ANSWERS THE CALL

It’s no accident UF is a Top 5 university.

The yearslong ‘Drive to Five’ took diligence, strategy and an outpouring of support from the Gator Nation. Meet the alumni leaders who helped lead the charge.

Page 38
UF’s CHAMPIONS

GATOR GAME-CHANGERS

Student-athletes, hospital patients, psychologists-in-training and schoolchildren will all benefit from some of the gifts made this fall as the university’s Go Greater campaign nears its final months. In a salute to all the Gator philanthropists who invest so generously in UF, we’re profiling four of them here.

TRISH RING

As a single mom working on two UF degrees in the 1990s, Trish Ring (MS ’93, PhD ’96) juggled graduate school and motherhood. That experience inspired her to offer a helping hand to students and professors in UF’s Department of Psychology. This fall, the psychotherapist and equine coach boosted her UF endowment fund to create two professorships and help students travel to conferences, conduct research and manage expenses while working on their dissertations.

TRISH RING

Continued on page 4

DR. SANDRA FACKLER

So often together, Drs. Martin and Sandra Fackler were campus fixtures. As a pair, the two supported a list of UF programs, served on university boards and attended events. When her husband passed in 2015, Sandra Fackler honored his memory with a gift to the campus hospitals. Now, she’s honoring him again with a $7 million bequest for the Fackler Family UF Health President’s Neuromedicine Endowment. The fund supports pioneering work in neuromedicine research and education.

FEATURES

20 Where Are They Now?
We caught up with some of the Gator Nation’s great athletes.

26 Healing, Learning, Discovering
100 years after its start, UF Health’s next century looks brighter than ever. That’s not just great news for Floridians. People — and animals — from all corners of the nation and world are healthier because of it.

32 The Fall & Rise of Damon Woodard
High school dropout. Abusive home. Poverty. The odds were against Damon Woodard. But propelled by a fierce inner drive and a few supportive souls along the way, he would go on to become one of the nation’s leading experts in biometrics and machine learning.

38 A Nation Answers the Call
Meet the alumni leaders who helped lead the charge to Top 5. What are they doing these days, and how did their years at UF shape them?

44 A Photo Salute to “We’re Back!”
UF students, faculty and staff in Gainesville experienced a full, bustling fall term once again, after more than a year since the pandemic.

ON THE COVER

UF began making the steady climb to Top 5, one rung per year, starting with the 2018 break into the Top 10 of U.S. News & World Report’s Best Colleges rankings. One force behind this ascension? Leaders of the UF Alumni Association. We caught up with some of them on page 38.

DEPARTMENTS

5 CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT KENT FUCHS
6 UNIVERSITY AVENUE: News about UF
52 GATOR NATION: News about alumni
72 3 MINUTES WITH: Pat Collier Frank (BSBA ’51)

FLORIDA GATOR WINTER 2021
Conversation with UF President Kent Fuchs

There is no shortage of alligator statues on our campus. Still, I was very happy to see the return of the Holiday Gator late this year. The Holiday Gator is an artful lighted alligator sculpture that was commissioned from local metal artist and College of the Arts alumna Leslie Tharp in 2019.

Placed on the lawn of the University Auditorium in early December, its purpose is to provide encouragement to everyone on campus as the days get shorter and the semester comes to a close — and also to take joy in and celebrate the many different holidays of the season, including Christmas, Chanukah, and Kwanzaa. The statue's orange and blue LED lights were brightened last year, making it especially luminescent, all the more so when backlit by the beautiful lights of Century Tower, which have also been brightened and colorized.

A gathering to celebrate the Holiday Gator’s appearance early this month drew a joyful crowd of faculty, students and families who enjoyed hot chocolate and cookies, serenaded by UF student musicians and singers.

As I joined in that celebration, I was pleased by how the Holiday Gator renews UF's celebration of the holidays for the present times.

The university once held an annual tree-lighting ceremony on the lawn of the University Auditorium, possibly at the same location as the Holiday Gator near the corner of Union Road and Newell Drive. Another longstanding tradition was the annual reading of Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol,” a practice that began in the 1920s and was made famous in the 1950s and 1960s by the dramatic readings of Dean of Students Lester Hale, also at University Auditorium. There was an annual children’s party, fair and concert, among many other events.

I am grateful that we honor and celebrate the holidays for all people, not just with the Holiday Gator, but also with the annual Sounds of the Season concert in December at the Phillips Center, this year featuring 300 performers from the UF School of Music. I am also grateful that student and community groups welcome everyone to celebrations in their own faiths and traditions, such as the annual lighting of a giant Menorah celebrating Chanukah in the Plaza of the Americas.

Especially with the stress of the nearly two-year-old pandemic, we can all benefit from light and shared joy this time of year. The Holiday Gator will do its part for that cause through the end of the semester — at which point it will be removed and safely stored until it reappears next year.
In August on Bid Day, after these UF students met in the Exactech Arena to learn which sorority had extended each of them a membership bid, they shuttled over to Sorority Row via bus and ran to their new chapters where their new sisters were waiting to welcome them with signs, music and entertainment.

See the rest of the photo essay by Aaron Daye on the return of UF students this semester, Page 44.
Mars rover images help UF scientist, NASA team, narrow the search

Billions of years ago, a Martian river flowed with such force that it tumbled boulders in its path, strewning them out into its massive delta. UF astrobologist Amy Williams looked up from the bed of that ancient river in its rocky remains, courtesy of the Mars Perseverance rover, which sends on-the-ground views of the red planet back to Williams and the rest of the NASA team.

To Williams, left, the rock layers looked familiar, matching patterns she’d seen in her fieldwork on Earth — thus revealing how the delta in Mars’ Jezero Crater formed. That discovery, published recently in the journal Science, will help scientists pinpoint where to look for signs of ancient life.

“It’s hugely useful for the mission and guiding us to select samples for return to Earth,” said Williams, an assistant professor of geology. “We’re applying all of our usual tool sets as geologists to understand what these layers mean. It’s amazing to me that you can do that on another world.”

UF assistant professor Amy Williams is studying an area of Mars that appears to have once been a river delta.

Perseverance is Williams’ second Mars mission: She has served on the Curiosity rover team since 2009. The Perseverance rover landed in February and has been sending high-resolution images back to a multinational team that evaluates them for clues to Mars’ past climate and habitability. Future missions will bring samples back to Earth.

“My main focus is to understand the geology of the delta, and how it was formed and is altering over time,” Williams said. “One of the big things that has been amazing is that following the images, we can see water that formed the delta, but having these images is like reading a book instead of just looking at the cover.”

100 MILES

Amount of Gulf Coast shoreline affected this fall by red tide, an algae bloom in the Gulf of Mexico, hurting food supplies and fishing- and tourism-related industries, not to mention the health of beach-area residents. Numerous scientists across UF are working to understand the phenomenon’s triggers, mitigation techniques, tracking options and economic impacts. A webinar on the latest mitigation research, hosted by UF’s Howard T. Odum Center for Wetlands, can be viewed at ufl.edu/odum

192,070

Metric tons of papayas imported by the U.S. in 2019. UF/IFAS is working with Florida farmers, particularly in the Miami-Dade area, to identify a variety of the dessert fruit that will grow well in the area’s tropical climate and compete in national and global fruit markets. An initial trial examined 21 such varieties.

NUMBERS OF NOTE

Grass varieties that were planted at UF’s Natural Area Teaching Lab this fall in order to boost conditions for native animals, such as gopher tortoises, and to provide a living lab for students and members of the public who are involved in studying and promoting ecology and biotic diversity.

NOT YOUR GRANDFATHER’S STUDENT INFIRMARY

UF is building a $26 million, state-of-the-art, 46,000-square-foot facility that will focus on students’ comprehensive health care needs. This facility’s services will replace those at the current Student Infirmary, located on Fletcher Drive between the Florida Gym and Dauer Hall. The new, larger health care center will be on Stadium Road, west of the Stephen C. O’Connell Center and south of the future site of the Florida Gators football training center on what used to be the baseball stadium’s outfield. Expected to open in late 2022, it will house all of the functions the current infirmary on Fletcher Drive provides.

HEARD IN GATORVILLE

“I’m not seeing a lot of COVID ramifications. When we see these full stadiums, it makes people feel nervous because we’ve been avoiding crowds for such a long time. But some of these outdoor events really are not the super spreader events that people have worried they’re going to be.”

— CINDY PRINS, a UF Health infectious disease epidemiologist who tracks coronavirus trends nationwide. Learn more about her examination of sporting events at ufl.edu/bagbook
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**AWARD-WINNING UF JOURNALISM**

Tobie Neil Perkins (BSJ ’20), Sam Thomas (BSJ ’20) and Mackenzie Bahn (BSJ ’20) won the Edward R. Murrow National Student Award for excellence in reporting. Their story “At the Finish Line” chronicles the end of greyhound racing in Florida.

Greyhounds sprint down the track at the Sanford Orlando Kennel Club, from “At the Finish Line.”

Victor Prieto (4JM) won the Edward R. Murrow National Student Award for excellence in video reporting. His story, “Beyond the Finish Line,” explores the challenges Chris Nikic, who has Down syndrome, overcame to race in an Ironman Triathlon.

**BEER FOR BUTTERFLIES**

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“BEER FOR BUTTERFLIES”

FIRST MAGNITUDE BREWING COMPANY

“$38 MILLION

Amount of a National Institutes of Health grant awarded to UF Neurosurgery Chair Dr. Brian Hoh to test two new prospective treatments for symptomatic intracranial arterial stenosis, a condition that’s the leading cause of ischemic strokes worldwide. This severe narrowing of an artery in the brain accounts for 8-10% of all strokes in the U.S., about 80,000 per year.

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Dr. James and Sara Toussaint of Gainesville made it possible for the Harn Museum of Art to showcase a photography exhibit that explores the past, present and future of Black life. The couple funded “Shadow to Substance,” which uses historical and contemporary photos to create a chronological arc and examine Jim Crow Florida, the Great Migration, the Civil Rights Movement and Black Lives Matter through the lens of healing, myth, intimacy, joy, resistance and rebirth.

The exhibit has been the subject of national news and was hailed by *Forbes* as one of the country’s best college art exhibitions. The exhibit continues through Feb. 27, 2022.

James Toussaint is an orthopedic surgeon who treated victims of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Sara Toussaint is a seasoned sports marketing executive who works to break barriers for girls in sports and STEM as a board member of the nonprofit Play Like a Girl. Together, they co-own the North Carolina Courage, a professional women’s soccer team.

2. Kehinde Wiley, *Margaret, Countess of Blessington*, 2018, the Toussaints’ painting on loan to the Harn
3. Ayana V. Jackson, *Sighting in the Abyss ii, from the series Take Me to the Water*, 2019
5. Ayana V. Jackson, *Moments of Sweet Reprieve*, 2016, from the series *Intimate Justice in the Stolen Moment*
Irv Gleim (UF accounting professor 1971-88, named professor emeritus in 1988), whose numerous test preparation and training manuals are prolifically used to educate students around the world, died in July at age 78.

At UF he often told his peers that he “didn’t need to die to go to heaven, he just joined the faculty at the Fisher School of Accounting.” When he retired in 1988 and was appointed a professor emeritus, he became the youngest professor emeritus at any Association of American Universities member institution. The atrium of Gerson Hall at UF is named in his honor.

Gleim was an innovative force in the field of accounting not only through his teaching and research, but also through his professional exploits as a self-made publisher. He produced training manuals for budding accountants that became the field’s authoritative learning tools for students. As president of Gleim Publications, he released his first CPA Review book in 1974 and went on to deliver more than 200 titles that provide accounting students with the richest, most in-depth material for CPA, CIA, CMA and EA exam preparation.

While teaching at UF, his uncanny knack for reciting complex accounting equations without reference dazzled his students.

“Irv Gleim was full speed ahead at all times,” said Gary McGill, director of the Fisher School of Accounting. “He was devoted to the Fisher School and UF. He never rested in his quest to make good things happen for the Fisher School.”

Gleim also made an extraordinary impact on the aviation industry. He published flight training books designed to help pilots pass their FAA exams and earn certificates from private pilot through airline transport pilot. All told, he taught millions of people during his 47-year career. His legacy continues through all of his training manuals and his publishing company, which will help candidates achieve their educational goals.
HEART ATTACK SENSOR
A new UF-born handheld, low-cost sensor can detect trace amounts of troponin concentrations in blood, which precede heart attacks and mark a period in which damage to myocardial cells is still reversible. Existing tests are time-consuming, difficult to use and expensive, limiting their effectiveness in emergency room situations. Heart attacks represent one of the five most common reasons for emergency room visits.

ADVANCED 3D PRINTING
UF researchers invented a binder-based 3D printing process that allows metallic, ceramic and composite structures to be made at room temperature. This is a stark improvement over current inefficient and inconvenient printing technologies that require high temperatures, high energy output and highly controlled environments. This new technology is expected to dramatically improve the cost and accessibility of products in the medical, automotive, aerospace and defense industries.

COOL TECH
THESE LAB-TO-MARKET INNOVATIONS ARE UNDER DEVELOPMENT BY UF RESEARCHERS WITH THE SUPPORT OF UF INNOVATE, THE UNIVERSITY’S TECHNOLOGY INCUBATOR.

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HEART ATTACK SENSOR
“Having a benchmark like this will help researchers better understand how exposure to substances, stress and environmental factors … can affect the brain and alter a child’s behavioral development.”
— MATTHEW GUNHA, a UF professor and one of three co-principal investigators leading a NIH-funded study involving 25 institutions nationwide. The HEALTHy Brain and Child Development (HBDC) Study will enroll thousands of pregnant women and their babies and follow them through early childhood to identify trajectories of brain development.

ADVANCED 3D PRINTING
“Two new viruses that UF plant pathologists identified this year, called watermelon crinkle leaf-associate viruses 1 and 2, they attack watermelon plants, causing fruit to taste bitter and pulp to turn jelly-like. However, the viruses are not harmful to humans. Florida farmers are working with UF/IFAS scientists on mitigation techniques. These farmers are the only U.S. supplier of watermelons from December to April.”

HEART ATTACK SENSOR
“‘We know some of the specific genes for milk and meat production, but we’re looking into a bit of a black box. AI will help us clear up the mystery faster and more accurately.’
— RALUCA MATEESCU, a UF/IFAS animal science professor, who, with assistant professor Fernanda Rezende, are gathering hundreds of thousands of pieces of information about genetic traits in cattle. They plan to use HiPerGator, UF’s supercomputer, to analyze that data and develop better recommendations for ranchers about which animals to keep and breed for improved beef and dairy.

ADVANCED 3D PRINTING
“70% Non-U.S. participants in a UF/IFAS study who believe discarded food causes an environmental problem. Less than half of the U.S. participants in the study agreed that the problem exists. UK participants showed a higher awareness of the environmental impact of food waste. Learn why and how Americans tend to waste more food (especially at major holidays) at uff.to/tfc682”

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WAYS TO RELIEVE STRESS WITH MUSIC

An Arts in Medicine professor offers tips to soothe your soul

Before she studied the plentiful evidence that music can alleviate stress, Ferol Carytsas (MM '12) was a kid who discovered that playing piano made her feel better. Today, she’s a professor with UF’s Center for Arts in Medicine, where she shares how music can reduce pain, boost mood, build healthy habits and improve lives for people with conditions from PTSD to dementia.

Below is her advice for harnessing the power of music to cope with stress.

1. KNOW YOUR PATTERNS. Part of using music effectively is understanding when it can help, Carytsas said. Find those windows by learning to identify when your stress is starting to spike. “When I’m getting stressed out, I can feel my muscles tense, I feel my heart start to beat a little bit faster,” she said. Try to catch your own pattern early and redirect it by listening to or even making music. “It doesn’t have to be complicated. You could just drum on the table with your fingers.”

2. CUE YOURSELF. When tuning into news or scrolling through potentially aggravating social media, consider setting a timer to limit your intake, then make time afterward to decompress with music. “At the end of that session, what would happen if you played some music or even danced around your house? Just approach it with openness — I’m going to try this to see if it helps.”

3. EXPERIMENT WITH WHAT WORKS FOR YOU. Your favorite songs might not be what you need when you’re feeling frazzled. For Carytsas, pop music doesn’t soothe. She prefers instrumentals — “nothing too distracting, but nothing too predictable, either.” She suggests curating a playlist and tinkering with it until you figure out what relaxes you best.

4. PICK UP AN INSTRUMENT. “The No. 1 thing I hear from adults when I say I’m a musician is, ‘I used to play, and I’m really sad I gave it up,’” Carytsas said. If that’s you, pick it back up! If your former instrument isn’t practical (tuba solo, anyone?), jump into a new one. The same is true if you still play: Trying a different instrument can put you in a fresh headspace. If you’ve never played, you could try something with a low barrier to entry, such as the ukulele. But instead of focusing solely on what’s quick to learn, think about the experience you crave, she advised. What will feel most comforting? Strumming a guitar? Banging a drum? The resonance of strings? “It’s not just about ease but also the sensation of the instrument and what it feels like to you.”

5. SING! “Singing is a really, really great stress reducer. If you’re concerned about how you sound, sing in the car when nobody can hear you.” You could even try songwriting, Carytsas said. “It’s not always about the product, it’s about the process. Focus on whether it brings joy.”

6. EXPERIMENT WITH OTHER ART FORMS. “You have to be open to the idea of music. If you don’t want music in that moment, it’s probably not going to achieve the effect you are seeking.” The good news is that plenty of art forms can improve wellbeing, from painting to theater, Carytsas said. “You just need to have that initial openness to the arts and find what works for you.”

For more on how the arts can foster health and wellness, visit the UF College of the Arts’ Center for Arts in Medicine.

— ALLISON CLARK (BSJ ‘98)

UF Health Shands Children’s Hospital is No. 1 in Florida, ranked as one of the nation’s best hospitals in eight medical specialties by U.S. News & World Report. But what truly gives meaning to this accolade is the unmatched care we provide your child. It’s why families from every corner of Florida and more than 20 countries around the globe turn to UF Health Shands Children’s Hospital for advanced pediatric care.

UFHealth.org/pediatrics
Gator softball great Chelsey (Sakizzie) Becchetti (BSR ’99) recently found out that the Gator Nation really is everywhere. She went to work out at a gym in Arizona and discovered a connection with one of the trainers there. She, too, was a Gator athlete: gymnast Amanda Cheney (BSTEL ’19).

“We were laughing about how it truly is a small world,” Becchetti said.

Happens all the time.

Imagine four Gator grads — one of them the best Gator softball player ever — sitting around a table eating brunch or former athletes showing up at one of the 87 Gator clubs around the country to watch a Florida football game with like-minded people.

We went looking for some of the best Gator athletes out there to find out exactly what they’re up to these days.

Longtime Gator sports writer Pat Dooley catches up with 10 of UF’s best former student-athletes to see what they’re up to nowadays.
HEATHER MITTS SOCCER
Mitts (BSADV ’01) was one of the keys to the Florida defense and helped the Gators win a national title in 1998. She is also a three-time Olympic gold medalist and played on World Cup teams.

Mitts, 43, retired from soccer eight years ago, but stayed busy in the sport doing commentary for ESPN and ABC. She also did some sideline reporting for ESPN on college football.

Now married to former NFL quarterback A.J. Feeley, she has stepped away from broadcasting, in part because of COVID-19, but also because she has three young children, ages 3, 5 and 7.

“They keep me pretty busy,” she said. “But we try to make sure we get back to Gainesville to keep in touch with teammates as much as we can.”

Mitts is currently a motivational speaker who speaks about the “Gold Medal Mindset” and has a workout app for female soccer players.

NINA (FOSTER) MCGREW VOLLEYBALL
Foster (BA ’98) started at Alabama but transferred to Florida after her sophomore season. In Tuscaloosa, she was the SEC Freshman of the Year and at Florida was the SEC Player of the Year in 1997.

It was while watching nurses tend to her ailing father in intensive care (he passed away before she started college) that she found her calling.

“I knew it was for me,” she said.

After graduating from Florida, she got her master’s degree in nursing from Kennesaw State in Georgia. She moved there because her husband, former Gator football star Reggie McGrew, was with the Atlanta Falcons.

The couple moved back to Gainesville eight years ago, and she is now the assistant director for clinical research for the Department of Neurosurgery at UF Health. Reggie is an assistant strength and conditioning coach at Florida.

They have a 14-year-old daughter, Gia, who plays volleyball at Gainesville High.

“I don’t miss volleyball because I’m always there with my daughter and go to the Florida matches as a fan,” she said. “I’m so happy to be back and be part of the Gator Nation.”

MELODY (FEL Exe) BUSHENEL BASKETBALL
Bushenel (BA ’02) was the SEC Freshman of the Year in 2002 and helped Florida win two national titles in 2003 and 2007.

She is also a two-time Olympic gold medalist and was part of the U.S. women’s basketball team that won the gold at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

Now married to former Gator football star Thomas Bunten, she has stepped away from coaching and is now a motivational speaker who speaks about the “Gold Medal Mindset.”

“They keep me pretty busy,” she said. “But we try to make sure we get back to Gainesville to keep in touch with teammates as much as we can.”

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TIM OLSON BASEBALL
This past spring, Olson (’00) saw his Florida record of 21 years finally broken. He hit in 29 straight games in 2000, but Jacob Young eclipsed that with a 30-game hitting streak that actually spanned three seasons because the 2020 season was cut short by COVID-19.

Young was in a different altitude from any other Gator player in history. Olson is in a different altitude as well.

The 43-year-old Olson lives in Denver with his wife and three boys where he is a commercial insurance broker.

“I love it out here,” he said. “But I keep my eyes on the Gators.”

Olson spent eight years in pro ball after his Gator career, parts of two seasons in the Major Leagues with the Colorado Rockies, before settling down in Denver.

MELISSA (MILLER) SCHUBECK GYMNASTICS
Miller (BAE ’90) was the first Florida gymnast to win the SEC all-around title twice in 1988 and ’89.

“Being at Florida was the time of my life,” she said. “It was so impactful.”

Miller and her husband, Darin, who she met at UF, live in Cantonment, a suburb of Pensacola, where she grew up. Now 53, she is the children’s director at Heritage Baptist Church.

Her son, Justin, is a third-year student at the University of Florida. Her daughter, Brianna, is married.

JEFF MORRISON TENNIS
Before Sam Riffice won the individual NCAA title this year, there was Morrison (’97-’00).

He’s the only other Gator to win the individual championship, beating James Blake of Harvard in the 1999 final.

After college, Morrison played professional tennis until 2006. He achieved a world ranking of 85th before retiring.

It was then that he went into the family business started by his grandfather, the water management company C.I. Thornsburg (renamed CITCO Water). Morrison is CEO of the company based in Huntington, West Virginia.

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It was while watching nurses tend to her ailing father in intensive care (he passed away before she started college) that she found her calling.

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“I don’t miss volleyball because I’m always there with my daughter and go to the Florida matches as a fan,” she said. “I’m so happy to be back and be part of the Gator Nation.”

HEATHER MITTS SOCCER
Mitts (BSADV ’01) was one of the keys to the Florida defense and helped the Gators win a national title in 1998. She is also a three-time Olympic gold medalist and played on World Cup teams.

Mitts, 43, retired from soccer eight years ago, but stayed busy in the sport doing commentary for ESPN and ABC. She also did some sideline reporting for ESPN on college football.

Now married to former NFL quarterback A.J. Feeley, she has stepped away from broadcasting, in part because of COVID-19, but also because she has three young children, ages 3, 5 and 7.

“They keep me pretty busy,” she said. “But we try to make sure we get back to Gainesville to keep in touch with teammates as much as we can.”

Mitts is currently a motivational speaker who speaks about the “Gold Medal Mindset” and has a workout app for female soccer players. The Feeley family lives in Media, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia, where both Heather and A.J. played parts of their professional careers.
DUDLEY HART GOLF

After a stellar career at Florida where he was a four-time All-American, Hart (RA ‘90) had success on the PGA Tour (winning twice), but also had injury problems. One year, he had to make most of the previous year. Hart, 55, made a decision in 2004 to move to Buffalo with his wife and triplets to get away from south Florida. But six years ago, he changed his mind. “I love it in Buffalo, but after a while I just said, ‘I can’t take the cold weather anymore,’” he said. So they took what were now four children and moved to Naples, where he lives today. The triplets are 19 — Ryan on the golf team at UF, Rachel at the University of Tampa and Abby at Florida Gulf Coast. The fourth child is 10-year-old Avery. Hart has tried to play on the Champions Tour, but hand and back problems have limited him. He’s still involved in golf as a volunteer assistant for J.C. Deacon’s team at UF.

“I’m just trying to get them to understand the mental side of golf,” he said. “How to play the game by doing the little things.”

LAUREN EMBREE TENNIS

Embree (BSSPM ’14) had an incredible career at Florida, and was a key part of consecutive national titles in 2011 and ’12. She played professional tennis, achieving rankings in the top 250 in both singles and doubles. “I got to travel the world,” Embree, 30, says. “But I knew it was time.” She was an assistant coach at Pepperdine University for two years. Meanwhile, her parents had moved from Marco Island to Gainesville. Then UF tennis coach Roland Thornqvist called. “It was a tough decision to leave,” she said. “But it was a chance to get back to Florida and work with Roland. Just a great opportunity.” She has been an assistant coach at UF the last three years and still plays with the UF team.

LARRY KENNEDY FOOTBALL

Kennedy (’91-’95) was one of the best defensive backs in UF history, and his interception return to clinch the 1991 game against Tennessee was one of the loudest moments ever in the Swamp. After playing in NFL Europe and Arena Football, he landed a job at Riddell, where he is now the national key accounts manager. He has lived in Charlotte for 22 years.

“Life after football has been wonderful,” Kennedy, 50, said. He has served on several boards, including for two bond games, and has helped several former Gators start businesses of their own.

“I have golden hands,” he said. “Everything I touch turns out well.” He is married with two sons, ages 30 and 24.

CHELSEY (SAKIZZIE) BECCHETTI SOFTBALL

Florida started playing softball in 1997. The following year, Sakizzie, who grew up in New Mexico, was signed from Central Arizona Junior College. In 1998, she was the SEC Player of the Year. “About 10 years ago, I thought I could still pitch,” she said. “But not now.” She taught first-graders for 15 years after she moved to Chandler, Arizona, with her husband, who she met at Florida where he worked in the athletic department. Because her husband was traveling a lot, she decided to become a stay-at-home mom. Now 45, her son Jake is out of the house and is a competitive gymnast at the Air Force Academy. “I always miss softball,” she said.

DAN CROSS BASKETBALL

Cross (BSTEL ’00) was the heart-and-soul point guard of a special Florida team, the first one to ever go to a Final Four in 1994. He was a two-time All-SEC player. After college, Cross played professionally in Europe and in some developmental leagues in the United States. A native of Carbondale, Illinois, he settled in Orlando and has been active in the development of young people there and across the nation. Cross Academy LMS (Learning Management Software) helps students with life skills and online curriculum. For 17 years, Cross has been returning to Gainesville to have an All-Fundamentals basketball camp and his Athletes Connection Foundation utilizes sports to teach youth in life skills.

“Florida was the greatest time of my life,” Cross, 48, said. “I miss the competition and the guys in the locker room, my teammates.”

His son, Daniel, is a wide receiver on the Gators football team, and his daughter, Rachel, is also a UF student.
100 years after its start, UF Health’s next century looks brighter than ever. That’s not just great news for Floridians. People — and animals from all corners of the nation and world are healthier because of it.

Go Greater Campaign
2014
- Former pharmaceutical company executive Debbie DeSantis gives $3 million to College of Pharmacy for professorship in natural products.
- UF Health Shands Children’s Hospital’s pediatric cardiac intensive care unit opens. Also created are Wound Care and Hyperbaric Center. Cancer Center at Orlando Health and Diabetes Institute.
- Go Greater campaign chairs Andrew and Pamela Banks establish $5 million endowment to support UF’s rise in national rankings.
- UF’s Comprehensive Stroke Center becomes just second stroke center in Florida — one of 78 in country — to earn national certification.
2015
- George T. Harrell, M.D., medical education building opens on campus and UF Health North medical complex opens in Jacksonville; construction begins on two new standalone campus hospitals: Heart & Vascular and Neuromedicine.
- UF neurosurgeon implants 1,000th deep brain stimulation lead, more than anyone else in world, in brain of child with dystonia.
Over a memorable span of just five years, Dr. Jon and Nancy Wilkins experienced many of life's most wonderful and tragic moments. Now, their fellowship for ALS research has turned personal tragedy into hopeful triumph for future patients and families.

The couple — each having lost their first spouses — met on a blind date in 2015 and soon married. Less than a year later, Nancy was diagnosed with ALS. Doctors at the Norman Fixel Institute for Neurological Diseases at UF Health treated Nancy until her death in March 2020.

In gratitude to her UF doctors, James Wymer and Emily Plowman, the Wilkinses established a fellowship to support ALS-specific respiratory supplements the couple's fellowship.

“The world of ALS would not be the same if not for Jon and Emily,” said Dr. James Wymer, director of Neurological Diseases at UF Health. “Their investment will help the college evolve even more, she says. “While the college is more than what it is without her, it happens to be in an area that is very important to us.”

Their investment will help the college evolve even more, she says. “While the college is more than 50 years old with a distinguished history . . . it takes more time, more faculty, and more graduates to achieve even greater levels of distinction,” Peoples-Sheps says. “We hope to contribute to this exciting trajectory.”

College of Public Health and Health Professions

A WOMAN OF INFLUENCE

No one will ever say Mary Peoples-Sheps didn't make a difference. UF's College of Public Health and Health Professions wouldn't be what it is without her.

The new $135 million building — located in the heart of UF's campus across from the J. Wayne Reitz Union — is made possible in part with the generosity of an array of longtime College of Pharmacy donors, including the DuBrow Family Foundation and Carl (BSP '76) and Joan Allison.

“Malachowsky Hall for Data Science and Information Technology will be a beautiful and visually interesting addition to campus,” says Julie Johnson, dean of the UF College of Pharmacy. “But more importantly, it will be a space where innovation and data-driven solutions are realized to improve health care.”

College of Pharmacy

SCI-FI AND HEALTH CARE COLLIDE

Drug discoveries and treatments will never be the same. Come 2023, when Malachowsky Hall for Data Science and Information Technology opens, professors and students in UF's College of Pharmacy will have the world of artificial intelligence at their fingertips — and with it a space age approach to the science of life.

The college will have a significant footprint in the 263,000-square-foot building. The sixth floor will belong to the Department of Pharmaceutical Outcomes and Policy, the Center for Drug Evaluation and Safety and the Consortium for Medical Marijuana Clinical Outcomes Research.

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College of Medicine

FOR THE ONE I LOVE

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In gratitude to her UF doctors, James Wymer and Emily Plowman, the Wilkinses established a fellowship to support ALS-specific respiratory supplements the couple's fellowship.

“It's very important to me that these kinds of clinical treatments are available to those who so desperately need them,” Jon Wilkins says.

College of Medicine

WINTER 2021

FLORIDA GATOR | 29
College of Veterinary Medicine

FOR FUZZY FRIENDS

Pets treated for cancer at the College of Veterinary Medicine have a better chance to recover. A new linear accelerator, purchased with a donation from the Joanne W. Gauntt Foundation, is enhancing radiation oncology treatment at UF’s Small Animal Hospital. UF is the only second veterinary college in the country to own the leading-edge technology. “This truly transformative gift will enhance our ability to effectively treat tumors inside areas of the chest and abdomen where movement occurs due to breathing,” the college’s interim dean, Dr. Dana Zimmel, says. UF veterinary radiation oncologists have developed many of the modern techniques used to treat cancer in animals, working on some of the most complex cases in the nation and conducting groundbreaking research. The college is one of the few in the Southeast offering radiation oncology through the use of a linear accelerator with cone-beam CT, allowing for the treatment of many types of tumors in the brain and some in the limbs.

UF Health Shands

IN A FATHER’S HONOR

Caring for newborns in the neonatal intensive care unit at UF Health Shands Children’s Hospital has gotten a helping hand from the Pritchett family. Jon and Kelly Pritchett, Phillip and Emily Pritchett, and Robin Pruitt’s donation to the hospital — made in memory of family patriarch Marvin Pritchett — support the NICU’s expansion and its ambition to be one of the nation’s best at caring for the tiniest patients.

“Our father was energized by his work with young people, and he would be so pleased and excited with the progress of the UF Health Shands Children’s Hospital,” Jon Pritchett says. “We are proud to continue his legacy of giving back and helping to make a lasting difference for children for decades to come.”

Marvin Pritchett (BSBA ’59) was a devoted family man, respected businessman, philanthropist and civic volunteer. One of his greatest joys was giving back to his community.

UF Health Jacksonville

UNSEEN WOUNDS

UF Health Jacksonville and the Gary Sinise Foundation, one of the nation’s premiere institutions dedicated to helping veterans, first responders and their families, are bringing comprehensive brain health care to Florida. The program also got a boost from the Jacksonville Jaguars Foundation.

Expanding on the Marcus Institute for Brain Health and Boulder Crest Foundation’s expertise, the Gary Sinise Foundation’s Avalon Network is creating a nationwide traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress treatment and training network. By leveraging the science of post-traumatic growth, the network empowers patients to cope and heal.

“When I formed the Gary Sinise Foundation in 2011 it was rooted in a personal mission to provide support, raise spirits and improve the mental wellness of our nation’s heroes and their families,” the Hollywood actor and activist says. “The partnership with UF, he says, will “help heal the invisible wounds afflicting too many of our veterans and first responders, transforming struggle into strength and lifelong post-traumatic growth.”

2019

(continued)

• The Marcus Foundation invests $12.5 million to fund UF Health Jacksonville’s program for veterans suffering from traumatic brain injuries.

• UF’s annual Dance Marathon raises event-record $3.2 million for UF’s children’s hospital.

2020

• UF Health takes national lead to test, treat and prevent COVID-19: designs make-at-home emergency ventilator, helps develop treatments and home tests.

• Corporate medical director Dr. Donna Baytop establishes scholarship in the College of Medicine.

• UF experiment studying age-related muscle loss takes place aboard International Space Station.

• Retired radiologist Dr. Michael Lehtola creates scholarship and endowment for Emerging Pathogens Institute, fellowship chair in radiology and professorship.

• The Thomas and Irene Kirbo Charitable Foundation creates state-of-the-art training hub in the College of Nursing.

• Joanne W. Gauntt Foundation contributes $3 million to College of Veterinary Medicine to purchase linear accelerator to enhance radiation oncology treatment for small animal cancer patients.

• Veterinarian Dr. Larry Dee and his wife, Rita, give $1 million to College of Veterinary Medicine to endow Michael Schaer Professorship in Small Animal Emergency and Critical Care Medicine.

2021

• Hundreds of UF Health employees move their offices into the newly acquired Nationwide building near campus to make room for more campus medical services.

• UF Health announces $75 million initiative to expand research and services at the Norman Fixel Institute for Neurological Diseases.
The Fall & Rise of Damon Woodard

High school dropout. Abusive home. Poverty. The odds were against Damon Woodard. But propelled by a fierce inner drive and a few supportive souls along the way, he would go on to become one of the nation’s leading experts in biometrics and machine learning.

HERE’S MORE TO BIOMETRICS EXPERT
Dr. Damon Woodard than meets the eye — or the “periocular region,” as his research specialty is known. An associate professor in UF’s Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Woodard is a pioneer in digitally identifying people through the features around the eye — eyebrows, wrinkles and skin folds — even if the subject is masked or the image is blurry.

“As I joke with my students, it’s not like the bad guys want to pose for the camera, so in biometrics, you have to use what you have,” Woodard said in a recent interview.

Solving real-world problems is Woodard’s passion, and since 2007, his efforts have been rewarded with $20 million in research funding from the intelligence community, the Department of Defense, the National Science Foundation and other sources. UF tapped his problem-solving bent in 2020 when he was named Director of AI Partnerships for the university’s Artificial Intelligence Initiative. In that role, he reaches out in multiple directions, like Spiderman’s “Doctor Octopus,” to arrange AI collaborations and trainings with industry, government, nonprofits, K-12 schools and universities around the state.

It’s a role that calls for well-honed people skills, not a characteristic typically associated with engineering wizzes.

But Woodard is not your typical engineer or academic.

Three decades ago, he was a high school dropout “just running the streets” of New Orleans, he said. How he rose from those bleak circumstances to become the first African American to earn a Ph.D. in computer engineering from Notre Dame is a testament to the people who believed in him — and to the inner fire that refused to go out.

“I’m the type of person who, when you tell me I can’t do something, that fuels me even more to succeed,” said Woodard. “You are not going to outwork me in terms of effort, and I am not going to quit.”

Dr. Damon Woodard joined the faculty of the Wertheim College of Engineering in 2015 and now serves as director of UF’s Biometrics and Machine Learning Group, among other duties.
“I would work during the day as a mechanic, come home, take a shower, eat really quickly, and then change clothes and go to school at night.”

— Damon Woodard on how he put himself through night school at Tulane University

FROM STREETS TO MECHANIC SCHOOL
Woodard grew up in the Crescent City, one of five sons born to a homemaker and a pipefitter for the Navy shipyard. The family lived in a two-bedroom home, and “money was tight,” Woodard said, noting that anger and physical abuse permeated the household. But his mother, Gwendolyn Woodard, “always kept an eye on her boys’ comings and goings, and urged them to aim high with their studies.”

By the time Damon was in high school, his father’s volatility had grown more heated. “It was hard to concentrate on doing homework and being a student in that environment,” he said. “It was just too much.”

At age 15, he dropped out of school and hid it from his mother for a year. “I pretended I went to school, and I was just running the streets,” he said. When he finally revealed the truth, Gwendolyn had been working outside the home for a while, holding down several low-wage jobs to make ends meet. Damon’s news came as a shock. “I know that really hurt her,” said Woodard. “But I told her I would go back to school. I always knew I would. I even had a plan.”

At age 17, he enrolled in trade school to become an auto mechanic, a skill he planned to use to put himself through college. Simultaneously, he studied to earn his high school equivalency diploma. “I studied on the way to the trade school, on the bus,” said Woodard. “I studied on the bus stop. I mean, I carried my books everywhere with me.”

In 1990, shortly before he turned 18, he earned his GED, and Gwendolyn—who then was no longer living with Woodard’s father—buckled her son’s college dreams, even if she had no money to spare for tuition or books. “My mom said, ‘We’ll figure it out. We’ll make it happen,’” he remembered.

NIGHT-SCHOOL NAYSAYERS
Woodard applied to Tulane University and in 1992 was accepted into its night program for computer information systems. “I would work during the day as a mechanic, come home, take a shower, eat really quickly, and then change clothes and go to school at night,” remembered Woodard.

One evening in class, a guest speaker who taught C programming shared that he had a doctorate. Intrigued, Woodard asked if that was the highest degree a person could get, and the speaker told him yes. Later, when the speaker asked the class to share their individual career plans, Woodard confidently announced he was going to earn a doctorate, too, prompting whoops of laughter from his classmates.

“They started laughing because, understand … the general outlook then was that night school students couldn’t hack it in day school with the regular students,” said Woodard.

“That was almost thirty years ago, but I remember it like yesterday,” he added. “It became one of the main things that drove me.”

Woodard’s strong work ethic and stellar GPA spurred a staff member at Tulane’s computer lab to recommend he transfer to the regular program for computer science, a much harder course of study. The staffer introduced Woodard to the chair of the engineering department, who recognized his potential.

“She was really nice and offered me a partial scholarship,” remembered Woodard. “She said, ‘OK, let’s see what you can do, you’re going into both engineering school and day school now, so it’s a different ballgame.’”

As any former engineering student can tell you, the first two years of school are filled with demanding courses such as Calculus I, II and III, Differential Equations and Statistics.

“The widow-makers, ‘the murderers,’ we call them,” joked Woodard. “For me, I didn’t have the math foundation to tackle those courses. It’s one thing to get a GED, but it’s completely different to operate at that [higher] level.”

Worried he would fail, he turned to his mother. She told him to buck up and get a tutor, which he did. “I’m not going to lie, it was a fight,” he admitted. “That tutor taught me four years of high school math in a little over six months.”

Woodard’s dream at the time was to become “the Bill Gates,” he said, and it pushed him to excel. In his senior year, he received the Highest Senior GPA Award from the National Society of Black Engineers in 1997 and earned a bachelor’s degree in computer science and computer information systems.

FINDING HIS ACADEMIC HOME
Advice from an African American Ph.D. student at Tulane turned Woodard’s thoughts from entrepreneurship to graduate school, especially when he learned that in 1994 there were fewer than 100 Black PhDs in computer science.

“I said, I am going to be in that number. I’m going to do it. It was my new goal,” said Woodard.

Buoyed by support from the Graduate Education for Minorities (GEM) Fellowship Program, he chose Penn State University to earn his master’s degree in computer science and engineering. The program was good, but in the late 1990s the atmosphere on campus toward underrepresented students was “extremely hostile,” he said.

On his first day, he entered his graduate computer architecture class. He was the only Black student in the room.

“I’ll never forget it,” said Woodard. “A [white] student comes up to me and say, ‘Are you sure you’re in the right class? Because this is Advanced Architecture.’”

“Growing up, I had experienced every sort of micro/macro aggression you can think of, so I had tough skin, but this was through the roof,” he said. “And you should have heard the stories the other African American graduate students used to tell in the dining hall.”

In 1999, Notre Dame flew Woodard to Indiana to check out its Ph.D. program in computer science and engineering. The university was home to the GEM program headquarters, and after just 15 minutes on the smaller, more welcoming campus, he knew he had found his academic home.

BUILDING A LIFE AMID A DEATH
While Woodard was working toward his Ph.D., 9/11 happened. He immediately wanted to drop out of school and join the Marines to fight al-Qaeda, and confessed as much to a trusted professor.

“I was young, and I wanted to drive tanks,” said Woodard. “But the professor told me told me, ‘Don’t do it. Your talents can help your country in a different way.’”

The other way was through biometrics research, the specialty of new faculty member Dr. Patrick Flynn, who would become Woodard’s dissertation advisor. While the field of biometrics had existed decades, the 9/11 attacks spearheaded a global push for countries to “develop and implement systems to collect biometric data” to accurately identify terrorists, as a UN Security Council resolution stated.

After all, in the run-up to 9/11, al-Qaeda was able to exploit weaknesses in border screening to send 19 operatives into the United States undetected. More advanced biometrics tools were urgently needed. Enter Damon Woodard. And enter his new research partner: the U.S. government.

Woodard’s dissertation, “Exploiting Finger Surface as a Biometric Identifier,” became the opening salvo in an ongoing volley of academic papers and book chapters focused on ways to collect and analyze biometric data — everything from eyebrows to “iris segmentation” to “soft,” or behavioral, biometrics.

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina destroyed Woodard’s family home and all their photos.

“I spent a year as a [post-doctoral fellow] at Notre Dame, sponsored by the director of central intelligence,” said Woodard. “Biometrics is what my career has been built on.”

The intelligence community’s interest came at a critical juncture: Woodard’s family in New Orleans had recently suffered multiple tragedies. In 2003, two years before Woodard made history as Notre Dame’s first Black doctorate in computer engineering, his mother died of a stroke. For various reasons, she had never attended his prior graduation ceremonies, but Woodard had assured her she would be front row for this one. Now that longed-for moment was ripped from their grasp.

“She saw me through the process, but she never saw the ending,” said Woodard with emotion in his voice.

More than anyone, Gwendolyn had believed he would make it as a computer scientist, even when others laughed in his face. He says it isn’t hard for him now to imagine the feisty woman relishing his triumph over the smug naysayers.

“If she were alive right now, my mom would be talking so much trash to those people,” he said, chuckling.

Unfortunately, Woodard can only preserve her memory mentally. Hurricane Katrina destroyed his family home and all their photos in August 2005. Three months later, his younger

PHOTO COURTESY DAMON WOODARD

In 2005, Damon Woodard became the first African American to receive a doctorate in computer engineering from Notre Dame. He is shown here at that momentous graduation ceremony. The intelligence community’s support came at a critical juncture: Woodard’s family in New Orleans had recently suffered multiple tragedies. In 2003, two years before Woodard made history as Notre Dame’s first Black doctorate in computer engineering, his mother died of a stroke. For various reasons, she had never attended his prior graduation ceremonies, but Woodard had assured her she would be front row for this one. Now that longed-for moment was ripped from their grasp.

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Unfortunately, Woodard can only preserve her memory mentally. Hurricane Katrina destroyed his family home and all their photos in August 2005. Three months later, his younger
brother Jason was killed. "The pain was almost unbearable," he says, but his academic "family" saw him through.

"Some of the worst times of my life were while I was at Notre Dame, but the support system I had there was phenomenal," remarked Woodard.

BIRTH OF A MENTOR
Fortified, Woodard vowed to fulfill a promise he had made to his mother on her deathbed: help his other younger brother, Brian, go to college.

Brian had dropped out of high school when Woodard did, obtained his GED and went into the military. After Katrina hit, Woodard invited Brian to live with him in Indiana and enroll in nursing school. "Not only did he finish nursing school, he graduated at the top of his class," Woodard said proudly.

Woodard's own career took off in 2006 when he joined the faculty of Clemson University's School of Computing. "There he extended his biometric research into keystroke dynamics, gender classification, machine learning and how aging affects people's susceptibility to online scams, among other areas."

He also earned praise and awards for his effective mentoring of "nontraditional" students—women, minorities, first-generation students and those who start college at age 25 and up.

Woodard's unique skillset didn't escape the attention of his department chair, Dr. Juan Gilbert. When UF recruited Gilbert to head its Department of Computer and Information Science and Engineering (CISE) in 2015, Gilbert hand-picked Woodard and four other Clemson computer scientists to relocate with him to Gainesville.

"It was an easy decision to bring Dr. Woodard," said Gilbert in a recent interview. "Not only is he an outstanding scholar and researcher—his work in biometrics is top-notch—he's an exceptional person as well. He's an excellent communicator and works to solve problems when they arise."

When Woodard bade goodbye to the Clemson Tigers, one of his leading graduate students, Tempestt Neal (PhD '18), followed him to UF. "He remains available when I text or call," she added. "He's a role model, for sure."

VALUING "DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCE"
Married since 2008, Woodard enjoys a quiet life in Gainesville, where, in his rare free time, he enjoys good food and playing video games (first-person shooters are his favorite, he says). Looking back on his unorthodox career path, he says his bumpy journey only made him stronger and more resilient. He knows the value of grit and emphasizes to students that intellect alone is not enough; persistence and punching back after setbacks are the foundations of success.

Lessons like these can't be gained by reading academic papers, he says. People have to experience them directly and pass them on to the next generation. He hopes that when hiring faculty members, universities will increasingly value nontraditional applicants who have overcome hardships to become standouts in their field.

"If the entire faculty is made up of people who only followed the strict path [to an academic career], you're going to get a certain way of thinking," said Woodard. "But if you mix in those folks with people like me, you get a diversity of experience that makes the whole institution stronger. "Who better to help people overcome adversity than someone who's climbed that mountain themselves?"

MORE ABOUT
• Watch this short CISE video to learn about Dr. Woodard's biometrics research:  

PHOTO COURTESY DAMON WOODARD

PHOTO BY AARON DAYE

PHOTO BY AARON DAYE

PHOTO BY AARON DAYE

FLORIDA GATOR | 37
It’s no accident UF is a Top 5 university. The yearslong ‘Drive to Five’ took diligence, strategy and an outpouring of support from the Gator Nation. Meet some of the alumni leaders who helped lead the charge.

BY DAVID FINNERTY

It was an audacious declaration that February night in 2015. There he was, UF’s new president, telling the 200 or so Gators gathered in Jacksonville that evening that their university would soon be ranked among the nation’s Top 5. The notion seemed little more than a wish then, a remark to fire up the university’s spirited faithful.

At the time, the University of Florida was still well outside U.S. News & World Report’s Top 10. For UF to move up, other elite universities would need to move down. That happening in academia, where tradition and perception rule, was a longshot at best, akin to an SEC school not making the NCAA’s four-team football playoffs.

Kent Fuchs, nevertheless, drummed on. “My vision is that our academic preeminence will be as broadly recognized and celebrated as our Gator athletics,” the president said months later during his formal inauguration. “We will be among the nation’s Top 5 public research universities.”

His words proved prophetic. This fall, UF climbed past the likes of Georgia Tech, William and Mary, Texas and Wisconsin to claim the No. 5 spot on U.S. News’ annual list of best public universities, widely considered the standard-bearer of such measures.

To appreciate the feat — to truly, truly understand how improbable it was — consider this: there are roughly 4,000 public universities and colleges in America. When Fuchs made his 2015 promise UF was a respectable but nonetheless distant No. 14 in the rankings. UF’s breakthrough rise to No. 5 is unheard of in higher education, where change can be glacial.

There are good reasons for UF’s ascension: a push to lower the student-to-professor ratio, a wave of discoveries, high freshmen retention and senior graduation rates, and UF’s affordable tuition among them. Credit also goes to alumni. Alumni passion — determined by the percentage of graduates who give back to their alma mater — is one metric used to calculate a school’s spot on the magazine’s annual list. In UF’s case, participation was an impressive 25,000 Gators last year. That 19 percent giving rate is the highest of all public schools in the prestigious Association of American Universities.

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Dr. Jason Rosenberg

FAVORITE PROFESSOR:
Robert Bryan, UF’s interim president. “Uncle Bob” never taught me a class, but I learned more from him than from anyone during my time at UF. He taught me about what it means to be an educator, mentor and friend. He taught me how to be patient by taking me fishing, and how to appreciate single malt scotch (Oban). He made me think about what it means to be an educated person and to recognize that as a primary goal of a university. My firstborn son, Bryan, is named for him and his wife, Kay.

WHY IT’S GREAT TO BE A FLORIDA GATOR:
Florida’s land grant university was established to provide opportunities to the citizens of Florida. For many who, like me, are the first in their families to pursue higher education, UF remains true to its founding purpose. As Gators continue to succeed and lead, they never lose sight of their obligation to open the doors for those who follow them in hopes of joining the Gator Nation.

GO-TO FOOD WHILE A STUDENT:
Burrito Brothers — primo beef burrito, double wrapped, with onions and jalapenos.

WHAT GATORS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BEING TOP 5:
Leadership matters. Our administration, trustees and alumni leadership (along with the help of our elected leaders in Tallahassee) made a conscious decision that our state’s flagship university (and its world-class faculty) should be recognized among the finest universities in America. Together, they worked tirelessly over many years to earn this well-deserved recognition. Future leaders must continue to set audacious goals, and together we will achieve them. It’s what Gators do.

“Dr. Jason Rosenberg (MS ’90, MS ’93, MD ’95, HS ’02)
DAY JOB: Plastic and reconstructive surgeon, Gainesville
UFAA PRESIDENT: 2012-13
A few years ago Dr. Jason Rosenberg created a scholarship in the College of Medicine. The gesture was little surprise. Twice a gubernatorial appointee to the UF Board of Trustees, he has long been one of the university’s strongest advocates — both as a philanthropist and through service. That he wanted to do even more for his alma mater is his nature. So it made sense that his ideal candidate for the scholarship would be someone with the same mindset. The student, he says, should be “someone who’s going to go out there and change the world.”

PRESIDENTIAL TERM POINT OF PRIDE:
It was actually the year before I became alumni president. We had the opportunity to nominate a large number of new members. That group bought into a vision that the Tom Mitchell (vice president of UF Advancement) helped us develop. He asked us to envision raising a glass to our future accomplishments and asked, “What are we toasting?” We were able to harness the amazing energy of our alumni to help our university work toward an audacious goal. Ten years later, we collectively raised our glasses to toast UF’s recognition of becoming Top 5 public university.

UF IN THREE WORDS:
Life-defining friendships. (Is that two or three words?)

FAVORITE PROFESSOR:
Robert Bryan, UF’s interim president. “Uncle Bob” never taught me a class, but I learned more from him than from anyone during my time at UF. He taught me about what it means to be an educator, mentor and friend. He taught me how to be patient by taking me fishing, and how to appreciate single malt scotch (Oban). He made me think about what it means to be an educated person and to recognize that as a primary goal of a university. My firstborn son, Bryan, is named for him and his wife, Kay.

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FLORIDA GATOR | 41

Michael Browne (BSBA '91, MBA '97)
DAY JOB: Vice president, Kellogg Co., Frisco, Texas
UFAA PRESIDENT: 2016–17
It's funny, Mike Browne contends, how all these years since graduation he still leans on lessons learned in college. "My experiences at UF prepared me for the world," he says. "Even today, I will struggle with something, then think, 'Hey, this reminds me of the time we were arguing about a cabinet appointee,' and then laugh and get on with it."
We are just getting started.

Dear Gator Nation,

As we celebrate our 75th anniversary, I want to say thank you to the Florida Gator community for your incredible support of UF. From the moment you stepped onto campus, you have been a part of this university's history and future. The UF Alumni Association is proud to be a part of UF's journey, and we are excited to continue to support our students, faculty, and staff as they make their mark in the world.

We are thrilled to be a part of UF's Top 5 ranking. As a member of the Top 5, we are committed to continuing our legacy of excellence in all that we do. Our alumni, students, faculty, and staff are all working together to make UF the best it can be.

As a recent graduate of UF, I want to encourage all alumni to stay connected with UF. Whether you are involved with a specific college, school, or department, or if you simply want to stay updated on UF's news and events, there is something for everyone. The UF Alumni Association offers a variety of ways to stay connected, including newsletters, events, and opportunities to volunteer.

Thank you for your continued support of UF. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of our students and in the world.

Sincerely,

Karen Unger
UF Alumni Association President
We’re Back!

UF students, faculty and staff in Gainesville experienced a full, bustling fall term once again, since the pandemic began.

Students attended 4,678 unique courses on campus and residence halls were full once again with 7,804 Gator residents.

Shoki Mizuno, 23, a Japanese exchange student majoring in political science, was among those students who arrived in August. Mizuno said he had long wanted to attend school in Florida and was excited about exploring more of the Sunshine State.

“I really wanted to go to a warmer place,” Mizuno said. “I like the beach. I like scuba diving.”

Alexis Kaloustian, 17, a marketing major, and Nicole Bergman, 18, an environmental science major, also arrived in August anticipating the chance to become involved with clubs and to have in-person classes.

The following pages offer a glimpse into campus life this fall.

— CYNTHIA ROLDÁN HERNÁNDEZ

PHOTOS BY AARON DAYE

Turlington Plaza is once again filled with UF students between classes.
ABOVE: Freshmen Madison Simpkins, left, and Charlotte Herrig paused for this photo in Turlington Plaza on Aug. 23.

RIGHT: Once again, drivers in cars and on scooters, motorcycles, skateboards and bicycles converged on campus roadways.

ABOVE: UF Student Affairs staff arranged numerous fall activities for students during its Great Gator Welcome, including this King Croc slide near the J. Wayne Reitz Union.

BELOW: Amelia Saling of Jacksonville rides a bucking Gator as part of the the Great Gator Welcome at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium.

First-year doctoral student Mosunmola Ogunmolaji, right, gives first-year graduate student Faith Aiyia directions during the first week of classes.
Senior Chris Thevenot (center) walks through the Plaza of the Americas en route to his class in late August.

LEFT: Faculty and staff talk with students during the UF PAACT Mixer (Pledging to Advance Academic Capacity Together), an orientation program that focuses on the successful transition of incoming Black first-year students in the Multicultural and Diversity Affairs office in the Reitz Union

BELOW: From left, Charissa Lim, Camila Lim and Felipe Faria take time to connect after their Krishna lunch on the Plaza of the Americas.

Freshman Alexis Dvorak of Ocala moves into her Murphree dorm room with a bit of help from her father, Victor Dvorak.

From left, Charissa Lim, Camila Lim and Felipe Faria take time to connect after their Krishna lunch on the Plaza of the Americas.

Senior Chris Thevenot (center) walks through the Plaza of the Americas en route to his class in late August.
Vice President of Student Affairs D’Andra Mull took this selfie at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium where freshmen gathered to revive the UF class photo tradition.
Sarah Ann Painter (MEd ’12), a fifth-grade teacher at Eisenhower Elementary, in Clearwater, is Florida’s Teacher of the Year.

“I’d be lying if I said the school year wasn’t challenging,” Painter said. “There were times when the online students would drop off due to technical problems or a student would have difficulty with their face mask.”

At those moments, Painter uttered a phrase that, before long, became a mantra of encouragement and hope for her students.

“I’d tell them to ‘Find joy,’” she said. “And they’d all shout back ‘Find joy!’ It was a reminder to make the best out of difficult circumstances and to be appreciative for all that we have.”

Painter, the mother of six and a Pinellas County teacher for 18 years, has taught at Eisenhower for 13 years. She also works closely with parents, helps out with training at the district level and one year raised money on Facebook so all of her students could attend the end-of-year class trip to Epcot. She is chair of the school advisory council, representative for language arts and school liaison for the extended day program.

“I can’t imagine doing anything else,” Painter said. “I find joy in being around these kids. The rewards I receive from them are so much more than anything I can give them. ... It’s such an honor, and to be called out during a school year when we are experiencing a pandemic and there’s no rule book to go by means the world to me.”

Painter, 41, will receive $20,000 and will spend the next year traveling the state and visiting schools on behalf of the Florida Department of Education.

“Instead of thinking about this year in terms of what COVID has taken away from us, let’s choose to look at it as what COVID has given us,” Painter said. “For me it’s a better understanding of my district’s digital platform, a new way to connect with students and families, a new awareness of mental health, more time with family and friends, and a new perspective from which to teach from.”

Two years ago, Hillsborough County teacher Dakeyan Graham (BMus ’07, MM ’09) won Florida’s top teaching honor and later moved on to become a Department of Education official overseeing school choice programs.
Aaron P. Woods (BSCE ’09) of Atlanta is the founder and CEO of Podpal, a podcast management tool. He received one of 50 Black founder $100K startup grants from Google, as well as other funding to continue development of Podpal. He was also inducted into the Hennessy (cognac) Never Stop Never Settle Society, which champions the next generation of Black entrepreneurs.

J.N. “Jack” Breed (BLS ’82) of Bartow and Gainesville toured the US Navy Submarine Base in New London, Connecticut, with his son, Navy Petty Officer Luke T. Breed. Jack Breed owns a private civil engineering and surveying and mapping firm, called CivilSurv Design Group. He is also an adjunct professor of geomatics at UF. Luke Breed is deployed on the submarine South Dakota, the Navy’s newest Virginia-class fast attack submarine.

Macy Schmidt (BAMus ’18) of New York and Leah Vicencio (BAFA ’21) of Tampa founded Broadway Sinfonietta, an all-female-identifying, majority women-of-color orchestra. The idea, which they developed during the pandemic quarantine, stemmed from Schmidt’s experience in the Broadway community and at UF. Search Broadway Sinfonietta on YouTube.com to see many of their productions. Read a full story about the group at uff.to/0j3tkm

“While he may be best known as a champion of the electronic design automation industry, Wally’s ability to turn around companies and make them not only profitable, but leaders in our industry, is no small feat,” said Jodi Shelton, co-founder and CEO of the alliance.

Established in 1999, the Dr. Morris Chang Exemplary Leadership Award is the highest honor achievable through the Global Semiconductor Alliance, which is comprised of a who’s who in semiconductors and related ecosystems. This honor recognizes individuals for their exceptional contributions, exemplifying how their vision and global leadership have transformed and elevated the entire semiconductor industry. Rhines’ selection was based on his vast technological contributions, exceptional business acumen and wide-ranging respect among the technology industry and business community.

Lawrence Hatch (BSR ’98) of Winter Garden is senior vice president and Central Florida market president for Iberia First Horizon Bank. He is also chairman of the board for a Fortune 500 not-for-profit organization that assists in providing pharmaceuticals to those in need.

Kevin Lin (BScEng ‘15) is a senior R&D engineer at PepsiCo, working on its global Snacks Extrusions team. He came back to UF to talk with students in April about how he uses AI to streamline the manufacturing process and accelerate the product development process. Read more about him at uff.to/vjfgae

Alvaro Della Bona (PhD ’01) has been awarded the Wilmer Souder Award in Dental Materials by the International Association for Dental Research, which association members consider the Nobel of the dentistry world. Bona is a dentist, researcher and senior professor at the University of Passo Fundo in Brazil. He is also the first person from Latin America to win the award.
**MARKETING’S GOLDEN LADY**

Lailey Johnson (BSPR ’08) was named a Crain’s Chicago Notable Executive in Marketing. As the head of paid media, America’s marketing, for Ernst and Young (EY), she led an EY campaign that received a gold award at the 2021 ANA B2 competition. “Business Interrupted: Insights on the New Now” provided information to the business community at the height of the pandemic. Johnson managed the relationship with CNBC and coordinated across the EY organization to implement the campaign.

**INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN**

Spencer Silverglate (BSBA ’85, JD ’88) of Miami is a partner with the Clarke Silverglate law firm and has been elected president of the International Association of Defense Counsel for the 2021-22 term. The IADC is an invitation-only global legal organization for attorneys who represent corporate and insurance interests.

**MAJOR ASSET**

Ramon Looby (BA ’06, MAMC ’08) is CEO of the Maryland Bankers Association. He is the fifth president and CEO since the association’s founding in 1896. Prior to this post, he served as senior vice president and public policy lead at Bank of America Corporation.

**CITY STORYTELLER**

Kathleen Slesnick Kauffman (MSAS ’99) is the City of Gainesville’s new historic preservation officer. She comes back to Gainesville after serving in a variety of preservation roles in Tallahassee, Ft. Pierce, Lake Park, Miami and Miami-Dade County. Her father, Don Slesnick (JD ’55), was inducted into the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame in 2020. He is an attorney in Coral Gables.

**BOOKWORM**

Robert Jay Malone (MA ’91, PhD ’96) is executive director of the Association of College and Research Libraries. He leads the largest of the American Library Association’s eight divisions, which includes more than 9,000 individual and institutional members. He lives in South Bend, Indiana.

**ALUMNI OFFER HELPING HAND**

Five Gators have joined forces to launch Gators Unidos, a new nonprofit organization that fosters educational, mentorship and career opportunities for current UF Latinx students. In addition to a $2,500 scholarship, the group offers recipients access to a number of unique professional development resources.

Founder and president Dayana Falcon (BSAdv ’11), a human resources professional at The Walt Disney Company who grew up in Miami and was the first in her family to attend college, explained why the group formed.

“Despite the Latino community being the largest ethnic group in the United States, many barriers stand in the way of reaching financial stability, completing their college degrees and eventually creating a lasting impact in the workforce,” said Falcon. “And while UF can be proud of their 30,000-plus Latino graduates and of having the highest minority representation of Latino students in history among those currently enrolled at 19.5%, we have a unique opportunity to do even more.”

**COMEBACK TO GAINESVILLE.**

Rediscover the thriving culture and beautiful nature of Gainesville. Emerson, an intimate community of 58 luxury townhomes, gives alumni the perfect opportunity to reconnect with fond memories and the beauty of North Florida.

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- Live the Life You Imagine! -

Limited 13 units just released. Reserve now.
GATOR FAMILY TRADITION
GATOR FAMILY CELEBRATES MILESTONE AT HOMECOMING

The Albert family from Palm Harbor had more to celebrate than most Gators during UF’s Homecoming this year. For the first time, three generations of their family performed together in the Swamp during the Gator Marching Band and Alumni Band’s UF vs. Vanderbilt football game halftime show. Thomas Albert Sr. (BSEng ‘65, MSEng ‘66, PhD ‘69), his son, Jeremy Albert (BSAg ’97, DMD ‘00, MS ‘03), and his granddaughter, Alyssa Albert (BHP), all played their tenor saxophones on the field. Albert family members who also carry the Gator Band tradition but were not present on the field include: Jeremy’s brother, T.J. Albert (BS ’93, DMD ’97), who played trumpet 1989-93, along with his wife, Janine Albert (BSTel ’95), who played piccolo 1991-92 and their stepbrother, Victor Albert (BS ’10), who played drums 2006-09.

The Albert family’s love for the Gator band runs so deep, Jeremy Albert and his wife, Jacqueline (BSA ’98) funded two scholarships to cement the “Albert tenor sax legacy.” The scholarships were awarded in 2020 and 2021, providing $1,200 annually to each tenor sax band recipient, who “exceeds not only musically and academically, but also demonstrates a heart for volunteering and community service.”
EXHIBITING EXCELLENCE

Stephanie Chesson Bailes ('BA '92) is president of the Cade Museum for Creativity and Invention in Gainesville. She was recently named a Top 50 International Museum Influencer by Blooloop, a global resource for visitor attractions professionals. She was recognized for her leadership, overseeing the museum’s $12 million construction, its opening in 2018 followed by its adaptation to online programming during the pandemic, growing the team from four employees to 36, raising more than $4 million, forging public and private partnerships, and guiding education curriculum development. More than 100,000 people have visited the museum since its opening.

Elyse Cohen (BS '05) is vice president of social impact and inclusion at Rare Beauty by Selena Gomez. She has joined the new corporate leadership council at the Creating Healthier Communities organization in Alexandria, Virginia, to help elevate social impact issues.

C. Ryan Thompson (BSAg '05, MAURP '09) is senior project manager in CWH’s land planning and design department in Alachua.

Pavle Stojkovic (BSEd '09) of New York City is the chief people officer for SWORD Health, a virtual musculoskeletal care provider.

GOOD GATOR READS

COLD SURVIVAL
Laini Kotchers (BSPR '01) wrote the young adult thriller “Ski Weekend” about survival, impossible choices, and the harrowing balance between life and death. The book, about six teens, one dog and a ski trip gone wrong, is published under her pen name, Rektok Ross.

A SOLDIER’S TALE

CRIME AND MISCONDUCT

SOLVING SOFTWARE
Capers Jones (BA '61) of Sarasota published his 22nd book, “Software Development Patterns and AntiPatterns.” Jones worked for IBM and owns a software company. He is vice president and chief technology officer for Namcook Analytics.

FACTORY GIRL
George “Bob” Dekle (BA '70, JD ’73) of Lake City wrote “The East River Ripper: The Mysterious 1891 Murder of Old Shakespeare” that involves issues of alleged police misconduct, false conviction, racism and illegal immigration. Dekle is a retired UF legal skills professor who was recently interviewed for the A&E “Invisible Monsters” special as the lead prosecutor in the trial of serial killer Ted Bundy.

SOMETHING WENT HORRIBLY WRONG!
Eliot Kleinberg (BSJ '77, BSBR '78) has retired from the Palm Beach Post after more than 33 years. He now writes novels, gives lectures and produces a blog about bad writing and how to fix it, called “Something Went Horribly Wrong.” uff.to/aprswa
GATORS AREN’T THE ONLY ONES WHO CHEER FOR FLORIDA. MANY OF THEIR BEST FRIENDS ALSO ROOT FOR THE OLD ORANGE-AND-BLUE. MEET THESE FURRY AND LOVABLE FANS.

Four-Legged Fans

Scout
Ada de la Osa (BSN ’98, MSN ’07) and Jorge de la Osa (BSBA ’92, JD ’98) of Longwood, added Scout to their family after their human children left for UF: Nicholas (BSAPK ’19), Alex (BSSM ’21) and Michael Osa. Scout loves to walk UF’s campus on game days and chill out during tailgates. Ada is a nurse practitioner and educator at AdventHealth, and Jorge is in-house general counsel for a hotel company.

Penny Mae
Jessie and Will Rockey (BS ’10, MS ’13, DMD ’17) of St. Augustine, shared this photo of their fur baby, Penny Mae, a 2-year-old dapple Dachshund who loves the beach, riding in the car, and will fetch a ball until your arm gives out. Jessie is a registered nurse, and Will is a dentist.

Boots
Boots, AKA GatorBoots, decided to visit Albert on campus. Boots is the best friend of Antionette (Janes) Marbray (MED ’90) of Ellict City, MD. Marbray is vice president of legal affairs at Stevenson University.

Gator
The Murphy family say they love turning their French bulldog into a Gator. Math teacher Pam Murphy (BA ’73, a retired teacher in Gulf Breeze, and Elle, her French bulldog, love to dress up for every UF game. (Instagram @ ellekaslertthefrenchie).

Winnie
Courtney (Criswell) Davis (BSAPK ’14) is a physician assistant in Bluffton, SC, and the best friend to Winnie, whom you can follow on Instagram @winnie.may.the.doodle

Uno
Michele Thompson (MA ’96) lives in Columbus, NC, with this Gator fan, Uno. Michele recently retired as a Chicago federal law enforcement agent.

Sadie
Samuel “Scott” Savage (BA ’20) of Ocala, the son of Gator parents, says his golden retriever, Sadie, loves the Gators and UF’s College of Journalism and Communications, where Scott earned his minor. Today, he’s studying for the LSAT in Gainesville.

Rev
Geoff (BS ’90, MD ’93, HS ’96) and Laura Wolf (BS ’90, MD ’93, HS ’97) named their 3-year-old Pomeranian, Rev, which means “fox” in Norwegian. Rev enjoys watching Gator football games with the family. Geoff and Laura are both anesthesiologists at Cleveland Clinic Indian River Hospital in Vero Beach. Their five kids are all Florida Gators.

Comet
Michelle Thomas Snider is a physician assistant in Clermont. Her dog, Comet, helps her cheer on daughter Lauren Snider (4ENG), who is an SEC academic honor roll student-athlete on UF’s swimming and diving team.

Chloe
Ilona Scully of Stuart said 12-year-old Chloe “loves the Gators, just like her Mommy!”

SEND YOUR PHOTOS TO: FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu
Include your name, occupation, town and your pet’s name.
TAGE THAT TELL TALES

Cecil Hurst Jr. (BSPE '60, MPH '61), 83, of Merritt Island (above, left), shared these tags in honor of his lifelong mentor, Ed “Uncle Ed” Tomberlin (BSAg ‘51, MS ’68), 97, of Lake Panasoffkee, a WWII Army veteran and post-war teacher and principal. Tomberlin’s wife, the late Rosa Lee Davis Tomberlin, purchased the top two plates (ET4UF for her husband, and CH4UF for Cecil Hurst) when the official UF tag program launched in the 1980s. The tags have adorned their vehicles ever since.

According to Cecil’s daughter, Leslie Hurst (BAPolSci ‘89) of Orlando, who secured her tag, LH4UF, in the same format, these official UF plates represent a special bond between their families.

You see, Cecil was born in 1938 in the tiny farming town of Oxford, an hour south of Gainesville.

Although Cecil grew up a Gators fan, he never thought he’d have the means or opportunity to attend UF. Ed, Cecil’s teacher at the time, aimed to change that. Soon after, Ed, his wife and children invited Cecil to come live with them. Ed helped Cecil secure a job at the local Winn-Dixie while the lad finished high school in Wildwood. When Cecil graduated as the salutatorian, Ed helped him apply to UF and for a Winn-Dixie scholarship. Ed then drove Cecil to Gainesville, moved him into his dorm and helped him get a job in the library.

After graduation, Cecil attended the Naval War College and served in the Vietnam War as commanding officer of the USS White River (LFR 536). He earned a host of military awards including the Bronze Star with Combat “V,” a Gold Star and Navy Commendation Medal.

Upon his medical retirement, Cecil became a corporate investment real estate broker in California and Texas. However, a different calling compelled him to return to Florida. There, he followed in his mentor’s footsteps, teaching and coaching young people in Sumter and Brevard county schools. Cecil also signed over to UF an insurance policy that will one day help UF students.

Leslie, a commercial real estate developer in New York and Florida, says she, her brother, Warren Hurst, a teacher, and the rest of her family are forever indebted to Ed for changing her father’s journey. Together, they are proud to be “4 UF”.


You can win, too, as this year the UF Alumni Association is offering a $25 rebate to Gators who switch from plain Jane tags to the official UF license plate. Learn more at: UFPLATES.COM

Want to see your unique tag published?

Send photos with your name, town, degree info and occupation to:
FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu

FOND MEMORIES
NEW DISCOVERIES
UNDER THE GLOW OF
ORANGE & BLUE

FALL & WINTER FESTIVALS
MULTI-DAY MUSIC & ARTS EVENTS
6 AWARD WINNING BREWERIES
THOUSANDS OF FREE-FLYING BUTTERFLIES
ACRES OF BOTANICAL GARDENS
HENRY, THE OLDEST LIVING RHINO
CRYSTAL-BLUE FRESHWATER SPRINGS
100’S OF MILES OF TRAILS
FREE NIGHTLY BAT SHOWS
WORLD-CLASS MUSEUMS
LIVE MUSIC ON DOZENS OF STAGES

INSPIRATION FOR THE GATOR NATION
BEAUTIFUL GAINESVILLE & ALACHUA COUNTY

VisitGainesville.com
Enjoy these reader-submitted photos from their past and present adventures.

Murray Urquhart (BS '79, MD '82) of Bellevue, Washington, sported his Gator pride while riding the Route of the Hiawatha Trail, described as “The Crown Jewel of Rail-Trail Adventures.” The path is 4,000 feet above sea level and stretches from Montana to Idaho through 10 train tunnels and seven sky-high trestles.

Brad White (BA '83) and his wife, Cheri (UF Libraries 2011-2014) of Lady Lake, fly high over Albuquerque, New Mexico, during the Hot Air Balloon Fiesta in October.

John A. Ferko (BA '90) of Colorado Springs said he and his girlfriend represented The Gator Nation while at the Grand Prismatic Spring overlook in Yellowstone National Park. Ferko is a space operations officer in the US Space Force and works for US Space Command in the Joint Operations Center. His girlfriend is a naval officer and works for the US Space Command Commander’s Action Group.

This summer (from left), Nicole Shields (BA '10, AUD '14) and Luana Smith (BA '10) summited Mount Kilimanjaro's Uhuru Peak, the highest point in Africa and one of the Seven Summits. Smith is an attorney in New Orleans, but is originally from Tampa. Shields is an audiologist in Marietta, Georgia.

These two Gator couples took a fantasy RV tour that followed the Lewis and Clark expedition. They represented two of the 24 RVs on the tour. The couples had not met before the trip, but both of their RVs sported Gator logos, “so we became friends quickly!” From left are: Estela and Jim DuPont (both past presidents of the St. Augustine Gator Club), Maren Nelson (BSCE '87 and past president of Lone Star Gator Club), and Jeffrey Martin (BSCE '87 and past treasurer of Lone Star Gator Club). This photo was taken in Lolo, Montana, one of the confirmed campsites used by the expedition.

Ryan Mackman (BSTel '03) took this photo with his wife, Zoraime Mackman, at Castillo San Felipe del Morro in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where a real-life “Pirates of the Caribbean” historical event took place. The couple lives in West Palm Beach. He is a healthcare business consultant for value-based care at Salient Healthcare.

Martha Sale (MAcc '94) and her husband, Danny, of Cypress, Texas, carried their Gator flag all the way to Zermatt, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein. Martha has enjoyed her memberships in the Alamo City Gator Club (Texas), the Space Coast Gator Club (Florida), the Houston Gator Club (Texas) as well as the Lexington, Kentucky, and Pensacola Gator Clubs.

This photo was taken in Lolo, Montana, one of the confirmed campsites used by the expedition.

April Petrosino (BA '18, JD '21) of Merritt Island who traveled through Paris to celebrate her UF graduation, says her passion for UF is greater than the height of the Eiffel Tower. She is now working for the Bailey Glasser law firm in St. Petersburg.
Membership dues support alumni programs, student scholarships and UF’s ranking as a top public university. Your UF Alumni Association is proud to keep Gators connected to campus and to each other.

JOIN TODAY at ufalumni.ufl.edu or call 352-392-1905.
The Rocky Mountain Gator Club board of directors hosted a watch party for the UF-USF football game on Sept. 11.

The group began with a happy hour at a Gator-run business, Atlas Brewery, followed by the game.

**GATOR CLUB NEWS**

**TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALLGAME**

About 65 DC Gator Club members and friends gathered Sept. 14 for a night of baseball and fun as the Washington Nationals took on the Miami Marlins.

**ARE YOU A GATOR WHO HAS CEMENTED YOUR LOVE FOR UF IN INK?**

Share the image your tattoo artist used and the story behind your selection by emailing both to FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu

**IN MEMORIAM**

**TATTOO**

Ann Brocksmith of Defuniak Springs chose the Fighting Gator because it was the emblem at the time she started following UF. “I started trying to get the tattoo when I turned 60, but kept chickening out,” she said. Brocksmith finally took the plunge when she turned 75 so she would be ready for football season. “I love it! Go Gators!”

Linda Register Costantino (BSZoo '92, DVM '96) of Land O’ Lakes said the Fighting Gator has always been her favorite version of the Albert logo. So in 2004 when she and her husband were on their way into the Palms, she spotted Hart & Huntington tattoo shop and popped in to ask if they could copy that image. “He drew it free hand,” she said. “I loved it so much I had done right then and there. It shows ‘I am a Gator through and through.’”

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Joel Jackson Hartley (BSTel ’94) died Aug. 26 from COVID-19. He worked as a TV20 sports reporter and videographer after graduation but was more recently a media production staffer for the Marion County School Board.

He died in 2018 at age 71, but not before the Florida Bar gave him the Selig Goldin award for his lasting contributions to Florida’s criminal justice system. During his career, he pushed for better funding and improvements to criminal, mental health and juvenile justice. He was known for hiring more Black and female public defenders than any of his predecessors, and he pushed to move cases to a more digital sphere, long before the state mandated it.

**COVID CLAIMS FORMER REPORTER**

Joel Jackson Hartley (BSTel ’94) died Aug. 26 from COVID-19. He worked as a TV20 sports reporter and videographer after graduation but was more recently a media production staffer for the Marion County School Board.

**THE ART OF LIFE**

Suzanne Camp Crosby (BAFA ’70) was an artist and educator whose work led to her selection as the City of Tampa Photo Laureate in 2004 and numerous grants and fellowships throughout the Southeast during her career. Her works are included in many permanent museum collections, as well as other public and private galleries. She taught photography as an art form for more than 20 years at Hillsborough Community College. She died Dec. 9, 2020, at age 72.

**GATOR CHOMPING FROM AFAR**

The Rocky Mountain Gator Club held a watch party for the UF-USF football game on Sept. 11. Members (from left) are: treasurer Chrissie Dodd (BSAg ’96), director at-large Carissa Dill (BSESS ’01, MPT ’03), director at-large Nick Bokone (AA ’92), membership VP Robin Schuster, club founder Fran Wasserman (BA ’78, JD ’83), president and secretary Lorie Hoag (BA ’97), director at-large Brian “BC” Campbell (BSAdv ’90), president-elect Scott Mangino (MEd ’10), director at-large Matt Hopcroft and communications VP Kristy Williford (BSTel ’07).
What does it feel like to have a destination city courthouse named in your honor?

I think a courthouse honors me better than anything else. I can think of because I believe equal justice is the soul of democracy. That has been my path, trying to provide equal justice for everybody.

You’ve accomplished quite a few firsts in your lifetime. Which mean the most to you?

It’s a mosaic. I’m the first in my family to have a college degree. My father only went to the 6th grade. I was in the first class of women at UF. First woman to attend Georgetown. First woman to get the freshman award in the House of Representatives. Also, I was a selected member of the Senate. I can’t say that one is more memorable than the other. Everything has fallen in place for me. I feel very blessed.

Describe your first year at UF.

I had some friends from grade school in Ft. Lauderdale. We were very close. So we all went together to UF. There were no women’s dorms at that time, so we found a boarding house in town. There was a porbeagle stove in the middle of the room. One of the girls had a white suit she wanted to wear to a date, and she wanted to get the wrinkles out. So, she hung it up near the stove, and it was black by the time she came back. The ratio of men to women then was extraordinarily favorable to women. One night I had nine dates. How did you manage that evening?

With my watch, I think they were all hard up. We had a lot of veterans at UF at that time. They were examining what women were all about after being in service for so long.

People who did you see as a college student?

I did not find any bias in the professors. I can’t say that I faced any obstacles there.

Tell me about one or more of your college memories?

I ran for secretary/treasurer of the freshman class. I was in the first class of women at UF. I was there. Some local men called me and asked if I would like to have an honorary membership. I was astounded. I said of course. I particularly liked receiving that honor not posthumously. It was almost 10 years ago.

What else do Gators not know about you?

I’m tinkering with writing a book. It’s a very big hill to climb. I know I’d have to dedicate a lot of time.

What advice do you have for young people?

When I started out in political office, I lost three elections before I won and then I never lost an election when I was in office. What you have to do is focus, and if you really want something, you work hard, just your feet off and keep going. You’re stronger because you’ve experienced the loss, and it gives you humility. I lost one election by 54 votes. I can’t get it out of my mind still.

What else do Gators not know about you?

I’m still a frustrated would-be lawyer. The mistake I made is that when I was at UF and they were offering a combined law degree with your undergraduate degree — to save one year — I should have done that. I wanted to be a tax lawyer. I like numbers.
“AS UF CELEBRATES THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF TITLE IX, ONE GATOR REFLECTS ON HER HISTORIC COLLEGE CAREER.”

Margaret Tolbert (BFA ’74, MFA ’77) was smacking tennis balls during her daily workout when her future ran past her on the University of Florida campus. Jack Bacher (PAD ’72) and Frank Shorter (JD ’74), who had helped found the Florida Track Club, were out for a jog when it hit Tolbert: “That’s what I want to do,” she said.

And so, like Forrest Gump, she started running. She ran with the Florida Track Club and ran distances at a time when few women did. “If you won a race, you got thrown in the pool,” she said. “I was the odd man out because I was the girl, but they were my pantheon of heroes.”

Things changed in the 1972-73 academic year when UF decided to start giving scholarships to women athletes in five sports: swimming, tennis, golf, gymnastics and track and field. Title IX legislation a few months later changed everything for women athletes. UF has been celebrating the 50-year anniversary of that legislation a few months later changed everything for women athletes. Title IX legislation a few months later changed everything for women athletes. UF has been celebrating the 50-year anniversary of that milestone decision throughout this academic year.

Before that milestone, any women at UF who wanted to play sports were relegated to club sports.

Tolbert said being a part of the first class of women to receive scholarships seemed awkward and outlandish back then because track athletes in general didn’t receive much support at all. “The guys had a field house,” she said, “and we would stand outside and buy shoes from the trunk of a car. But we [women athletes] still didn’t get to have a field house. We used the Women’s Gym.”

“And then everything changed,” Tolbert said. Suddenly, there was access to the field house, weights for the women, and they were flying to meets all over the country.

Today, that seems normal as the Florida women’s athletic programs have become one of the most prolific in the country. Back then it was a novelty. “I remember being in school, and women’s sports were getting started,” Tolbert said.

Tolbert competed in national events for the Gators, a trailblazer in so many ways because she was among the first women to receive a scholarship and one of the few who liked to run distances.

“I didn’t have a sense of history when I was a teenager running things,” she said. “And then everything changed.”

When she was a Lady Gator runner, Tolbert said she went to Europe with her family, as her father, a UF professor, was traveling on a Ford Foundation grant. “While there, she competed in some races, met dignitaries and realized the scale of her sport.

“I started to get it. You know Frank Shorter was running in Fukuoka [Japan],” she said. “But, I realized any of us can compete overseas. It is a great model. Running can happen anywhere. … Just go out your door and make it happen.”

Running led her to art, and now Tolbert is an accomplished artist and author with paintings, lithographs and prints hanging in museums around town and around the world. She says she loves the way art, like running, is also a global connector. “Art can, you know, just bring things together,” she said.

Tolbert still lives in Gainesville in a home near the Mark Bostick Golf Course and has become involved in many projects, from UF’s NCAA Scholar Athlete committee to her fascination with Florida springs as a subject of her art.

“I always feel a connection,” she said. “I think Gainesville is kind of a portal connecting people everywhere together in myriad ways.

For instance, Tolbert recalls Frank Shorter once saying, “There must be something about Gainesville because when I came back into town, I could feel it.” He said, “If you want to set a world record or win an Olympic medal … you need to come to Gainesville to train even if you have to live in your car.”

Tolbert says she’s proud to call Gainesville her home. And in reflection, she’s grateful to have been a part of the first class of women athletes to receive support. While it seems like a long time ago that women didn’t have the facilities or budgets or certainly scholarships to field teams, it often still seems surreal for the women in that first class.

They weren’t thinking about how they were blazing a trail. “I realize now … that we probably just weren’t aware that we were kind of history,” Tolbert said. “You know, we kind of were. That’s amazing, amazing Title IX.” Amazing, indeed.
ON FEBRUARY 17, we ask you to “stand up” for the school, research initiative, program or UF cause that means the most to you. Your gift, joined with thousands of others that day, will lift UF and all of its far-reaching and life-changing work.

Gifts of all sizes are welcome; what matters most is that every Gator gives. And we’ll have fun along the way, with events, challenges, gift matches, leaderboards to watch and chances to compete with Gators everywhere. You can keep up with the action at GIVINGDAY.UFL.EDU.