

GATOR

FLORIDA

NATION

WINTER 2021

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



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

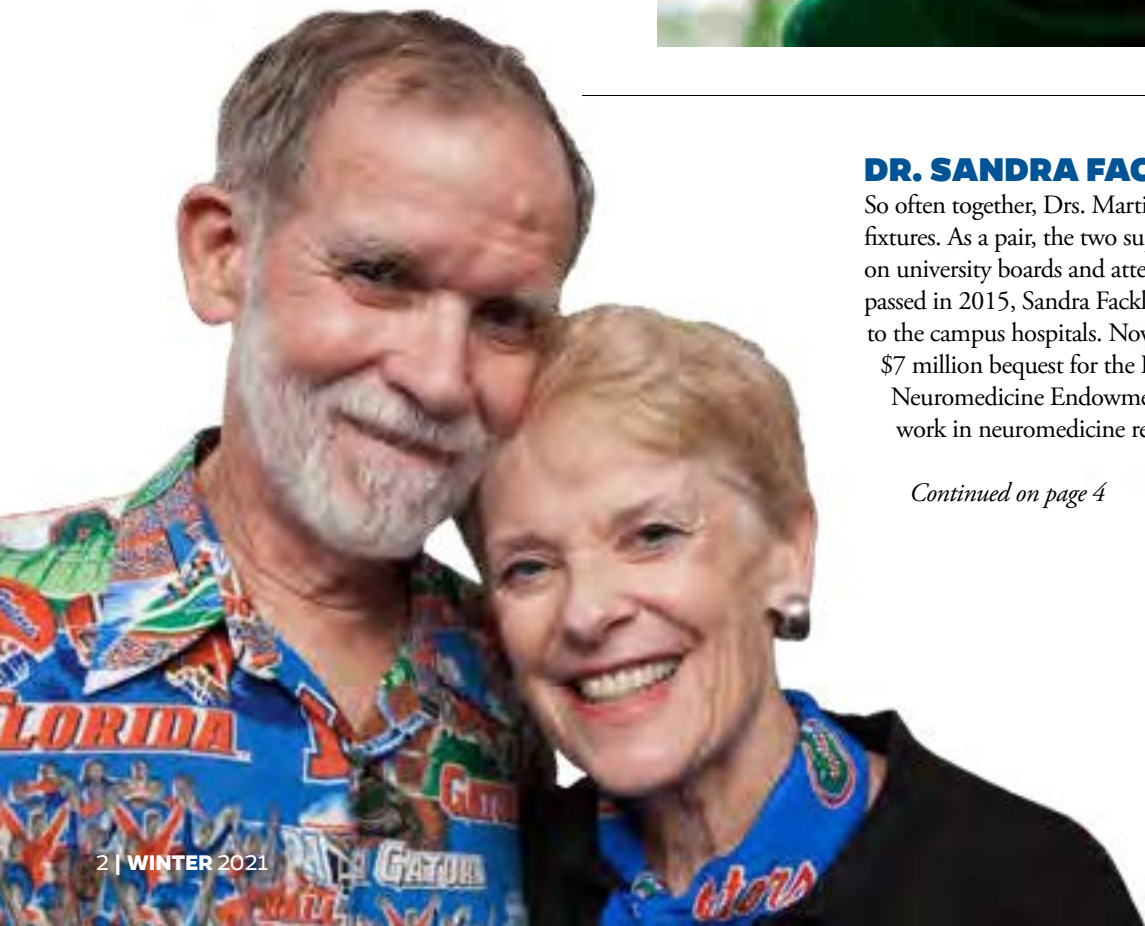
As a single mom working on two UF degrees in the 1990s, **Trish Ring** (MS '93, PHD '96) juggled graduate school and motherhood. That experience inspired her to offer a helping hand to students and professors in UF's Department of Psychology. This fall, the psychotherapist and equine coach boosted her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



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.

Continued on page 4



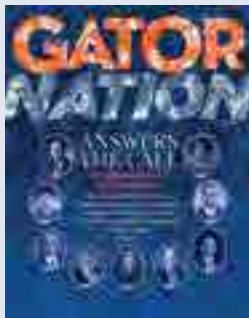
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We caught up with some of the Gator Nation's great athletes.
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High school dropout. Abusive home. Poverty. The odds were against Damon Woodard. But propelled by a fierce inner drive and a few supportive souls along the way, he would go on to become one of the nation's leading experts in biometrics and machine learning.
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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.*





KENNETH GRIFFIN

“Education,” Ken Griffin insists, “is the most powerful solution we have to enable future generations ... to realize their potential.” That belief led the Citadel hedge fund founder and CEO to invest \$5 million in UF’s College of Education to expand its computer science education program. His gift is part of an initiative focused on increasing access to high-quality computer science education across the United States. With it, UF professors will integrate computer science into math, science, literacy and other subjects.



HUGH HATHCOCK

You could say Hugh Hathcock has always had good taste. After all, 30 years ago he started the cookie delivery service Fresh Beginnings. What began as a small group of South Georgia bakers selling fresh cookies to car dealerships to help them close deals soon became a popular nationwide oven-to-doorstep service. All these years later, Hathcock has given UF Athletics a treat of its own: a \$12.6 million gift to name the suite tower at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium and the basketball practice complex.



Conversation with UF President Kent Fuchs

A SEASON OF LIGHT AND JOY

ON CAMPUS, A GATOR ALL AGLOW SPARKS A NEW CAMPUS TRADITION.

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

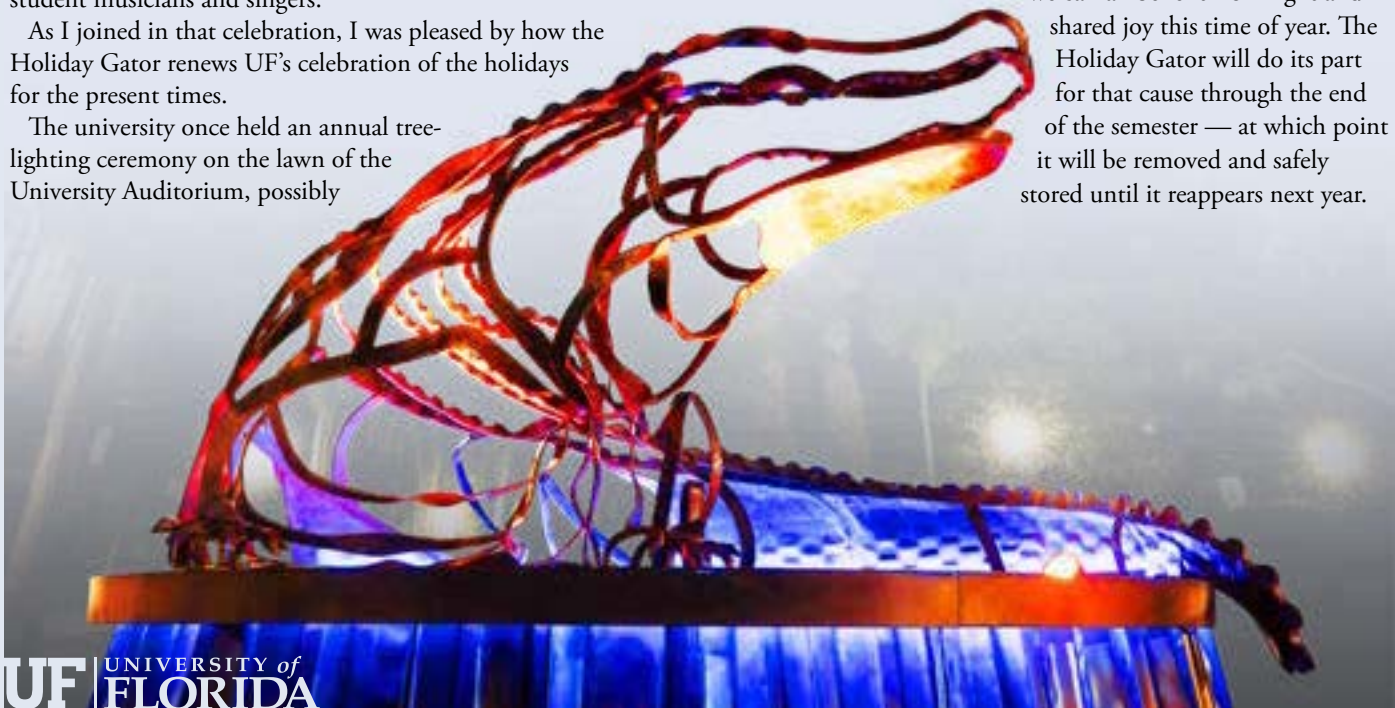
at the same location as the Holiday Gator near the corner of Union Road and Newell Drive.

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.



FLORIDA GATOR
THE UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA’S ALUMNI
MAGAZINE
VOLUME 9 ISSUE 1
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ALUMNI ASSOCIATION INC. FOR ITS MEMBERS. ADDRESS
CHANGES MAY BE SENT TO UFALUM@UFALUMNI.UFL.EDU
OR ALUMNI RECORDS/UF ALUMNI ASSOCIATION, P.O. BOX
14425, GAINESVILLE, FL 32604-2425. STANDARD POSTAGE
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IN A RUSH

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 Perseverance rover's view of the delta in Jezero Crater on Mars.

ANCIENT LIFE ON MARS

NASA/JPL-CALTECH/ASU/MSSS

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, strewing them out into its massive delta. UF astrobiologist Amy Williams looked up from the bed of that ancient river to its rocky remnants, 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."

The images reveal a transition from a river flowing into a lake to episodic torrents of floodwater that deposited the boulders.

"It helps us understand so much more about the water cycle on Mars," Williams said. "From orbital images, we knew it had to be water that formed the delta, but having these images is like reading a book instead of just looking at the cover."



COURTESY OF NASA

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.

"This is the closest I will ever get to going to Mars and doing this work in person," Williams said. "Seeing these rocks as I would in real life ... is really staggering and really beautiful."

— ALISSON CLARK (BSJ '98)

NUMBERS OF NOTE

6,000+

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.



NOAA

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 uff.to/jhd3s8

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.



Artist rendering of the new student health care center.

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.



The current Student Infirmary, located on Fletcher Drive

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 uff.to/0qdwsk

BEER FOR BUTTERFLIES



FIRST MAGNITUDE BREWING COMPANY

“It may be a pie-in-the-sky idea, but I hope breweries will see the benefit.”

— JARET DANIELS, UF butterfly researcher

UF Butterfly researcher, Jaret Daniels, partnered with Gainesville’s First Magnitude Brewing Company to launch sales of a new beer, Reign Imperial Stout. He is recruiting breweries across the continent to make and sell the beer, with a portion of the proceeds devoted to planting milkweed, a key factor in the success of the iconic but declining monarch butterfly.

\$38 MILLION



Hoh

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.

AWARD-WINNING
UF JOURNALISM



SAM THOMAS

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

Tobie Nell Perkins (BSJ '20), **Sam Thomas** (BSJ '20) and **Mackenzie Behm** (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. uff.to/kbfzb6



VICTOR PRIETO

Chris Nikic trains for an Ironman Triathlon, from “Beyond 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. uff.to/pp9f38

These students’ award-winning work was selected from more than 5,200 entries.



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1

DOCUMENTING SOCIAL CHANGE



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



3



4

1. Sheila Pree Bright,
The Rebirth of Us, 2020

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

4. Earlie Hudnall, Jr.,
The Guardian, 1990

5. Ayana V. Jackson,
Moments of Sweet Reprieve,
2016, from the series *Intimate*
Justice in the Stolen Moment



5

99.4%

Match of a human coronavirus strain to that of a strain found in dogs in Malaysia.

A UF research team is helping to build the case that coronaviruses move between animals and people at a more frequent rate than previously understood. Learn more at uff.to/2fskcj

72 HOURS

Length of UF’s hackathon, at which students learn about coding while competing to create innovative answers to a variety of challenges. This year,



the event was led by **Sanethia Thomas**, a former professional women’s basketball player who is now a computer and information science professor at UF. Thomas

says she likes how this event merges her field with science. A \$100,000 prize pool provided by IBM was split among all winning and some participating teams. Winners were announced Dec. 6.

17

Countries and territories throughout the Caribbean whose coral reefs are under attack from stony coral tissue loss disease.

UF Sea Grant staff are among the hundreds of people working to preserve more than 2,000 living rescued corals, which have been placed at more than 20 facilities in 14 states for protection and breeding purposes. Learn more at uff.to/7z4s6r



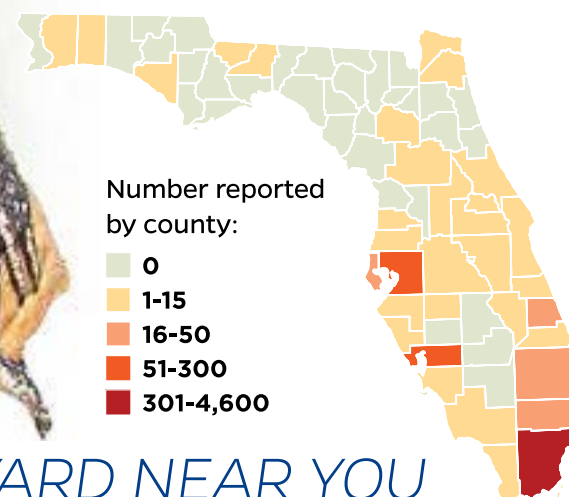
UF/IFAS

TEGUS: COMING TO A BACKYARD NEAR YOU

UF/IFAS scientists are providing critical research for Florida's Wildlife Commission about the growth and spread of the **Argentine black and white tegu** population in Florida. These large reptiles were brought to the state as exotic pets. However, escaped or released pets are wreaking havoc in some Florida counties, impacting wildlife, threatening the nesting areas of endangered species and invading natural areas, including Everglades National Park. Tegus

have been spotted in four Georgia counties, as well. **Melissa Miller**, invasive species research coordinator for The Croc Docs at UF's Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center, says trapping efforts are key to reducing tegu numbers. At-risk native wildlife already impacted by tegus include the American crocodile, Key Largo woodrat, and Cape Sable seaside sparrow, as well as all other ground-nesting birds and reptiles.

TEGUS SPREAD



WEED IT OR NOT?

130 types of weeds are included in a new UF/IFAS weed identification online tool, which sorts weeds by flower color and offers management strategies. It also includes grass types.

uff.to/r3j70y

UF/IFAS



TWITTER

UF biomedical engineer and science artist **Ana Maria Porras** with her 3-D printed statue as part of the *If Then She Can* art exhibit in Dallas (shown below)

125

Women STEM professionals whose full-length 3-D printed statues are part of the *If Then She Can* art exhibit in a Dallas park. UF biomedical engineer and science artist **Ana Maria Porras** is included. Porras studies microbes for a living. For fun, she crochets likenesses of the microscopic organisms. "Microbes aren't inherently bad," Porras said. "I think it's nice to portray them also in a way that makes them look cute to take a little bit of stigma away and make people think about them in new ways."



IN MEMORIAM



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."

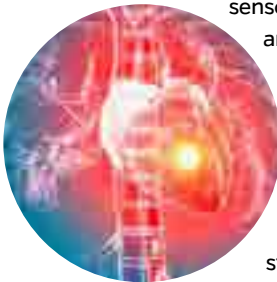
Gleim also made an extraordinary impact on the aviation industry. He published flight training books designed to help pilots pass their FAA exams and earn certificates from private pilot through airline transport pilot. All told, he taught millions of people during his 47-year career. His legacy continues through all of his training manuals and his publishing company, which will help candidates achieve their educational goals.

COOL TECH

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

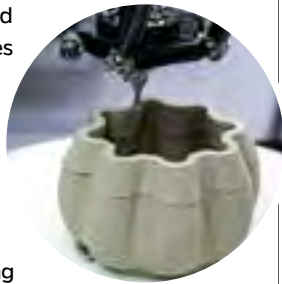
HEART ATTACK SENSOR

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.



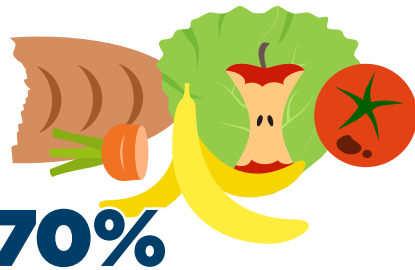
Artem Varnitsin / Adobe Stock

“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 GURKA**, 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 (HBCD) Study will enroll thousands of pregnant women and their babies and follow them through early childhood to identify trajectories of brain development.

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.



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/6jrc682

“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.”



Amplified Intelligence

— **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.

THREE

Veterinary colleges in the nation that own a linear accelerator, which uses highly targeted radiation to deliver more precise and faster treatment of cancerous tumors within the chest. UF is one of those three, thanks to a **\$3 million gift from the Gauntt Foundation** that was used to purchase the leading-edge technology.



UF COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE

Lincoln, a 9-year-old mixed breed dog diagnosed with a tumor inside of his chest, was one of the first patients to receive radiation therapy using a new leading-edge linear accelerator at UF’s Small Animal Hospital.



UF/IFAS

2016 Great Florida Cattle Drive

DID YOU KNOW?



UF/IFAS

UF Sea Grant Agent Michael Sipo (BS '13, MS '18) holds a hogfish and shares this little-known fact:

Q Which animal species is born all female, but some transition to male later in life if needed?

A hogfish (also called hog snapper, although they do not belong in the snapper family). These fish spawn in groups where one male can have a harem of multiple females. When the male is removed from the population, the largest female begins her transition to male and develops a more dramatic sloping snout as well as darker pigmentation around the face, almost resembling a mask. It is believed the female-to-male transition can take up to two months, internally, while the external characteristics continue to become more pronounced over time. Sex change from female to male in a typical population occurs at around 3 years of age and 14 inches fork length. However, if there are no cues to transition, there have been documented females as old as 12 and around 25 inches, with the oldest hogfish being a 23-year-old male.

MOOO-VING MILESTONE

UF/IFAS faculty and staff are helping Florida cattlemen celebrate the 500th anniversary of their industry, which began in 1521 when Ponce de Leon brought six Andalusian cattle from Spain. From preserving Florida’s six million acres of ranchlands and the state’s water supply to supporting native ecosystems, wildlife and cattle breeding best practices, IFAS faculty aim to help keep this farming segment viable for future generations of cattlemen, and for the millions of people who depend upon them for food. UF’s agriculture experts also work to enhance all the ways cattle ranches support native ecosystems.

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.

— ALISSON CLARK (BSJ '98)

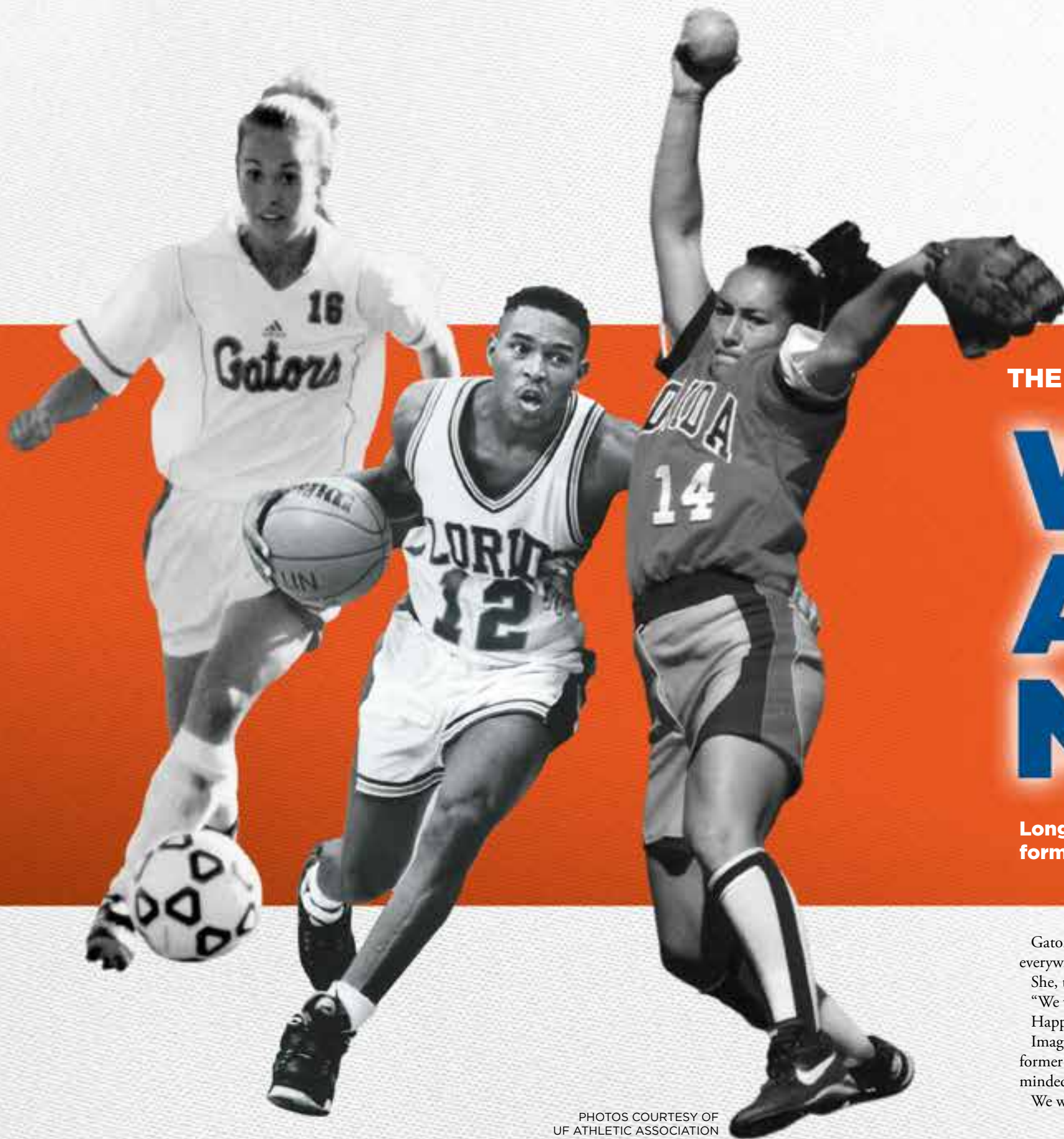
#1 in Florida



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
shands children's Hospital

UFHealth.org/pediatrics



THE GATOR NATION IS EVERYWHERE...

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

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.

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 are up to these days.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF
UF ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION



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 is 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. Thornburg (renamed CITCO Water). Morrison is CEO of the company based in Huntington, West Virginia.

TIM OLSON BASEBALL

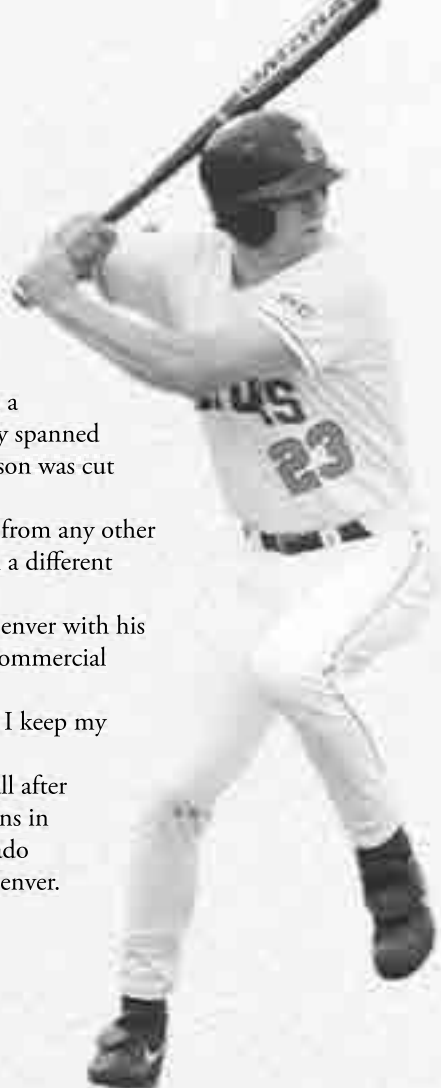
This past spring, Olson ('00) saw his Florida record of 21 years finally broken. He hit in 29 straight games in 2000, but Jacob Young eclipsed that with a 30-game hitting streak that actually spanned three seasons because the 2020 season was cut short by COVID-19.

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.



HEATHER MITTS SOCCER

Mitts (BSADV '01) was one the key cogs in 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.

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.

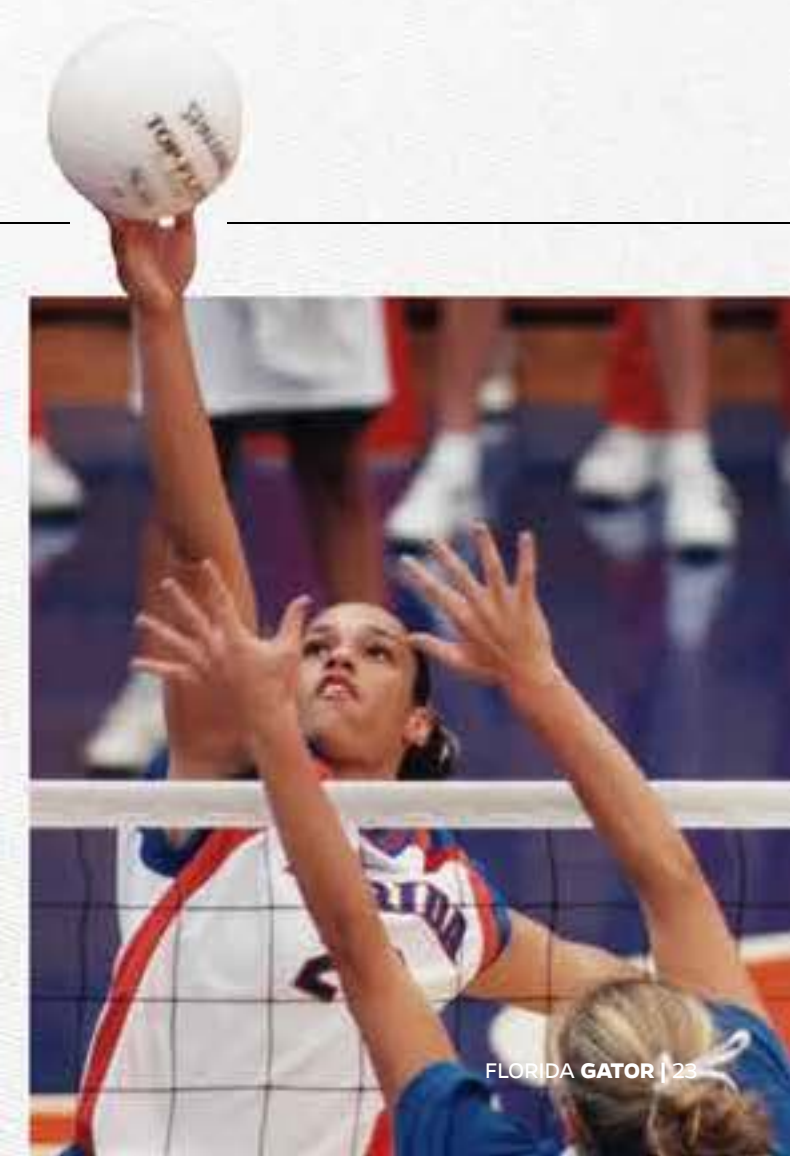
"I knew it was for me," she said.

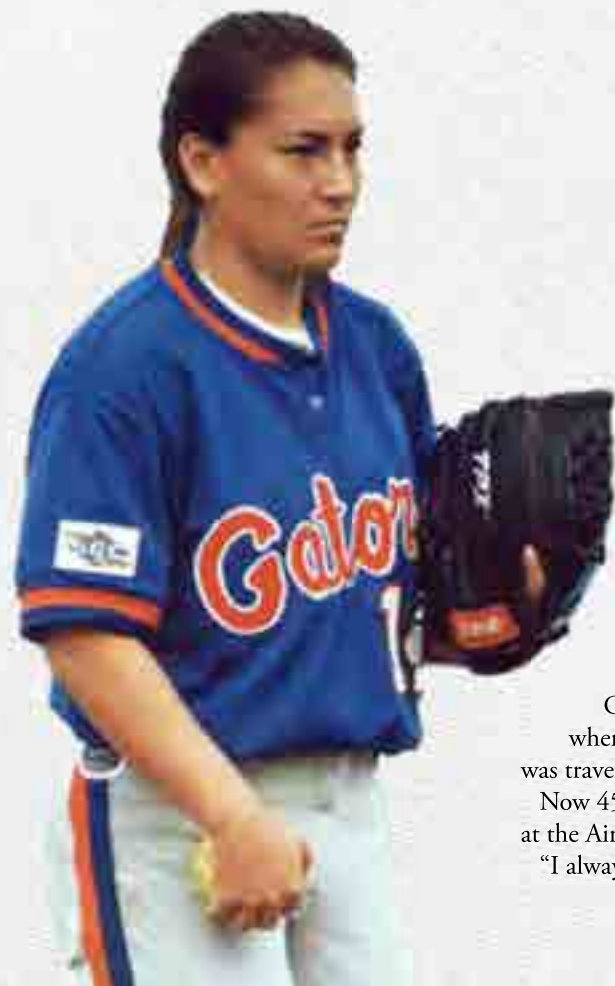
After graduating from Florida, she got her master's degree in nursing from Kennesaw State in Georgia. She moved there because her husband, former Gator football star Reggie McGrew, was with the Atlanta Falcons.

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."





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.

DUDLEY HART GOLF

After a stellar career at Florida where he was a four-time All-American, Hart (BA '90) had success on the PGA Tour (winning twice), but also had injury problems. One year, he had to make a certain amount of money on Tour or lose his card after missing most of the previous year.

Hart, 53, made a decision in 2004 to move to Buffalo with his wife and triplets to get away from south Florida.

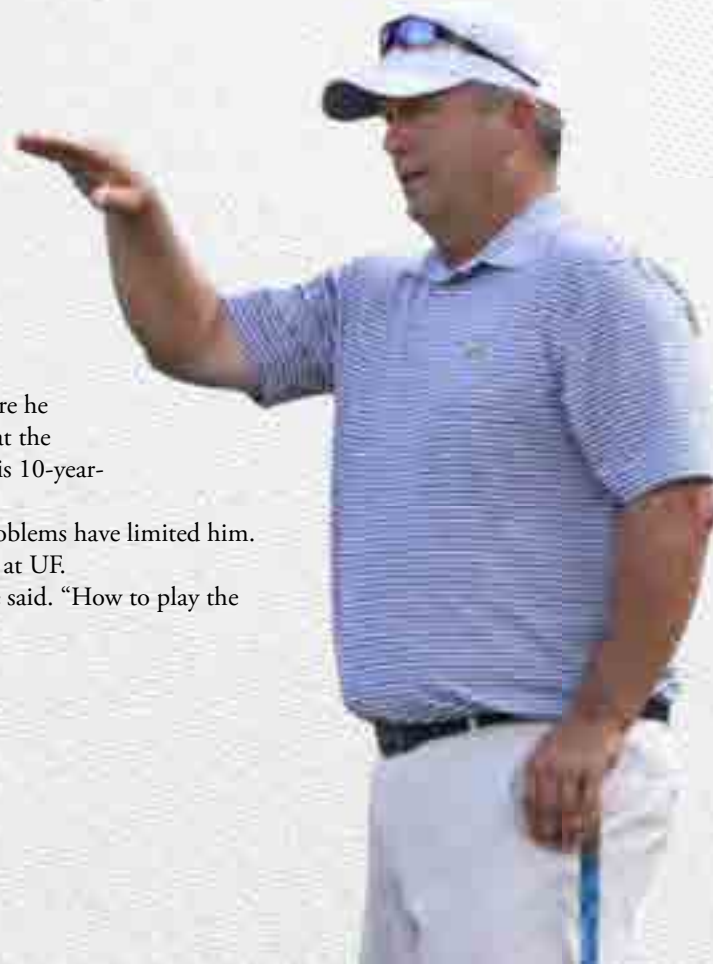
But six years ago, he changed his mind.

“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.”



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.



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.

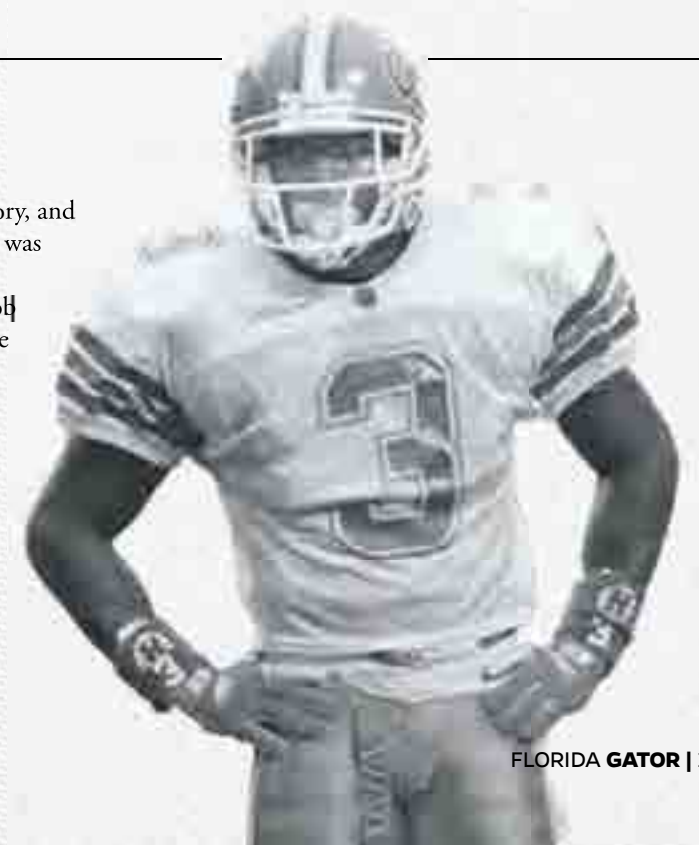
“I got to travel the world,” Embree, 30, says. “But I knew it was time.”

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 bowl 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.

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.

IT WAS, IN 1923, AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAD COME. The science of medicine, taught at the University of Florida for the good of communities stretching from Pensacola to Key West. It started with a pharmacy school. That year — memories of the influenza pandemic still lingering — 43 students registered for classes in what would soon be UF's first health college. Medicine and nursing colleges would come three decades later. A teaching hospital, College of Public Health and Health Professions, a VA

center and two more colleges — dentistry and veterinary medicine — would follow in the 1960s and '70s. Then there would be new centers, new clinics, new hospitals, new institutes, new academic buildings and new programs.

Until, finally, it would be easier to refer to the collection simply as "UF Health."

Almost a century after those first students enrolled, UF Health spans six standalone colleges, nine centers and institutes and nine hospitals. Roughly one-third of the university falls under its umbrella. It brings to campus more people than football, basketball, baseball and the other Gator sports combined.

Its alumni include inventors, world-renowned researchers, some of the nation's best surgeons, professors and even an astronaut.

And now — with the university's eight-year **Go Greater** campaign nearing its end — UF Health's ambition is bolder than ever. So too is its ability to treat and care for Floridians (and their animals).

There's a good reason for that confidence. During the campaign's first six years, alumni and friends invested:

- **\$59.5 million** for education in the six colleges;
- **\$39.39 million** for endowed faculty positions to support world-class scientists and physicians;
- **\$372.45 million** for research;
- **\$413.44 million** for programs and patient care; and,
- **\$38.9 million** for new facilities.

A few of those investments are mentioned here:



UF PHOTO ARCHIVES

Nursing students on the steps outside of the Health Center in 1964.

College of Dentistry YOUR SMILING FACE

Often overlooked Floridians are flashing big grins thanks to College of Dentistry community partnerships.

The Special Day Foundation, Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation and the **Henry Schein** dental supplies company teamed up with UF to deliver care to vulnerable children and adults in St. Petersburg, Hialeah and Naples.

UF's College of Dentistry and the Special Day Foundation are working together to treat people with disabilities at the UF Health's St. Petersburg and Hialeah dental centers. It's not just about smiles. Developmentally disabled people disproportionately suffer from malnutrition, speech problems, infections and other oral-related health issues. In Florida alone more than 500,000 children and adults are estimated to have disabilities that can make a trip to the dentist challenging.

In Naples, the college's **NCEF Pediatric Dental Center** — named for the Naples Children & Education Foundation — is partnering with the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation and the dental equipment company Henry Schein to support a new oral health promotion center. The center treats children in Southwest Florida.

College of Nursing BACK TO THE FUTURE

America's next generation of nurses got a booster shot from three alumna. **Linda Aiken** (BSN '64, MSN '66), **Linda Moody** (BSN '65, MSN '69) and **Patricia Chamings** (BSN '64, MSN '65) — all with careers of their own in high education — returned to their alma mater to create professorships in UF's College of Nursing.

An endowed professor herself at the University of Pennsylvania, Aiken's UF professorship is held by the college's dean, Anna McDaniel. Moody, a distinguished professor emeritus of the University of South Florida, established a research professorship before her death last year. And Chamings, a former nursing dean at the University of North Carolina Greensboro and North Carolina A&T State University, created a professorship so UF "continues to be on the cutting edge of nursing and leadership for our profession."

"These professorships are integral to our mission to further knowledge in the field of nursing science," McDaniel says. "Not only will these endowments support innovation within the college for years to come, but they will also strengthen our outstanding educational programs and clinical service to benefit the next generation of nursing researchers."

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.



College of Medicine FOR THE ONE I LOVE

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 and speech therapists. Their gift also provided seed money to expand research efforts, which led to a multi-million dollar biomarker research grant that 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 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**.

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 **DuBow 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 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 now retired senior associate dean helped established new degree programs, departments and infrastructure, and twice led the college's multi-year accreditation process. But even in retirement she wasn't finished. Peoples-Sheps and her husband, **David**, are establishing a scholarship and endowed chair through a bequest.

"Both of us have health degrees — in medicine and nursing — in addition to degrees in public health," she explains. "We have firsthand experience with the value of combining other health degrees with public health. PHHP was several steps ahead of the national agenda. This is a great example of PHHP's record of forward-thinking, and 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 continue to flourish and achieve even greater levels of distinction," Peoples-Sheps says. "We hope to contribute to this exciting trajectory."

2015 (continued)

- UF Health Shands Hospital awarded **World Health Organization** and **UNICEF's** "Baby-Friendly" designation.



2016

- Surgeons at UF Health Shands Hospital **separate conjoined twins connected at heart and liver**.

2017

- College of Medicine physicians **first to implant bionic eye** in patient with blinding genetic disorder.

2018

- **UF begins \$17 million, four-year initiative** to solve urgent societal problems — included are using precision health and data science to fight disease and disparities, and advancing therapies to enhance brain, neuromuscular and mental health.



- **Center for Regenerative Medicine** launches to find methods that allow human body to repair damaged organs.

- UF College of Medicine-Jacksonville physician performs **world's first implant of a regenerative bio envelope** that protects cardiac defibrillator under skin.

- UF Health pediatric and adult ECMO program receives prestigious **Award for Excellence in Life Support** from **Extracorporeal Life Support Organization**.

2019

- **Lauren and Lee Fixel** invest \$20 million to establish **Norman Fixel Institute for Neurological Diseases**, named for Lee's father.

- UF doctors first in country to treat baby with the **gene therapy drug Zolgensma for spinal muscular atrophy**.



- Orlando businessman **Harris Rosen** gives \$12 million for brain tumor research initiative; UF Health-led **ReMission Summit** follows, drawing nation's top experts to focus on treatments.



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 only the 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** — supports 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 impressed 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.

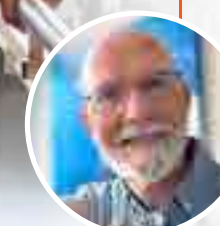
2020

- **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.

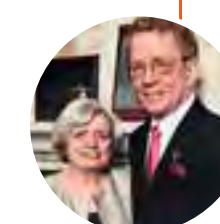
- **UF experiment studying age-related muscle loss** takes place aboard International Space Station.



- 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.

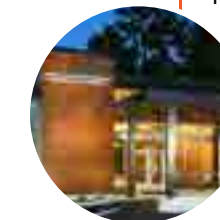
- **Joanne W. Gauntt Foundation** contributes \$3 million to College of Veterinary Medicine to purchase linear accelerator to enhance radiation oncology treatment for small animal cancer patients.



- 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**.



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.

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.

STORY BARBARA DRAKE (MFA '04)

PORTRAIT BY AARON DAYE

THERE'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.



Amplified Intelligence UF

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.”



PHOTO COURTESY DAMON WOODARD

Damon Woodard in the second grade, in New Orleans. As a child, he was quiet, determined and focused, he says.

“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 at 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 by then was no longer living with Woodard’s father — backed 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



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 event with his dissertation adviser and mentor, Dr. Patrick Flynn. “He taught me a lot during my time as a graduate student,” says Woodard, “and all these years later, I find value in his advice as a faculty member.”

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 Black 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” there, 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 a 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 for 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 2005 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.



GETTY IMAGES

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 initial 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.

“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

Dr. Tempestt Neal and Woodard at her UF graduation.



PHOTO BY AARON DAYE

Damon Woodard and his wife, Kila, married in 2008 when he was a faculty member at Clemson University.

“I credit much of my success to Dr. Woodard’s mentorship — he’s a game changer!”

— Dr. Tempestt Neal, first-generation alum, now a tenure-track faculty member at the University of South Florida

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. The daughter of a cosmetologist and a military veteran, Neal went on to make Gator history as the first African American woman to receive a doctorate in computer engineering from CISE.

“I credit much of my success to Dr. Woodard’s mentorship — he’s a game changer!” said Dr. Neal, now a tenure-track professor at the University of South Florida. “He takes on a ‘cool uncle’ approach, where he isn’t a hand-holder, nor is he hands-off. He allows his students to find their own way in nearly every aspect that matters in a PhD program....”



PHOTO BY AARON DAYE

An expert in artificial intelligence and biometrics, Dr. Woodard serves as Director of AI Partnerships for UF’s new Artificial Intelligence Initiative. In that role, he coordinates with industry, government and educators across the state.

Now that Neal is mentoring her own students, she says she often finds herself wondering, “What would Dr. Woodard say about this situation?”

“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: uff.to/j214z9
- **Visit** Woodard’s UF homepage at www.damonwoodard.com



A NATION 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 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.

"We will be among the nation's Top 5 public research universities."

— **UF President Kent Fuchs** during his formal inauguration

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 really, truly understand how implausible 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 breakneck 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.

"All I can say to our alumni is 'thank you' and let's keep going," Brian Danforth, the alumni association's executive director, says. "Gators strive to be at the top, and participation is something all of us can do to be there."

Leading the university to that elite spot were UF Alumni Association presidents. We caught up with some of them.

Dr. Jason Rosenberg (BS '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.

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.

ADVICE FOR NEW ALUMNI:

Collectively, we owe UF a debt that we will never be able to repay. Take every opportunity you can to continue to engage with your alma mater. You will continue to get more than you give. People often ask me to tell them my favorite memory as a Gator. I tell them, without hesitation, it's the one that I have yet to make.

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.



Rahul Patel (BA '94, JD '97)

DAY JOB: Partner, King & Spalding, LLP, Atlanta

UFAA PRESIDENT: 2013-14

He didn't know it then, but 1992 was the year Rahul Patel's life course would be set. It started with being picked for the Preview Orientation team. There he met his wife, Swati, made lifelong friends and began decades of service to UF — including now a governor-appointed to the university's Board of Trustees. "That was a real 'sliding door' day for me," he says of his selection to Preview's staff. "UF really does shape the direction of your life."

PRESIDENTIAL TERM POINT OF PRIDE:

Jason Rosenberg started an initiative to improve our alumni engagement score while he was president. Other presidents who followed Jason, including me, were inspired by his leadership, success and impact of this initiative and continued to drive it. Today we are the second-ranked public university in alumni engagement.

UF IN THREE WORDS:

Life-changing, culture-of-excellence, opportunity.

FAVORITE PROFESSOR:

D.T. Smith, who taught trusts and estates in law school. He made the class entertaining.

I remember on the first day of class, the first thing he said was, "You will do a lot of reading in my class. I like reading. My favorite three authors, in order of importance, are: No. 1, me; No. 2, Mike Bianchi (who at the time was the Gator sports beat writer for the Gainesville Sun); No. 3, me." We all looked forward to going to class because it was a bit of a stand-up comedy hour. Taught me the power of keeping your audience engaged.

WHY IT'S GREAT TO BE A FLORIDA GATOR:

I can spare myself the embarrassment of having to say I graduated from a bottom 95% public university.

POST-GRADUATION SURPRISE:

I thought I would grow taller. I really thought I would have a late-in-life growth spurt. Didn't happen.

ADVICE FOR NEW ALUMNI:

"The master in the art of living makes little distinction between his work and play. He hardly knows which is which; he simply pursues his vision of excellence in whatever he does, leaving others to decide whether he is working or playing. To him, he is always doing both." (James Michener)

WHAT GATORS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BEING TOP 5:

We are part of a university with great momentum. Five years ago we were the 14th ranked public university in the country. Today we are a Top 5 public university with only UCLA, Berkeley, Michigan and Virginia ahead of us. The rise in our ranking improves our brand and the value of all UF degrees, provides an opportunity for students to get a world-class education in Florida, and helps us solve the world's most pressing problems through the research we do. The best is yet to come.



Suzanne Norris (BSBA '86)

DAY JOB: Executive vice president, Millennium Bank, Lake City

UFAA PRESIDENT: 2014-15

Life is good for Suzanne Norris. For that, she points directly to her UF education, skills learned through student involvement and the rich experiences of being part of the university's diverse community. "My post-graduation life is even better than I could have imagined," she says. "I'm not sure as an undergraduate that I fully appreciated the advantage that being a UF alumnus affords you."

PRESIDENTIAL TERM POINT OF PRIDE:

I am proud to have participated in the selection process for the new president of the university. Upon meeting Dr. Fuchs, it was immediately apparent that he was the right person to help guide UF to the next level.

UF IN THREE WORDS:

Excellence, achievement, responsibility.

WHY IT'S GREAT TO BE A FLORIDA GATOR:

The best thing about being a Gator is you become part of a worldwide family. No matter when you attended UF or what path you have taken since graduation, we are all part of the Gator Nation. A Gator knows no strangers.

WHAT SHE WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HAVE KNOWN WHILE A STUDENT:

Don't be in such a rush to leave UF.

POST-GRADUATION SURPRISE:

All the best things in my life came from my decision to attend UF. I met my husband at UF, made lifelong friends and have had a rewarding career thanks to the education I received. I am not sure I could have understood the impact that UF would have on my life when I decided to attend.

ADVICE FOR NEW ALUMNI:

Wherever you settle, find your local alumni association chapter and get involved. It's a big transition, and finding yourself among fellow Gators makes it a lot easier.

WHAT GATORS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BEING TOP 5:

Being in the Top 5 of public universities will provide even more exciting and rewarding opportunities to our students and alumni. While we have achieved this important milestone, we can't be complacent. We have to continue to challenge ourselves as alumni to do more to support our university. Alumni engagement is critical to maintaining our spot in the Top 5.



Timothy Cerio (BA'90, JD '95)

DAY JOB: General Counsel, Citizens Property Insurance Corp., Tallahassee

UFAA PRESIDENT: 2015-16

It was big news in September 2020 when U.S. News & World Report placed UF No. 6 on its annual best colleges list. But Tim Cerio, a member of the Florida Board of Governors, wasn't satisfied. Days later, the board that oversees the state's 12 public universities approved \$20 million for UF's artificial intelligence initiative so the university could take another step forward. "The Legislature will ask the universities, and will ask us as the Board of Governors, 'How are you spending the money we gave you? How does it align with metrics that are observable and measurable,'" he said then. A year later that focus helped result in UF's Top 5 ranking.

UF IN 3 WORDS:

Leadership, stewardship and tradition.

DEFINING UF MOMENT:

While I was a student, I was appointed by Gov. Lawton Chiles to the Florida Board of Regents (the predecessor to today's Board of Governors). That opportunity shaped me professionally and personally, and continues to have an impact in my life today.

FAVORITE PROFESSOR:

Professor and former dean of the law school Jon Mills. Professor Mills, also a former speaker of the Florida House of Representatives, has a passion for Florida constitutional law and he teaches with a deep understanding of how our state government works with practical, policy and political insight.

WHY IT'S GREAT TO BE A FLORIDA GATOR:

UF has an unparalleled tradition of providing leadership for our state and nation, and as we emerge as a world-class institution of higher learning our influence will continue to grow around the globe.

WHAT HE WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HAVE KNOWN WHILE A STUDENT:

I wish I had known the importance of the relationships I was forming — not just among other students, but also some faculty and administrators. Now, 30 years after I graduated from UF, I still count many of these individuals among my closest friends, even family.

ADVICE FOR NEW ALUMNI:

Many new alums are busy starting careers and families, but when the time is right engage with your alma mater in a way that's meaningful and rewarding for you personally. Whether you are giving your time, talents or resources you can make a difference.

WHAT GATORS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BEING TOP 5:

Making the Top 5 is a game-changer for UF and it creates momentum that can continue to propel the university forward. We will capture the attention of new, world-class employers for our students; we will draw in more public and private research and grant dollars; and we should expect even more successful philanthropy. We must make the most of these opportunities as good stewards, and never rest on our laurels.



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 cabinet appointees,' and then laugh and get on with it."

PRESIDENTIAL TERM POINT OF PRIDE:

We transformed the operating model, bringing in sponsorship dollars so that UFAA could spend more of its time and money reaching alumni, like game day at Emerson, Gator 100 and other events.

UF IN THREE WORDS:

Achievement, competitiveness, passion.

DEFINING UF MOMENT:

In February 1990, I was elected student body president, and our Vision Party swept the senate. Campaigns were always long and full of energy and emotion. I remember a huge, exhausted group of us at the old Orange and Brew hearing the results at 1 a.m. and going crazy, 50 or 60 of us screaming in a massive hug, just taking in what it all meant.

FAVORITE PROFESSOR:

(Marketing professor) Doc (Jack) Faricy had a great love of the subject and connection with students. Not only did he teach, but he was a faculty sponsor for student organizations and had such a great wit and demeanor. I can still see him shaking his head watching some of the things going on around him.

WHAT HE WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HAVE KNOWN WHILE A STUDENT:

At times just to slow down in the moment, take it all in. As great a time I had, I could have learned even more from others while I was at UF.

ADVICE FOR NEW ALUMNI:

No one expects you to have it all figured out at 21, so don't be afraid to ask questions.

WHAT GATORS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BEING TOP 5:

The designation is something that we all helped build with successes and engagement with UF. It has been a long time coming and we have a chance to use this recognition for better things.



Karen Unger (BA '92)

DAY JOB: Civic activist and adviser, Tallahassee

UFAA PRESIDENT: 2017-18

Ask Karen Unger to pinpoint her best UF moment and she'll hesitate. "It is difficult to select just one because it's the totality of the moments that have been defining in my life," she explains. There's her selection to Florida Blue Key, the time she was in a Miss UF pageant and her commencement address to new graduates, to name a few of them. Those many UF moments, she says, led to a wonderful life.

PRESIDENTIAL TERM POINT OF PRIDE:

I am very proud that the UF Alumni Association was asked to partner with the university on increasing our alumni participation rate (APR). Our APR is one of the criteria in determining university rankings, and we enthusiastically accepted the opportunity to take the lead on this important endeavor.

UF IN THREE WORDS:

Foundation for life.

FAVORITE PROFESSOR:

(English professor) James Haskins was the author of the iconic novel, "The Cotton Club," which had been adapted to the big screen by Francis Ford Coppola just prior to my time at UF. Dr. Haskins was brilliant, engaging and inspirational. He lived in New York City, but flew to Gainesville every week to teach. I strove to become a better writer to impress him, and we learned so much about the creative process from him.

GO-TO FOOD WHILE A STUDENT:

Pizza (some things never change).

POST-GRADUATION SURPRISE:

How quickly time flies after graduation.

WHY IT'S GREAT TO BE A FLORIDA GATOR:

We afford our students the opportunity to excel in and out of the classroom; our alumni network is the best in the nation; and because we are the "everything school."

WHAT GATORS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BEING TOP 5:

Becoming a Top 5 university is the culmination of hard work, great vision by our university leadership and the participation of our students, alumni, faculty and administration. In order to remain in the Top 5 and continue to ascend, we need to continue to strive for excellence in all that we do.



Brian Burgoon (BA '94, JD '97)

DAY JOB: Owner, Burgoon Law Firm, LLC, Atlanta

UFAA PRESIDENT: 2018-19

As an undergraduate, Brian Burgoon thought he knew how the rest of his life would unfold. He'd earn a law degree and return to his hometown, Ocala, to practice. "Instead, I ultimately ended up in Atlanta and have enjoyed living and practicing law here ever since," he says. For Burgoon, that unexpected open door is more evidence that UF can be life-changing.

PRESIDENTIAL TERM POINT OF PRIDE:

During my term, the UFAA launched the inaugural Gator Nation Giving Day: Stand Up and Holler, with the dedication and support of a board of extremely talented and impressive Gator leaders. Seeing the enthusiasm and excitement of Gators across the country that day as UF shattered participation and fundraising goals and engaged many new alumni made me so proud to be a Florida Gator.

UF IN THREE WORDS:

Foundation, connection, excellence.

DEFINING UF MOMENT:

Serving as UF's student body president, particularly during the year that we won the first football national championship. To this day, being elected to represent and advocate on behalf of 40,000 fellow students is still my most incredible and cherished experience.

WHY IT'S GREAT TO BE A FLORIDA GATOR:

The University of Florida provided me so much more than an education. It's been an integral part of my growth and development as a leader, attorney and person. Being a Gator has given me relationships with students, alumni, faculty and staff who not only shaped my experience as a student, but who continue to enrich my personal and professional life.

POST-GRADUATION SURPRISE:

As a kid, I never would have dreamed I would have been fortunate enough to serve UF as both a student leader and an alumni leader. I am thankful for all the incredible friendships I have made over the years that arose solely through my decision as a high school senior to attend the University of Florida.

ADVICE FOR NEW ALUMNI:

Very few things worth having are just handed to you. If you want something, you have to work hard for it. I encourage new alumni to stay connected with UF. Even seemingly small measures — such as mentoring students, assisting with hiring UF graduates, staying in touch with organizations you were involved with, participating in events for your college or joining the UF Alumni Association — can be meaningful. It not only will be rewarding to you and the others involved, but will assist UF as it continues its rise in prestige.

WHAT GATORS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BEING TOP 5:

UF alumni need to know both the crucial role they play in making UF a Top 5 public university and the value they derive from that standing. Annual donations, even just \$1, from alumni are a key factor that determines the ranking. At the same time, UF's status as an elite public university makes a UF degree even more prestigious and its alumni more desirable in the job market.



Katrina Rolle (JD '91)

DAY JOB: President, Community Foundation of North Florida, Tallahassee

UFAA PRESIDENT: 2019-20

Katrina Rolle had her choice of law schools after earning a bachelors at Alabama's Tuskegee University. She picked UF. "[I knew] I was going to receive a great legal education," she says. "I was excited and nervous but totally looking forward to the law school experience at UF." That "school experience" became a 30-year relationship with UF that's still going strong.

PRESIDENTIAL TERM POINT OF PRIDE:

Working alongside a group of highly committed board members who were focused on helping UF continue to rise in the college rankings.

UF IN THREE WORDS:

Excellence, leadership and family.

FAVORITE PROFESSOR:

(Law professor) Richard Pearson taught his torts class in a way that kept you on your toes, but you also knew he really wanted you to know and understand what was being taught.

GO-TO EATERY WHILE A STUDENT:

Chaucer's Restaurant (which later became location for the Swamp).

WHAT SHE WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HAVE KNOWN WHILE A STUDENT:

Remember to fully embrace as many opportunities and experiences as possible during your time at UF.

ADVICE FOR NEW ALUMNI:

Don't be afraid to try new things and be OK with making mistakes. Mistakes happen. What's most important is how we respond to and learn from our mistakes.

WHAT GATORS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BEING TOP 5:

The Gator Nation should be very proud of our collective effort to help UF rise to the Top 5. Moving forward, we will need every member to stay engaged and do their part to help UF continue to be a part of this elite group of universities.



Mark Criser (BA '92, MA '94, JD '97)

DAY JOB: Attorney, Hill, Ward & Henderson, P.A., Tampa

UFAA PRESIDENT: 2020-21

There's more than a little Gator in Mark Criser's DNA. Marshall Criser, his dad, was UF's president in the 1980s. Brothers, nieces and his wife are all graduates. So it's fitting that it's under his watch as UFAA president that UF cracked the Top 5. UF's rise, Criser says, shouldn't be a surprise, however. "The loyalty and passion of the Gator Nation is unparalleled," he insists.

PRESIDENTIAL TERM POINT OF PRIDE:

I am proud of the diversity that we have brought to our board, and the enthusiasm and commitment that board members and the UF Advancement team have for our mission.

UF IN THREE WORDS:

Passion, excellence and loyalty.

DEFINING UF MOMENT:

Meeting my wife, Heather Blanco Criser, at a Florida Blue Key meeting in 1994. Heather was getting ready to finish her undergraduate degree and I was getting ready to start law school. We have been together ever since, have three wonderful boys together (Jake, Dean and Hyatt) and will be celebrating our 24th wedding anniversary in December of this year.

FAVORITE CLASS:

Psychoanalytic criticism (taught by eminent scholar professor Norman Holland). In addition to professor Holland being a brilliant man and fantastic teacher, this class changed the way I look at writing and the importance of understanding your audience.

GO-TO EATERIES WHILE A STUDENT:

Burrito Brothers and Joe's Deli.

ADVICE FOR NEW ALUMNI:

Decide where you want to live and what you want to do, then go do it.

WHAT GATORS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BEING TOP 5:

We are just getting started.



JOIN US! STAND UP AND HOLLER • GATOR NATION GIVING DAY



Thousands of Gators worldwide make a massive, 24-hour show of support for UF. Give to the school, department, research initiative or campus activity that means the most to you. Let's show the world what a difference thousands of Gators and 24 hours can make!

**Make your gift on February 17 at
GIVINGDAY.UFLEU**



We're Back!

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

PHOTOS BY AARON DAYE

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

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.



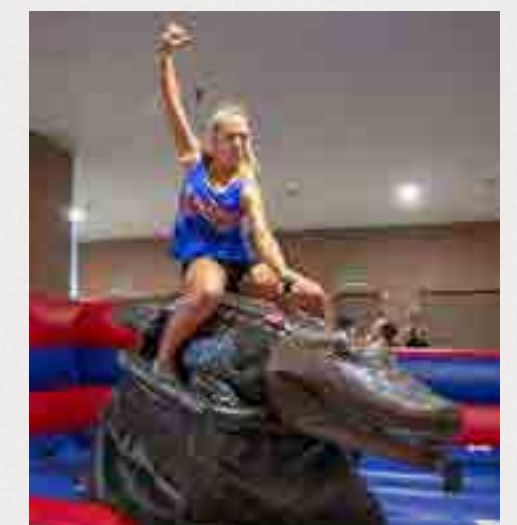
ABOVE: UF Student Affairs staff arranged numerous fall activities for students during its Great Gator Welcome, including this King Croc slide near the J. Wayne Reitz Union.



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



First-year doctoral student Mosunmola Ogunmolaji, right, gives first-year graduate student Faith Aiya directions during the first week of classes.



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



Senior Chris Thevenot (center) walks through the Plaza of the Americas en route to his class in late August.



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



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.





Vice President of Student Affairs D'Andrea Mull took this selfie at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium where freshmen gathered to revive the UF class photo tradition.

Finding Joy In Education

TEACHER OF THE YEAR

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.

GREAT GATORS

WITH GREAT NEWS



DOUBLING DORITOS

Kevin Lin (BSChEng '15) is a senior R&D engineer at PepsiCo, working on its global Snacks Extrusion 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/v1fgee

BIG SMILE

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.



GREATER GOOD

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.



WINNING IDEA

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.



OVERTURE, CURTAINS, LIGHTS

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/Oj3tkm



TOURING GATORS

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.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Walden "Wally" Rhines, who has supported UF engineering faculty and programs since 1987 with his gifts totaling almost \$3 million, received a prestigious leadership award from the Global Semiconductor Alliance. Rhines is a semiconductor industry luminary and technologist who is president and CEO of Cornami, a fabless software/semiconductor company focused on intelligent computing for fully homomorphic encryption and machine learning. Previously, Rhines was CEO of Mentor Graphics for 25 years and executive vice president of the Semiconductor Group, responsible for Texas Instrument's worldwide semiconductor business.



"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.



MARKETING'S GOLDEN LADY

Lainey 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.



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 '68), 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.



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.



FALCON

KOESTER

MENESES

PIMENTEL

ZIMA

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."

In addition to Falcon, the Gators Unidos board includes:

- Vice President **Jason Koester** (BSBA '11, MA '12), who is a senior advertising account executive at Amazon in Los Angeles;
- CFO **Jason Meneses** (BSAC '11, MACC '12), who is the vice president, internal audit at Jushi Holdings Inc.;
- Security of Innovation officer **Daniel Pimentel** (BSAdv '11, PhD '20), who is an assistant professor of immersive media psychology at the School of Journalism in Portland, Oregon;
- Creative Strategy Director **Jackie Zima** (BSBA '12, BSAdv '12), who is an associate director, strategic insights, at Alma, a marketing and advertising agency in Miami.

For more information about the scholarship or the organization, visit gatorsunidos.com.



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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** (1HHP), 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 "excels not only musically and academically, but also demonstrates a heart for volunteering and community service."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ALBERT FAMILY

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CADE MUSEUM

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 Bloolooop, 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.

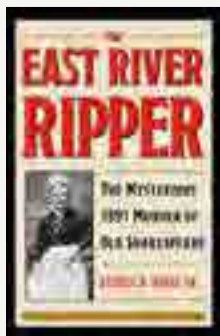
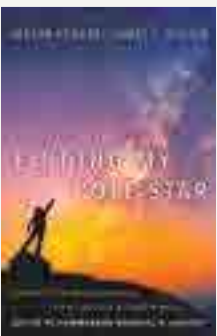


Elyse Cohen (BS '05) is vice president of social impact and inclusion at Rare Beauty by Selena Gomez. She has joined the new corporate leadership council at the Creating Healthier Communities organization in Alexandria, Virginia, to help elevate social impact issues.

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



Pavle Stojkovic (BSTel '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

Galia Gichon (BSBA '92) wrote "The Accidental Suffragist," a historical fiction novel about a WWI-era factory worker living in a New York tenement. Gichon spent almost a decade writing financial research for investment banks before launching a personal financial advising firm in New York.

CRIME AND MISCONDUCT

Maj. Gen. **James Dozier** ('52) shares how he survived being held captive for 42 days in Italy by Red Brigade terrorists in his memoir, "Finding My Pole Star: Memoir of an American Hero's Life of Faithful Military Service." Dozier is retired from the U.S. Army.

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

Four-Legged Fans

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.

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.



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.



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



Chloe

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



Boots

Boots, AKA GatorBoots, decided to visit Albert on campus. Boots is the best friend of Antionette (Jones) Marbray (MEd '90) of Ellicott City, MD. Marbray is vice president of legal affairs at Stevenson University.



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.



gator

The Murphy family say they love turning their French bulldog into a Gator. Math teacher Pam Murphy (BAE '90, MAE '91), trial attorney Lewis Murphy Jr (JD '91) and their daughter, architect Sydney Murphy (BDES '15), live in Vero Beach.



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.



Elle

Corine Moody Kasler (BA '73), a retired teacher in Gulf Breeze, and Elle, her French bulldog, love to dress up for every UF game. (Instagram @ellekaslerthefrenchie).



gator

Dr. Herb McReynolds (BS '74, MD '78) of Tucson, AZ, shared this photo of Gator, an American bulldog, whom Herb rescued after Gator was abandoned in Los Angeles nine years ago. Gator is perched atop Mt. Lemmon. "He's a champ!"

SEND YOUR PHOTOS TO: FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu
Include your name, occupation, town and your pet's name.



Check your monthly Gator Nation News email for the winner of the best official UF license plate submissions. Winners receive a \$25 Gator prize pack.

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



TAGS 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** (BAPoSci '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.

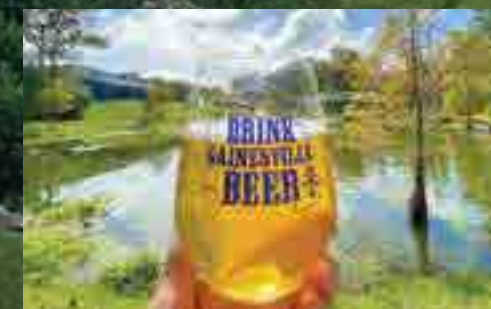
After graduation, Cecil attended the Naval War College and served in the Vietnam War as commanding officer of the USS White River (LFR 536). He earned a host of military awards including the Bronze Star with Combat "V," a Gold Star and Navy Commendation Medal.



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."

FOND MEMORIES NEW DISCOVERIES UNDER THE GLOW OF ORANGE & BLUE



VisitGainesville.com

Main Image: Sweetwater Wetlands Park by @wildlifeventures | Drink Gainesville Beer: Courtesy of Swamp Head Brewery

GATORS AROUND THE WORLD

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

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** (BSCEI '87 and past president of Lone Star Gator Club), and **Jeffrey Martin** (BSCEI '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.



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.



Ryan Mackman (BSTel '03) took this photo with his wife, Zoraima 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.



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.



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.



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.

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FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu

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ONCE A GATOR, ALWAYS A GATOR!



PHOTO BY AARON DAYE

Alumni Association members Kristen Jenelle Yarbrough, from left, Tiffany Dorsey, Deborah Yarbrough and A. Keith Yarbrough at Gator Nation Tailgates for the Homecoming game on Oct. 9.

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AMBER YOO (DBA '23, MBA '10, BA '04)
Co-Founder & Vice President, SKY Facial Plastic Surgery, Inc.

MORE INFORMATION

[→ warrington.ufl.edu/DBA](http://warrington.ufl.edu/DBA)
or contact Angie at: angie.woodham@warrington.ufl.edu

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SHOW US YOUR 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 really 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.”

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

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



GATOR CHOMPING FROM AFAR

The **Rocky Mountain Gator Club** board of directors hosted 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 '81), president and secretary **Loree Hoag** (BA '87), director at-large **Brian “BC” Campbell** (BSAdv '90), president-elect **Scott Mangino** (MEed '10), director at-large Matt Hopcroft and communications VP **Kristy Williford** (BSTel '07).

IN MEMORIAM



JUSTICE FOR ALL

Rick Parker (BSJ '69, JD '72) of Lake City, an 8th circuit public defender who lived in Gainesville during and after the student murders, had the difficult task of leading his team's defense of the serial killer who would later be found guilty and put to death for the student murders and

other crimes. In the fall issue of Florida Gator, a feature article mentioned Rod Smith (JD '75) for having led the prosecution's case against the serial killer, but did not mention Parker's role. A former colleague of Parker's, **Jeffrey Barker** (JD '70), described Parker's efforts in this way: “Stuck with a horrible situation, Rick handled himself at the highest professional level and honored our law school, fulfilling his duty to the law and his client.”

Following Parker's distinguished career on the 8th circuit, he served his country for six years as special counsel, working to establish and improve the justice system in Afghanistan.

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.

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.



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.

3 MINUTES WITH PAT COLLIER FRANK (BSBA '51)



Pat Frank's unconventional path in the 1940s isn't so unusual today. But back then, her decision to join UF's inaugural co-ed class in 1947, then become the first woman to attend Georgetown University in 1951, certainly turned heads. Since then, she's used what she learned along the way to serve in a number of public service posts: Hillsborough County School Board (1972-76), Florida House of Representatives (1976-78), Florida State Senate (1979-88), Hillsborough County Commission (2000-04), and Hillsborough County Clerk of the Court (2004-20).

Frank counts among her many achievements:

- Integrating Hillsborough County Schools in the 1970s.
- Her bill that connected the organ and tissue donation system in Florida with the driver's license bureau, allowing potential donors to register more easily.
- Her phosphate reclamation act that requires mining companies to restore grounds after digging.
- Being one of only 10 state representatives who voted in favor of adoption rights for gays when the first such legal case was presented in 1977.
- Her bill that made kindergarten mandatory for all Florida children.
- Passing the growth management bill that requires communities to submit development plans for state approval.

In October, Hillsborough County renamed its downtown Tampa courthouse in Frank's honor. The building has served almost as many roles as Frank has during her career. Frank, who is now 92 years old, took three minutes with Gator Nation to reflect on this honor, her life and career.

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 named a respected 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 potbellied stove in the middle of the room. One of the girls had a white suit she wanted to wear on 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 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.

Did people take you seriously 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. My opponent was the cutest little cheerleader. She was athletic and charming. I came to UF from a small Catholic boarding school. So it came as a shock to me when she went into the male dorms to campaign. I just wouldn't think of going in there. So, I stood outside and handed out flyers. I resolved myself to the fact that I wasn't going to win, but to my

surprise, I won. In that election, Will Connor was elected vice president of that class. He became the commissioner of agriculture for many years. The president of the class was Bill Rouss, who became president of Agronomics (ag investment company). They were a wonderful trio to work with. It initiated me to state politics.

Who inspired you at UF and why?

I wouldn't say there is one person. An economics professor who was very bright and challenged me. We had veterans who had come back from the war ... The conversation was political sometimes. They never talked about their war experiences. They were heroes. They had a seriousness about them. They were intent to do a good job. They drank a lot and partied a lot, but they were serious people. They were trying to set a path for their lives.

What activities did you engage in most while in Gainesville?

Pep club. I was co-chair of the GAS party — Gator All Student — political party. Frank Muscarella was the other chair with me. I sat on the executive committee of the student body. I was homecoming parade chair one year, which was a fantastic task because the governor and senators were there.

What was your favorite Gainesville hangout?

The Primrose Grill. It was a little restaurant downtown with home-cooked food. It was the best buy in town. Very inexpensive. Real dumplings, chicken pot pie and all the things you don't get at fast-food places.

What compelled you to continue your education at Georgetown?

I was working as an economist. I had a passion to be a lawyer, but ... I just sort of drifted along. When I was working in the Justice Department, it appeared to me that it's something I wanted to do. I walked into Georgetown's law school and said, "I'd like to enroll." The women at the desk looked at each other and shook their heads and [called for the dean]. He talked to me for a long time. I didn't know there were no women there. Finally, I got a notice that said I was admitted.

What do you consider your greatest accomplishment so far?

Marrying the right man. We met in law school (he became an appellate judge). We had 63 years together before he died. I could not

have done anything without his support and confidence. I'm sure there were times he didn't want to go through another election, but he was always so supportive. That was very unique in those days. Women had to get husbands' permission to give them credit and do so many things. It's not the way it is today. He was so patient with me. I couldn't have done everything I did without him. It was a love story. Every morning when I'd [go to work], he'd say, "I love you." Every single day.

Florida Blue Key recently inducted you into its ranks. What was that like?

They didn't have women in Blue Key when I was there. Some local men called me and asked if I would like to have an honorary membership. I was astonished. I said of course. I particularly liked receiving that honor not posthumously. It was almost 10 years ago.

What do you value?

Integrity, humility, friendship, love and equality, in no particular order.

What does it mean to you to be a Gator?

The school has become very rigorous, and I'm proud of that. We have a wonderful university that is recognized as the best value among all the public universities in the country. And I believe it. You don't have to go to Princeton or Harvard or Yale. You can get an extremely good education right here in any field.

What's next for 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 times 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, dust 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.

FINISH LINE: MARGARET TOLBERT

LEADER OF THE PACK

BY PAT DOOLEY (BSJ '76)



“I DIDN’T HAVE A SENSE OF HISTORY WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER RUNNING FOR THE GATORS. NOW I THINK IT’S AMAZING AND HISTORIC, AND IT WAS EVEN LONG OVERDUE.”

— MARGARET TOLBERT

Tolbert’s passion for Florida springs inspires her artwork.



Tolbert is an accomplished artist and author with paintings, lithographs and prints hanging in museums in Gainesville and the world. Here, she works on one of her many large-scale paintings.

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 (PhD '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 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 for the Gators,” she said. “Now I think it’s amazing and historic, and it was even long overdue.”

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 historic,” Tolbert said. “You know, we kind of were. That’s amazing, amazing Title IX.”

Amazing, indeed.

STAND UP, GATORS

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.

