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## Saint John's "Rat" - Johnny Rat History, Part 1

Peggy L. Roske  
proske@csbsju.edu

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**A Tale...**



**...or  
"Tail" ?**



**...of the  
Johnnie  
"Rat"  
(Part 1)**

A Tale/Tail of the Johnnie "Rat" Part 1

Original "Rat Pack" of Las Vegas/Hollywood fame, 1950s; undated Homecoming(?)

Button in SJU Archives

<http://www.listal.com/viewimage/1013505>; Button 4662 in SJU Archives

## The Original "Rat": Francis Berres, '57



### '57 Rat Pack member reminisces

Dear Editor,

St. John's Homecoming 2007: It's my 50 year reunion and the 150th (Sesquicentennial) year for St. John's. On the campus, the football game and seeing the Rat Pack members made it seem like it was just yesterday.

The first half of the game between two outstanding teams was most intense. At the half the Johnnies held the lead 17-16 over St. Olaf. Early in the third quarter the Oles scored on a field goal to make the score 19-17.

The Old Rat in me felt it was time to go to the North End Zone to help the "Rat Pack." Walking down the steps the Johnnie crowd uttered some moans as the Oles forced a fumble off the Johnnie kickoff return. More gloom set in when the Oles scored again making it 26-17. Got to the Pack and told them they just had pizza, but had not done anything yet. Did my only thing asking them to give me a J-O-H-N-N-I-E-S. They were noisy.

Soon we scored to make it Oles 26 and Johnnies 24. Another "JOHNNIE" yell even noisier. We go ahead 30-26. Soon the Oles hit a field goal. Now Johnnies 30-Oles 29. After the Oles kickoff decided it was time for a "JOHNNIE" yell. Told "Rat Pack" it would be my last one at the 5:29 mark because it was time for my medications. At age 72 leading cheers for 20 year olds is not easy! Asked them to help the team hang on to the lead.

Got back to my seat for the last five minutes. What a finish as the Johnnies held on. Thanks, "RAT PACK MEMBERS," and GO JOHNNIES!!

Frank "Ratty" Berres,  
The Original Rat

The Original Rat, Francis (Frank) Berres, SJU '57  
1955 yearbook photo; 2007 Oct. 25 *Record* p.6 Berres letter to the Editor; photo  
from 2007 Feb. 19 *Record*, p. 7  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/33134/show/33127>

going to be a long road.”  
One bright note is that there are no seniors on the varsity this year.

## **BUSH LEAGUE FANS**

Perhaps the only distinction St. John's could claim in the basketball circuit this year would be that of having the "Most Bush-League Voting Section" in the conference. The aptly-named "rat section" displayed its ability to make noise only when the opposing team cheerleaders took the floor.

**Earliest mention of the Rat Pack/Rat Section  
located in St. John's publications:  
*The Record*, March 7, 1958, p.3**

Earliest mention of "Rat Section" indexed in St. John's publications: *The Record*,  
March 7, 1958, p. 3  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/30856/show/30854>

#### A HISTORY OF THE FAMOUS OR INFAMOUS RATS

In the 1954-55 basketball season, a St. John's institution was founded, the famous and sometimes infamous "Rat Pack". It all began with Francis Berres, cousin of F.R. Fr. Peregrin Berres, OSB, and a group of his friends. There had always been a section of students who would view the game from the north bleachers in the Old Gym (this was long before the Warner Palaestra had been constructed), but this year wasn't a normal year for those devoted north end fans. When Gustavus played St. John's during the early part of the season, a new and very different aspect of basketball spectating was experienced.

"The Gusties were coached at the time by Gus Young, who always brought along his wife," reported Rat co-founder Francis Berres. "She was a rabid of a fan for them and was really behind her husband's team. The funny thing was, she was more obnoxious than the average fan; she would yell and scream for most of the game. When there was a bad play or a poor call by the referee, she would go absolutely nuts and start throwing anything she could out onto the court. This, of course, gave the (would be) Rats cause to mimic her. From that point on, the Rats were off and rolling."

Mimicking and game playing of this nature began to carry over to other SJU contests. Soon, the Rats became noisier than the rest of the crowd and developed into a group that was "in."

"We had our share of ... on today. The Rats are doing more ...

In the early 60's, ... during that growing period were ... ofanity was not so apparent, but there was ... was one such exception. As his nickname suggests, he was something of a crazy man. Most of his popular stunts are unprintable, but the most basic was to grab an unsuspecting young lady and pass her around the pack.

During the last game played at the Old Gym (appropriately called Rat Hall), the Rats were in prime form. As the Cobbers of Concordia were being introduced by spotlight, the overcrowded Rats removed their shirts and proceeded to shell them with about 300 to 400 corn cobs. About four years ago, the school attempted to change the harsh ways of the Rats, as well as re-instate the official SJU mascot, the Bluejay. St. John's presented a letter to the general body that explained the acceptable conduct during sporting events. Fr. J. P. Earls was the director of the disciplinary measures and during that period was "Rat Enemy #1".

Several histories exist

Several histories of the Rats exist  
From ARC Rat Pack History folder

# Outrageous SJU Rats multiply with age

By Karl Hagstrom

The pack is back for its 30th year.

This year, 1984, marks the 30th anniversary of the infamous SJU rat pack. The Rats have grown from a few exuberant fans sitting in the north bleachers of the Old Gym (which was later dubbed "Rat Hall" in honor of the pack) in 1954 into a special cheering section that fills the west bleachers at Warner Palaestra. The pack's enthusiasm and support of the Johnnie dribblers is the envy of visiting opponents who have to compete with the pack as well as the team.

Frank "Rat" Berres, the Rat Pack's namesake, began Rat history in the 1954-55 basketball season when he energetically voiced his support of the Johnnies. Berres and his friends took their cues from Evelyn Young, wife of the then Gustavus Adolphus head coach, Gus Young. An avid fan, she would wave her coat in the excitement and throw it on the floor if a referee made a bad call.

Progressing from throwing their coats on the floor at questionable calls and jeering the opposing team's best player and coach, the Rat pack's tumultuous history has been marked by mini-riots to fights during the late '60's and early '70's when the infamous St. John's-St. Thomas rivalry was at its height.

The rat pack's demeanor has since mellowed, but they can still be outrageous.

Last year, one Johnnie associated with the Rat pack beat up a Tommie megaphone in a most ungracious manner. During intermission of the January 5 game last season, the pack turned around the chains of the St. Mary's bench in an amusing prank.

And during a game two years ago against St. Cloud State, they flashed a large poster of Marilyn Monroe in an alluring pose as a Huskie player attempted and failed to make two crucial free throws while facing the Rat section. The Rat pack's notoriety has



Drawing by Tom Voller

known few bounds through its colorful 30 year history.

But the Rat, the adopted student mascot, which the RAJ pack embodies is only 14 years old. A friendly-looking rat wearing a red SJU jersey, sometimes holding up his hand in a peace sign, was originally designed in 1970 by Karl Kaiser for a campus poster contest. Kaiser was a monk at that time, and the peace sign was in reference to the Vietnam War. Hanging from Boni Hall, the giant poster of the RAJ won first place.

In 1972, the RAJ mascot became popular when Steve Conroy, then the SJU Sports Information Director, used the design on basketball programs. Today, the RAJ can be found in the pages of The Record as well as on clothing and other articles at the SJU bookstore. Recently, however, a "new" Rat has struck onto sweat-shirts and t-shirts. Sporting a mean, malicious-looking expression, the design of the "new" Rat may damage SJU's image, along with the image of the Rat pack Public Information Director Lee Hanley suggests. Hanley is concerned that while the sometimes controversial behavior of the Rat pack, represented by a humorous, laid-back looking mascot, has not damaged SJU's image, that side of the Rat pack which is so contentious (their outrageousness and sometimes less than tasteful behavior toward non-Rats and women) would be emphasized by this mean-looking Rat design.

This contentious side has drawn criticism in recent years. Last year, a Forum debate discussed a proposal to modify the pack.

But the Rats squeaked out of the hole they had made for themselves with their controversial behavior and will once again rally in the west end for the Johnnies.

The tradition of the RAJ lives on the the Rat pack. With a mind of their own, they will continue to create their own image regardless of various artists' conceptions.

1984

A 1984 History of the Rats  
1984 Nov. 15 drawing by Tom Voller  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/36254/show/36248>

**Introducing this  
years' 'large crowd  
motivators'.**

Some of you may not be familiar with the Rat Pack. One is most likely to run into this colorful bunch at Johnnie football games, but they are not limited to football alone. Clad in blue and red attire with faces painted in various designs, these guys make a statement for school spirit.



2000

A 2000 *Record* article (September 9)

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/34456/show/34450>



# R

## Rat Pack

# Group sparks school spirit at sports events

By Christine Jasken  
The Record

What started with a messy room and cheering from the basketball sidelines has turned into a 52-year legacy that now reigns at Johnnie football games.

The history of the Johnnie Rat Pack can be traced back to Frank Berres, a 1957 graduate who calls himself the "Original Rat."

Berres earned the nickname "The Rat" because of his messy room, but he was best-known for bringing commotion to basketball games, where he mimicked other teams and their fans.

He began by imitating Evelyn Young, the wife of former Gustavus Head Basketball Coach Gus Young, who would wave her fur coat around during games. From his antics, a cheering section developed and a tradition was born.

This tradition has not



Photo courtesy of St. John's Magazine

**Past members of the Rat Pack gather to pump up the crowd of fans at a home football game.**

come without controversy.

Over the years the Rats have interfered with referees, distracted the opposing teams' players, and in the mid-1980s their rowdy behavior at a NCAA play-

off basketball game led to a ban that prohibited St. John's from hosting future games.

In the 1970s, they also met complaints over the exclusiveness of their group.

They had a no-outsiders, no-women policy.

Through the years the Rat Pack has changed and adapted with the university.

It moved with the Johnnie basketball team from the Old Gym to the Warner Palaestra in 1973, and has since moved its cheering section, now co-ed, from basketball to football.

The Rats' crazy antics and long-standing presence has won them recognition on Kare 11's sports feature "Perk-at-Play," and in 2002 they made it to the pages of Sports Illustrated.

Today, with a strong past behind them, the current Rat Pack waits for the next football season and the next chapter of the legacy.


Although no one can be sure of what this chapter will entail, it is sure to bring more of their chants, customs and creative entrances into Clemens Stadium.

2006


A 2006 history of the Rats in the Sesquicentennial edition of *The Record*  
2006 April 6, p. 5 of the supplement on the SJU Sesquicentennial  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/32646/show/32644>

The Record Page 11

## SJU Rats multiply with age



But the Rat, the adopted student mascot, which the RAT pack embodies is only 14 years old. A friendly-looking rat wearing a red SJU jersey, sometimes holding up his hand in a peace sign, was originally designed in 1970 by Kurt Kaiser for a campus poster contest. Kaiser was a mnk at that time, and the peace sign was in reference to the Vietnam War. Hanging from Boni Hall, the giant poster of the RAAt won first place.



In 1972, the RAAt mascot became popular when Steve Conroy, then the SJU Sports Information Director, used the design on basketball programs. Today, the RAAt can be found in the pages of The Record as well as on clothing and other articles at the SJU bookstore.

...strong expression, the image of the "age"  
 Rat may damage SJU's image, along with the  
 image of the Rat pack. Public Information  
 Director Lee Hanley suggests. Hanley is con-  
 cerned that while the sometimes controversial  
 behavior  
 humor  
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 pack. With a mind of their own, they will con-  
 tinue to create their own image regardless of  
 various artists' conceptions.

1984 *Record* article includes the story of the Rat drawing  
 1984 Nov. 15 drawing by Tom Voller,  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/36254/show/36248>

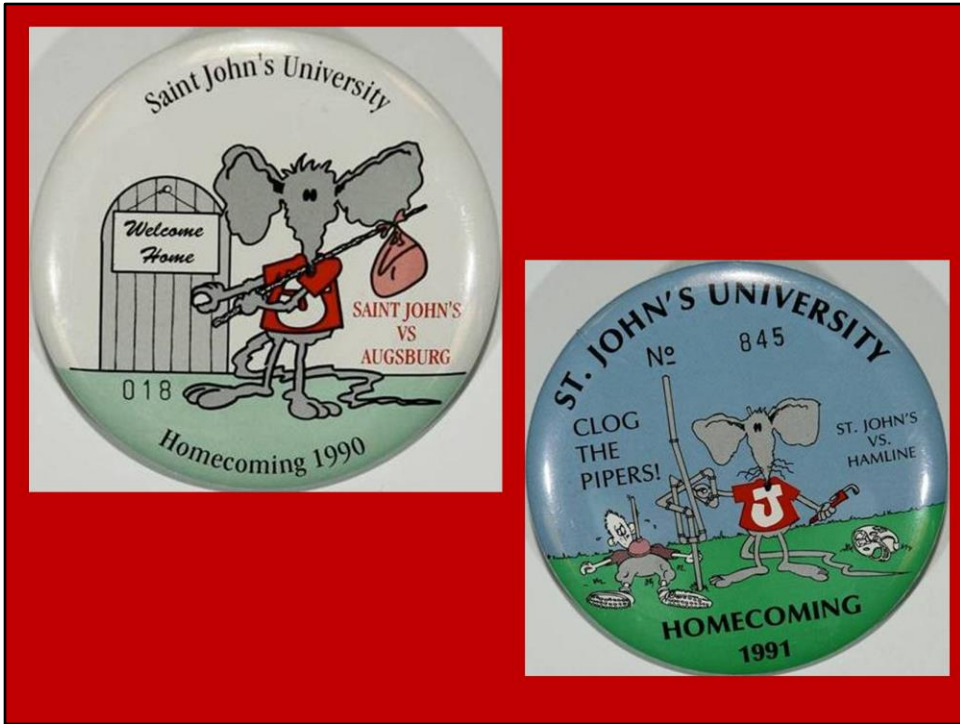
Kaiser, Peter OSB  
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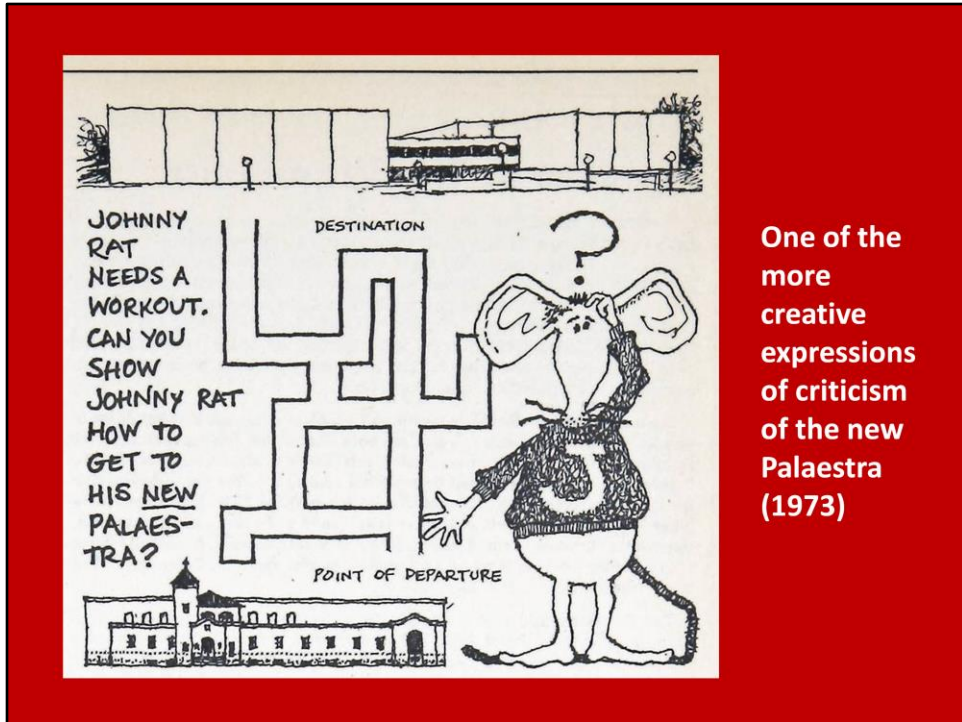
Kurt Kaiser SJU '67 is credited as the artist  
 1965-66 Student Directory; 1969-70 Student Directory (faculty section);  
<http://www.artprize.org/kurt-kaiser>  
 Aquinas College (Grand Rapids, Michigan) Art Dept., 1997-



1978, 1979, 1980 and 1981 Homecoming Buttons in the SJU Archives  
(4642, 4647, 4648 , 4649 - O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Homecoming Buttons)

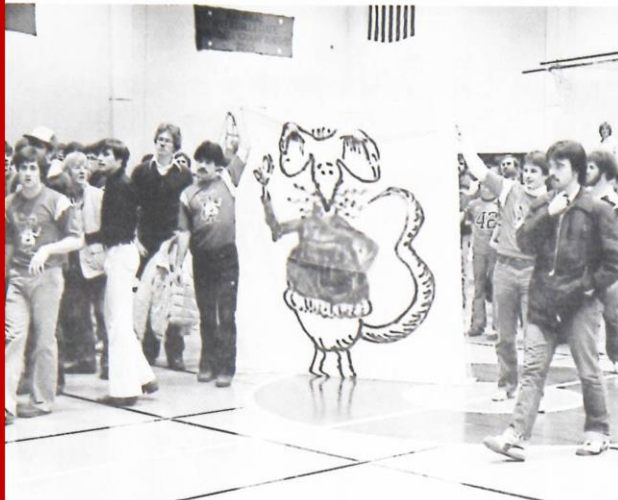


1990 & 1991 Homecoming Buttons in the SJU Archives  
(4656, 4661 - O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Homecoming Buttons)



Johnny Rat maze - 1973 Sept. 28 p.2 *The Record*

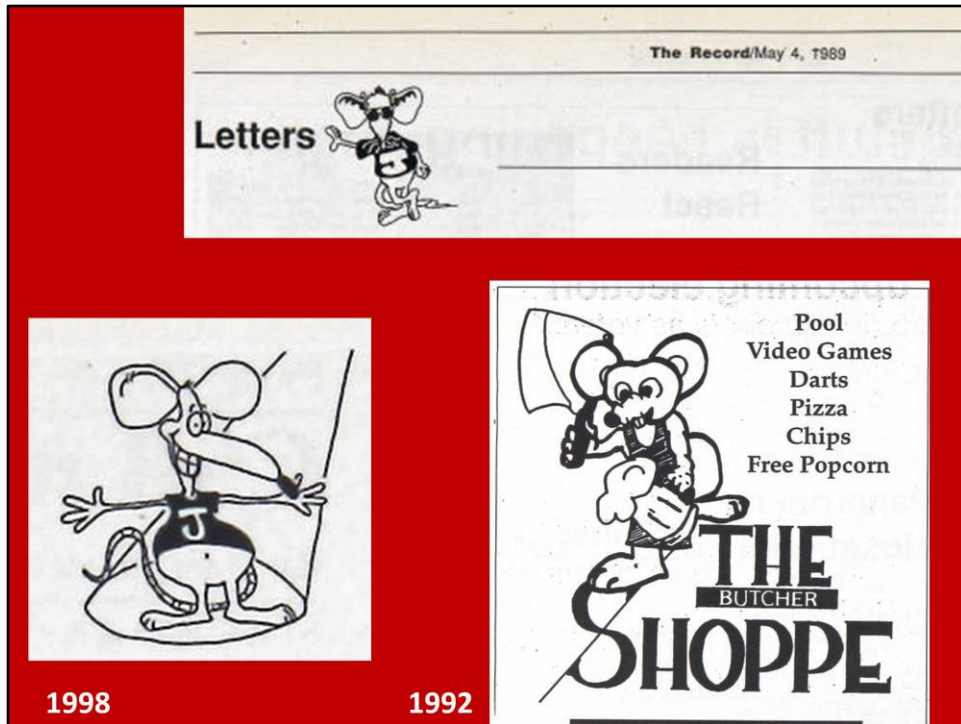
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/35021/show/35018>



**NAIA District 13  
Championship Highlights**

**1978**

1978 March 17 p. 6 *The Record* "Johnnie Rat joins in the post game festivities."  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/35266/show/35263>

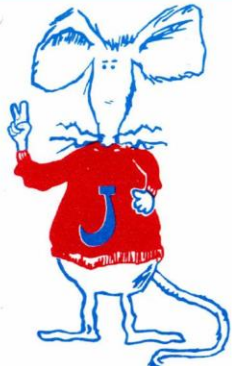


More renditions of the Rat from *The Record*

May 4 1989 p. 19; April 30 1998 p. 9; Oct. 29 1992 p.2

O:\Archives\SJUArchives\Images\Cartoons&caricatures\Johnnie Rat





**2002 Johnnie Rat  
Authentic Commemorative Card**

185

# Bobble!

**By Katie Holloway**  
*Editorial staff*

Bobble heads have become a popular novelty item that comically depict sports players, singers, cartoons and even Jesus. Now a favorite St. John's lion has achieved bobble head fame: the Johnnie Rat.

The Johnnie Rat bobble head doll has been designed, produced and is now being sold by the SJU golf team as a fundraising venture.

"I think it is such a unique idea and cool that we went through all the steps to actually produce them," said senior Sammy Schmitz, winner of the MIAC men's golf tournament.

The idea to create a Johnnie Rat bobble head came after golf Coach Bob Alpers received a bobble head of former Minnesota Twin Rod Carew for Christmas. His wife and son thought it was a hilarious gift, but they had no idea it would send visions of rats bobbling through Alper's head.

After the team was invited to a prestigious golf tournament in New York, fundraising was necessary to finance the trip. The Fred B. Crews Invitational, which is hosted by the University of Rochester, is being held April 25-26, and only five teams in the nation have been invited.

"St. John's is great at supporting us, but if something like this comes up, I don't want to prevent the team from going because of money," Alpers said.

So, Alpers recruited senior Paul Posnath, who is a golfer and Alper's student employee, to research companies in the bobble head-making business. Eventually they decided on Alexander Global Promotions, the same company who made the Rod Carew bobble head.


As a model for the design, Alpers bought a Johnnie Rat doll from the SJU bookstore. He and Posnath pinched, pulled and pinned the stuffed doll to create a 3D model for their bobble head. Photos were then taken and sent to Alexander Global Productions.

Alpers ordered 1,000 of the bobble heads, which was the minimum order. After placing the order, Alpers had recurring nightmares of his garage overflowing with thousands of Johnnie Rat bobble heads.

But after receiving the final product just before the Johnnie football Homecoming game, Alpers was pleased.

"I think they're perfect," Alpers said.

The bobble heads are being sold by members of the golf team for \$20 each. They are seven inches tall, and each comes with an authentic commemorative card, notifying which of the limited 1,000 dolls it is. The Johnnie Rat bobble heads will also be sold at the Tommie-Johnnie game on Nov. 2.



Katie Holloway,  
The Record

The Johnnie Rat bobble head is available for \$20 from members of the SJU golf team.

2002 Oct. 23 *Record* Bobblehead

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/32009/show/31997>

SJS

From page 2

mascot to change this.

The mascot will have various spoofs, each to identify different programs the SJS sponsors like the Collegiate Readership Program. SJS will begin with the basic mascot, a rat with a tie



Sen. Jon Ostazeski  
Student Services Board

PR decision at this point,"  
Service Chair Jon Ostazeski  
"We have been as cooper

curling into the "S" in SJS as the cornerstone logo.

The PR committee made the decision about the finalization without having the entire senate

"It's mo

possible without getting in the way of productivity," when asked by other senators why the entire senate did not vote to approve the logo.

After discussion of the new

**2009:**  
**SJS implements a new mascot,**  
**a rat with a tie**

...modifiable  
to suit other  
"themes"



2009 Oct. 23 *The Record* p. 3


<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/40423/show/40413> and

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/41314/show/41305>



..The Rat is a big marketing tool for the Bookstore  
SJS Rat, [csbsju.edu/SJU-Student-Senate.htm](http://csbsju.edu/SJU-Student-Senate.htm); photo from 2004 April 29 *The Record*  
supplement p.1  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/32224/show/32220>

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The Rat gets its (his?) own category on the Bookstore website

*PAGE 2*

# Briefs



Compiled in September 2012  
from resources in the SJU Archives  
by Peggy Landwehr Roske,  
CSB/SJU Archivist.

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One of the best adaptations!