

LADIES
1905
HALL

East Hall Magic

Thanks to the concentrated efforts of Augustana's Residence Life team, new, and possibly unlikely friendships are blossoming inside the walls of this 106-year-old building.



From left to right: Rollie Steck, Jon Ask, Casey Diggs, Jamie Martin and Mark Kuellman.

There's something happening on the fourth floor of East Hall.

Known for its distinct architecture, odd-shaped rooms, narrow staircase, round windows and creaky floors, the historic Hall, built in 1905 has traditionally been home to study-conscious upperclassmen.

Over the years, East (formerly known as Ladies Hall) has become a sought-after living space because of its "Responsible Living" status – a classification given to halls whose residents design and implement living rules, such as quiet hours and room policies.

From that perspective, this semester is no exception – 21 male students, mostly juniors and seniors – occupy the rooms on East Hall's fourth floor.

Who those students are, though, is another story all together. The Hall's fourth floor residents include: this year's Homecoming King, an aspiring track and field star, a budding government relations protégé from Germany, a future seminarian, and an accounting major well-known for his cooking abilities. They are an odd cast of characters, to say the least. Yet, thanks to their self-confessed openness, and the efforts of Augustana's Residence Life team to help foster friendships and develop a sense of community among hall residents, the guys on 'Fourth Floor East' have become much more than just neighbors. They've become friends.

"Prior to this year, I'd never seen any of these guys [on campus]," said Casey Diggs, a junior business and sport management major

from Brooklyn Park, Minn., pointing to his neighbors: Senior Jamie Martin, an outgoing computer science and business major from Valley City, N.D.; Rollie Steck, a quiet senior from Canton, S.D. majoring in accounting; Jon Ask, a seminary-bound senior from rural southwest Minnesota majoring in religion and psychology; and the jovial Mark Kuellman, a senior government and international affairs major from Potsdam, Germany.

The reality is, the guys say, that because of their different interests and personalities, the likelihood that they would connect on campus without living next door to each other was slim-to-none.

Before moving in, Diggs, a member of Augustana's track team, remembers wondering what the living dynamics in East Hall would be like.

"I didn't know what to expect, but it's worked out really well," he said.

The camaraderie, friendships and sense of community that develops in residence halls happens, Augustana officials say, because of intentional efforts that begin when students are freshmen. Through efforts such as StrengthsQuest, an online assessment to help students determine their top interpersonal strengths and learn how to use them to achieve academic, career, and personal success, to other group activities such as the annual "Semester Shut Down," Augie's residence life staff are able to look far beyond the surface to really learn about and support each student.

"There aren't many students I don't know, or know of – that comes in handy when you're trying to work on building communities," said Tracy Riddle, associate dean of students. "That's part of the hands-on nature of Augustana. We're constantly talking about who we know, what they need and how we can help them. That's

a luxury of being on a campus the size of Augustana. Between Jim [Bies, vice president for Student Services and dean of students] and me, we have more than 50 years of experience in higher education. We've been here so long because we believe in the power a small campus can offer in terms of helping students succeed – both academically and socially.”

In the case of Fourth Floor East, Hall Director Chrissy Bendel knew it would be important to balance the diversity of personalities with an adaptable and innovative peer advisor.

Peer advisors are student staff members who serve an invaluable role in developing and maintaining high community standards in each of the College's residence halls. They are managers, guides and a support resource for the residents living on each floor. Peer advisors help develop and implement floor rules, enforce policies, monitor the goings-on of floor residents and facilitate community building activities.

“When you have a talented soul like Jamie [Martin], there's no limit to what you can do. He doesn't have a critical bone in his body. We appointed him to be a peer advisor in East because we wanted Jamie to use his skills to build a community,” Riddle said.

For Martin, the task has been challenging, and fun.

“Early on, I was really nervous because I wanted everyone to get along,” said Martin. “So we started with some group activities – we did a night out at Applebee's and we formed a team for the ‘Dog-Eat-Dog’ intramural competition. From there, everyone just sort of adopted this openness and willingness to talk to everyone.”

The Power of Food

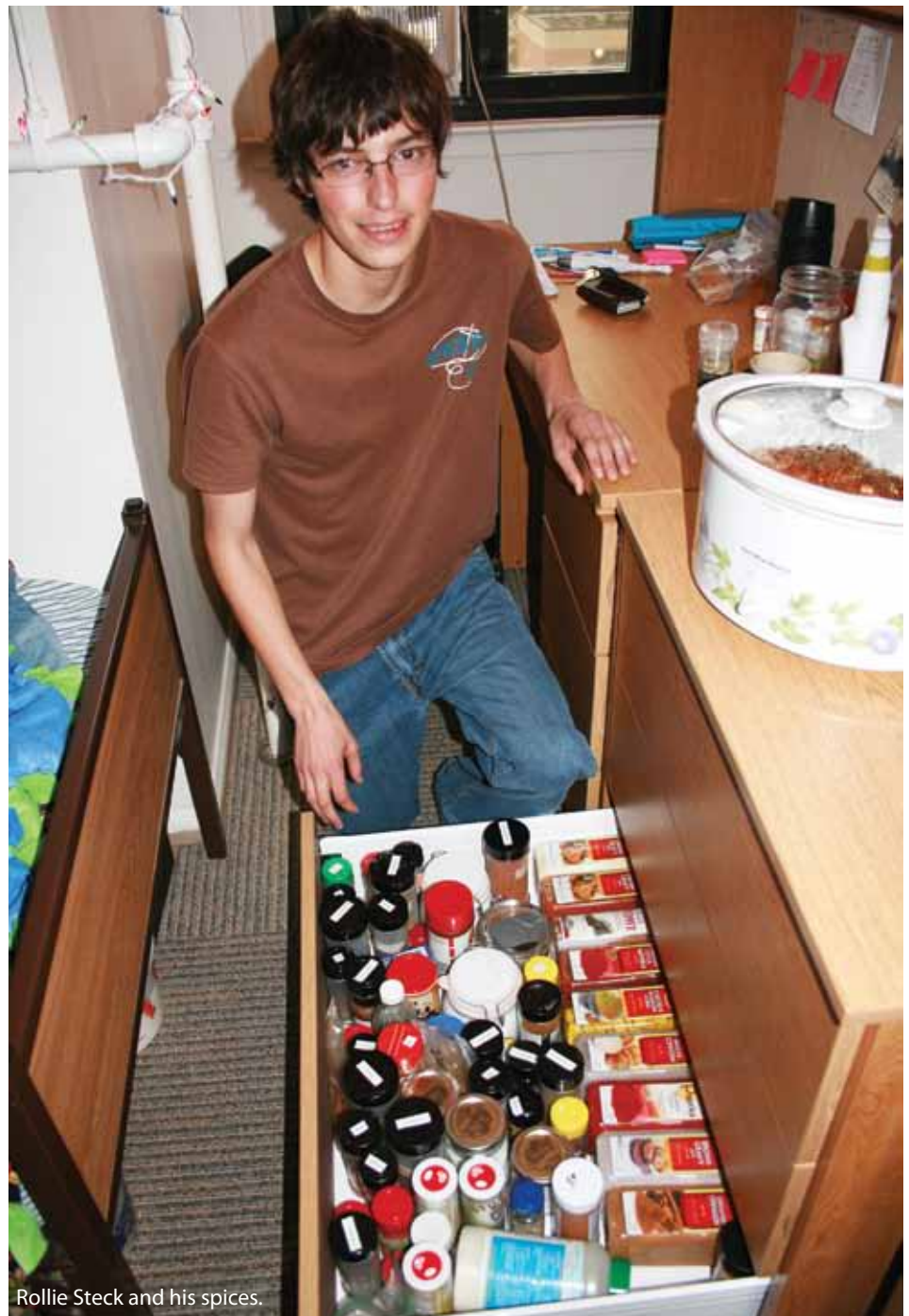
Nothing fosters conversation and friendship like food, the guys on Fourth Floor East say.

Enter Steck – the accounting major with a knack for cranking out home-cooked meals from his dorm room.

Dubbed the “Floor Chef,” Steck uses his crock pot and an array of spices to make hearty meals large enough to feed the entire floor. From roasted chicken and vegetables to a pork loin with mashed potatoes and gravy, Steck's entrees serve as another catalyst for camaraderie among East Hall's fourth floor residents.

Lessons for the Future

In less than a year, the bulk of East Hall's fourth floor residents will be Augustana alumni. They will work at careers in office buildings, join social organizations, live in neighborhoods and worship in congrega-



Rollie Steck and his spices.

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– Tracy Riddle,
Associate Dean of Students

tions across the globe.

And, thanks to the experiences they've had in a 106-year-old building, they'll have the know-how they need to build strong relationships with colleagues and neighbors.

“Living here has helped develop the skills we'll need to build relationships with all sorts of people – both in the workplace and in our daily lives,” said Ask. “It's really been great.”