

Professor's website entertains with tales and 'toons

By Meghan Ross
Staff Reporter

The office of Robert Jantzen overflows with math books and stacks of papers—tests and quizzes he still needs to grade from his differential equations and linear algebra classes. Posters of Einstein, his idol, decorate the walls and “Theory of Relativity” lies on his desk, the same book he checked out of his local library when he was in high school simply for pleasure. A certificate for winning last spring’s faculty research award is tacked outside his door. Needless to say, his office looks like that of a stereotypical math professor.

But Jantzen’s personal and academic homepages reveal more about the man than a fascination with math- and science-related subjects. Created in 1998, his website shows a quirky side, including sketches for annual Christmas cards, hundreds of recipes, self-made cartoons and links to favorite publications and organizations, including the Philadelphia Inquirer and WXPB.

“I was unable to sleep one night and was surfing around the Internet,” Jantzen says. “I saw a site where you could buy your own domain name, and then I got started. It’s a creative outlet. You don’t get that with math.”

Since that sleepless night, his site



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Dr. Bob's website is a digital trove of his varied interests: Italian and Armenian culture (especially food), mathematics, poetry, cartoons and more.

Since that sleepless night, his site has exploded. Beyond recipes and favorite media outlets, the site features a bulleted overview of his life, with details not only about what he has been doing academically (such as receiving his degree in theoretical physics from Princeton, followed by UNC Berkeley for post-graduate studies), but also personal details such as: "hair worn in a ponytail with the fashion of the times" and "gets drunk for the first time to see what all the fuss is about."

He also mentions attending Woodstock in 1969—a detail his students may be surprised to hear, considering Jantzen's straight-laced appearance. But back then, the professor still wore a ponytail and bell-bottoms. Donning the style of the times, he and three high school friends hitchhiked their way to the concert, saw Joe Cocker and Country Joe & the Fish and joined the anti-Vietnam war cheers in the

cow fields of Woodstock along with 500,000 other people.

In recent years, Jantzen has taken up cooking, and he illustrates the hundreds of recipes on his website. His online cookbook began with cheesecake recipes, but later expanded to other recipes as well.

"I used to have cheesecake parties in Italy," Jantzen says.

He even created a "Dr. Bob cooking school" in Rome, where his

students came to make limoncello cheesecake and guavaberry-lingonberry cheesecake.

His recipes range from the humorous ("spinach chicken glop") to the sophisticated (risotto with radicchio and mushrooms and gnocchi with pesto and asparagus). The majority of recipes are of Italian origin—many of them inspired by his annual trips to Italy, the first of which was 32 years ago when he

studied abroad for a year in Rome.

During his time at the University of Rome, he became fluent in Italian and developed life-long friendships, all the while enjoying "wine, pasta and the Italian way of life."

"I love the people of Italy," he says. "They're truly human relationships. In America, we're often divided by nuclear relationships. In Italy, I have

see **JANTZEN** page 13

JANTZEN from page 12

life-long friends.”

The Christmas cards he illustrates and writes each year are translated into Italian so that he can send them overseas to his friends.

“They tie into my international life as a way of trying to stay in contact with the hundreds of people we have met over the years,” he says.

This “we” he’s referring to is his wife, Ani Sarkahian, an Armenian woman who came to the United States when she was 15. Jantzen is clearly influenced by his wife’s heritage—he lists Armenian dishes in his cookbook, suggests listening to Armenian composer and musician Djivan Gasparyan and has visited his wife’s relatives in a small village on the border of Syria.

Jantzen may seem like the average mathematics professor with his Einstein posters and books and enthusiasm for differential equations, but beyond the classroom, the mathematician engages in life as cartoon-illustrator, recipe-inventor, Italian-translator and Armenian-admirer.

“Everybody likes to think they are unique in some way, even if we are more alike than we care to admit,” Jantzen writes on his website. A quick look at drbobenterprises.com, however, proves that Jantzen truly is one unique mathematician, and that you can’t judge a book by its theoretical cover.

O’DONNELL from page 11

branches are very active in giving back to the community.

The company is also becoming more socially conscious.

In fact, the company openly displays its progress on Aebetterworld.com, a site that details the company’s environmental regulations and the specific ways the company gives back.

American Eagle’s footprint became greener in 2009, when the company required suppliers to follow certain codes for production that protects the environment. Stores across the country released American Eagle brown shopping bags made from 100 percent post-consumer recycled materials.

On an administrative level, the company switched to nearly entirely virtual means of communication for international meetings. The biggest shift toward a greener company, however, is O’Donnell’s Blue to Green program. The initiative recycles old blue jeans and turns them into a type of insulation for houses. To date, more than 51,000 pieces of old denim have insulated more than 100 homes.

O’Donnell, still nostalgic and humble despite his high-profile position, speaks to students of the power of moderation.

“Keep everything in balance—academically, socially and culturally,” he says. “Those four years go by too fast, so make the most of them.”