have further suggestions for the page’s update to email her at [alumni@andrews.edu](mailto:alumni@andrews.edu).

So far, feedback on the redesign has been enormously positive. Aside from finding the layout and use of color “very attractive,” a ‘94 Andrews alumnus was impressed with the current news section, and “immediately drawn to one of the articles.” Current Andrews’ graduate student Darrell Rohl writes, in an email to Lee, “[The redesign] reflects amazingly well on Andrews University and lends itself to more intuitive navigation.” This is exactly what redesigners hoped to hear, especially since “intuitive navigation” was a major goal of the overhaul. Both Lee and Spangler emphasize their aim to revamp the old navigation system, which was often confusing and misleading. “Intuition is the key to any successful navigation system,” says Spangler, noting Lee’s efforts to eliminate dead-end clicking and facilitate a user-friendly, relevant, and rewarding system not only for current students, faculty, and alumni, but also for the general public.

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from Burmese students to Berrien Springs’ parents—Lee doesn’t regret following God’s plan and changing jobs. Quite the contrary, he enjoys “the freedom to coordinate both visual and technological innovation” his position at Andrews has granted.

The twenty-five-year-old Lee attributes his choice of careers to the influence of his older brother, who likewise majored in computers, and his father, who tinkered with the card-punch, room-sized wonders of the early 1960s. When in 1998 Martin enrolled at Canadian Union College to pursue studies in computer science, he had only one reservation. “I didn’t like calculus,” Lee confesses about a course vital to computer programming. But after transferring to Andrews University his sophomore year, he registered for math professor Lynette Weldon’s Calculus class and suffered through sines, cosines, and tangents. It was about this time when Lee cut short his college career to avoid amassing



school loans, and plunged into a very promising job market.

Now, as Andrews University’s full-fledged web-coordinator, Lee enjoys the benefit of attending one free class per semester, which moves him ever closer to eventual graduation. While looking forward to that day, Lee admits that in the web design business “it’s more about your portfolio than your degree.”

But before you label Martin Lee an unredeemable computer geek eternally locked before a screen, it must be noted that he does participate in some truly wireless hobbies, which his “arduous” workload of late has kept at bay. With the success of AU’s website redesign now chronicled in his portfolio, Lee certainly deserves a vacation—one he will probably spend mountainbiking, skiing, or doing generally “anything outdoors.” And you thought he’d spend his holiday eating cold pizza while mastering advanced-level computer games.