

GATOR



FLORIDA

SPRING 2023

THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH

*And 8 other heroes, legends
and history makers.*

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RANKING THE GATOR DIVES OF THE DECADES, PAGE 20



Why We Give

CHRIS BOYETT, BSBA '88, MBA '88, JD '91

Estate-tax attorney, Holland & Knight

KRISTINE BOYETT, BA '88

Member & past co-chair, with Chris, UF Parent & Family Leadership Council

"One of the things College of Law Dean Lewis told us was, 'Your education is costing you, say, \$3,000. But the state of Florida is paying \$10,000 to educate you. The difference is coming from the people of the great state of Florida. So, when you graduate and go out and practice, you owe them. Give back.'"

THEN: High-school sweethearts, Chris and Kristine matriculated to the University of Florida in the 1980s; while earning their degrees, they enjoyed Gainesville's thriving music scene and formed a dog-walkers group.

TODAY: Married nearly 25 years, the Miami-based Boyetts have four children (including three Gators) and are active members of the UF Parent and Family Leadership Council. They generously support UF's Office of Student Life and its Career Connections Center.

"We have a passion for helping students," says Chris. "You want the best for them, and that includes helping them put their best foot forward when they apply for jobs."

"Guidance means everything," agrees Kristine. "Even just one person, with the right advice, can make a big difference in your life."

THEN: Kristine went to Miami Killian Senior High School, where she was a cheerleader and an avid reader. At UF, she majored in sociology, studying marriage and family across cultures. In contrast with her required courses in high school, the diverse College of Liberal Arts and Sciences offerings were a breath of fresh air, she said.

"I loved CLAS because it had eclectic options for study," said Kristine, "everything from anthropology to sociology to writing classes."

TODAY: Kristine is proud to support the Machen Florida Opportunity Scholars program, which provides scholarships and support for first-generation college students.

"The MFOS program did not exist when I was an undergrad, but I know how transformational a college education can be," she says. "While neither of my parents had a college degree, college was the determining factor in how successful my siblings and I later became."

THEN: Chris majored in finance at Warrington College of Business and earned bachelor's and master's degrees in that subject. When Black Monday, the infamous stock market crash, happened on Oct. 19, 1987, Chris gave up his dreams of becoming the next Gordon Gekko and entered the Levin College of Law, where he became enamored of tax law in particular.

TODAY: Chris is a partner at Holland & Knight, in Miami, whose National Private Wealth practice he co-chairs. The 2021 "Best Lawyers in America" guide praises Chris as "an outstanding trust and estates attorney who consistently provides excellent advice to clients." That same year, he was recognized by Legal Week as one of the world's top 250 private client and trust practitioners.

Chris says that philanthropic advice gleaned from his first week of law school guides him to this day. The occasion was Dean Jeffrey Lewis's orientation address to the new 1989 crop of law students.

Remembers Chris: "One of the things Dean Lewis told us was, 'Your education is costing you, say, \$3,000. But the state of Florida is paying \$10,000 to educate you. The difference is coming from the people of the great state of Florida. So, when you graduate and go out and practice, you owe them. Give back.'"

— **BARBARA DRAKE (MFA '04)**



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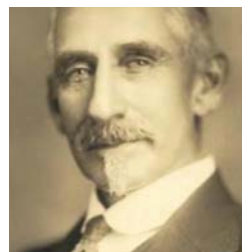
EYEWITNESSES TO HISTORY

Joe Kittinger stepped out of a gondola 19 miles above New Mexico and into the history books. Here is his story and those of other Gators with a hand in making history.



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The blue chip hangouts vary from generation to generation. Was Dubs the best or Purple Porpoise? We may not all agree on the best place to have a good time, but we probably can agree that a good time was had by all.



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FLORIDA

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Handle With Care

Museum “wet” collections on the move.

See story, next page.



FLORIDA MUSEUM PHOTO BY KRISTEN GRACE





FLORIDA MUSEUM PHOTO BY KRISTEN GRACE

The “wet” collections include fishes, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates.

THE FLORIDA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY BEGAN moving its burgeoning “wet” collections into a state-of-the-art Special Collections Building in the fall.

The wet collections include all specimens preserved in ethyl or isopropyl alcohol, which require specific safety features. The two-story, 23,000-square-foot building includes laboratories for biodiversity research and has room for continued expansion of the wet collections, including fishes, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates.

Each year, the museum’s wet collections loan approximately 18,000 specimens to researchers who use them to make new

discoveries. Last year, researchers from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service used museum specimens in assessing a freshwater mollusk once thought to be extinct, leading to the designation of protected habitat along 190 miles of north Florida streams and rivers.

All told, roughly 4 million specimens stored in 60,000 gallons of ethanol or isopropanol will move to the Special Collections Building. The ichthyology and invertebrate zoology collections are the second largest of their kind in the United States, and the herpetology collection ranks among the top 10 in the nation.

For more than 100 years, the museum has been the official repository of Florida’s biodiversity and cultural heritage, and today its collection numbers more than 40 million specimens and cultural artifacts.



The Special Collections Building will house about 4 million specimens.

STANDING UP FOR THE ORANGE & BLUE

The Gator Nation turns out big time for UF's fifth annual Giving Day



AARON DAYE

The College of Nursing demonstrates proper chomp form on Giving Day.

“Just when you start thinking Stand Up and Holler can’t top what we’ve done in the past, the Gator Nation rises up and does even more. There are no words, except ‘thank you.’”

— BRIAN DANFORTH, UF ALUMNI ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Gators rallied to support the University of Florida during its fifth annual 24-hour “Stand Up and Holler: Gator Nation Giving Day,” setting a school record for most gifts in a single day, 27,964. Those investments made on Feb. 16 from thousands of alumni, students, professors, staff members and others will fund scholarships, enhance academic programs and boost outreach projects across campus.



Stand Up and Holler is a significant contributor to UF’s being ranked a Top 5 public university for the last two years. Alumni giving is one of the benchmarks U.S. News & World Report uses to calculate its annual list. UF’s annual giving day is among the most successful in academia, and has created the opportunity for all Gators to invest in the university.

“The love our alumni, faculty, staff, students and friends have for this university is one of the reasons there really is no limit to what this university can be,” said Brian Danforth, the UF

Alumni Association’s executive director. “The Gator Nation is extraordinary.”

Gators from every U.S. state and 14 other countries from as far away as Afghanistan, Singapore and Australia participated in this year’s Stand Up and Holler campaign, giving a combined \$22.38 million.

“Gators are incredible, it’s that simple. Just when you start thinking Stand Up and Holler can’t top what we’ve done in the past, the Gator Nation rises up and does even more,” Danforth said. “There are no words, except ‘thank you.’”

UF’s annual giving day is named Stand Up and Holler as a tribute to the beloved Gator football game cheer made famous by George Edmondson Jr., better known as “Mr. Two Bits.” Edmondson’s iconic orange-and-blue striped necktie is used as a symbol to promote the campaign, with replicas as long as 30 feet strategically placed throughout the UF campus.

See more at givingday.ufl.edu

4,328

gifts to the **College of Journalism and Communications**, the most of all individual colleges

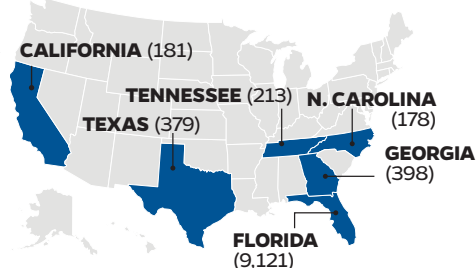
\$8.4 M

raised by the **College of Liberal Arts and Sciences**, the single largest amount.

78

Gator Clubs and 14 **alumni association affiliate groups** combined for **3,987 gifts** and almost **\$143,000**. The Gator Band Alumni Association’s **760** gifts for **\$46,241** were the most of all clubs and affiliates.

MOST GIFTS BY STATE





UF PHOTOGRAPHY

Patrick Zalupski, UF President Ben Sasse, Jacksonville Mayor Lenny Curry, UF Chair Mori Hosseini and Dr. David Nelson.

CITY OF JACKSONVILLE AND UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA TO EXPLORE **POSSIBLE NEW GRADUATE CAMPUS**

The University of Florida will partner with the city of Jacksonville to explore the creation of a new graduate campus focused on medicine, business and engineering.

The potential project would build on UF's and Jacksonville's longstanding connections through UF Health Jacksonville and the UF College of Medicine Jacksonville. The graduate programs would support the region's growing workforce needs in biomedical technology and focus on pioneering technology related to simulation, health applications of artificial intelligence, patient quality and safety, health care administration and fintech.

"Jacksonville has become a leader in both fintech and health care innovation. We have a robust network of Fortune 500 Companies and cutting-edge health facilities, like UF Health, Wolfson's Children Hospital and the Ackerman Cancer Institutes," Jacksonville Mayor Lenny Curry said. "We are excited about the possibility of hosting this University of Florida expansion to foster opportunity, a talent pipeline, and further grow our region's industry."

Curry invited UF to expand its presence in Jacksonville. As a part of the next steps in this partnership, he will bring a three-year,

\$50 million proposal to the Jacksonville City Council. UF and community leaders will seek an additional \$50 million in private support.

"We're excited to grow our historic partnership with Jacksonville through exploring what we envision as a new campus designed for the strengths of this unique city," said Mori Hosseini, chair of the UF Board of Trustees. "We're confident we can create incredible synergies by joining UF's strengths as a top-five public flagship university with Jacksonville's rising stature as national health care and technology hub."

Next steps include UF and city of Jacksonville officials working with Jacksonville's education, business, medical and community leaders to determine the most critical academic needs and opportunities for the regional workforce.

"UF is Florida's flagship university and we've got a special calling to serve Floridians," said UF President Ben Sasse. "We have a lot to discover and to learn together, but there's real potential for UF to add to Florida's skilled workforce, attract new private investment and support existing growth industries. Jacksonville's doing some impressive things and it's an exciting time for Gator Nation."



I  UF Health.

Michael, Gainesville

The heart. It's a symbol of caring and strength. It represents compassion and understanding. At UF Health, we put our hearts and expertise into everything we do. From developing new lifesaving procedures to providing routine health services, there is no heart condition too simple or complex for our dedicated doctors and staff. At UF Health, our teams of caring professionals work together to provide personalized treatment plans in one world-class medical center. We care for your heart with all of ours.

**Visit Heart.UFHealth.org
to learn more about Michael's story.**


HEART AND VASCULAR CARE

FLORIDA GATOR | 7

IN PRAISE OF RANDOM ROOMMIES



GETTYIMAGES

Advice from a Senior on Why You Should Live with a Stranger

BY JULIA BAUER, 4JM

AFTER I WAS ACCEPTED TO THE University of Florida in February 2019, my first concern was, “Who am I going to live with?”

Other future Gators from my Tampa high school urged me to join the UF 2023 Facebook group where they were finding their roommates. Posting a bio in a Facebook group with thousands of unknown people did not sound appealing, but I reluctantly joined to avoid UF assigning me a roommate.

I knew finding a random roommate would force me out of my comfort zone, and after all, your college years are the prime time to find yourself and grow. Hiding my phone under my desk during my fifth period AP Calculus class, I wrote a bio, added photos and hit the post button. After talking to about 40 girls over the next few weeks, I ended up rooming with the very first girl who messaged me.

Jenny and I immediately hit it off. She was the most authentic and honest person I spoke with. Before we signed the roommate agreement, we decided to FaceTime. We discovered just how much we had in common, like music, hobbies and everything in

between. She sent me photos of her paintings, and I grabbed my sketchbook to send her photos of my drawings. When we hung up the phone after talking for two and a half hours, we confidently submitted our roommate preferences.

Long story short, we have been roommates ever since.

During these last four years, we have spent countless nights sharing music and painting, which are the same things that brought us together. As students at the College of Journalism and Communications, we were lucky enough to take classes together and motivate each other to excel in our studies while still making time to goof off, just like freshman year.

Jenny and I have created a space that is safe enough to tell each other anything, from funny scenes on campus to the pitfalls of relationships. I know Jenny will be there when I need someone to lift me up, and she knows I will do the same for her. Without her, I would not be who I am today.

I never thought one of my best friends would be a random girl from Tennessee. Now, heading toward graduation, Jenny is not just my best friend, she is my family.

Julia Bauer and Jenny Rogers, 4PR, will be starting UF's online Master of Arts in Mass Communication program in May — together.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED

1. Random roommates help you grow

Branch out from your high school friend group. Post on the UF27 Facebook page after Decision Day. Ask potential roommates about sleep schedules, cleanliness, political views and more. Your roommate will discover who you are, so lay it all on the table.

2. Be polite and transparent in disputes

Speaking in person is better than texting. You may be a person who avoids conflict (like me), but remember that your home is your safe space. Be respectful.

3. Be responsible for your own things

My roommates and I buy our own groceries and cook our own meals, although we sometimes cook family-style. Arrange who brings what to avoid having two of everything.

4. Find fun things to do together

You can get to know your roommate with trips to nature preserves, farmers markets, thrift stores and walks on campus. Jenny and I have learned to make almost any situation fun, even the days we spend at home all day.

5. Remember to focus on yourself

College is your time to grow. Surround yourself with people who will contribute to your happiness and aid your journey. Take care of yourself. Self-care is just as important as your grades. On the opposite side, do not get too caught up in social obligations. Find balance and take time to discover who you are



Decision Day: You're in. Now what? Real Talk with RAs

BY JULIA BAUER, 4JM

The Class of 2027 joined Gator Nation on Feb. 24, and whether they live at Beaty, Broward or Buckman, living on campus gives them a key resource: the RA. Resident Assistants are students who manage the floors of the residence halls and act as a guide to dorm life.

Jennings Hall RA **Diego Alaman**, 4LAS, said he gets to know the students on his floor and fosters a sense of community to make sure everyone is included. He assures residents it is OK to feel nervous in beginning because living on campus is a brand-new experience.

"Everyone next to you has the exact same feelings," he said. "If people are aware that this is a shared experience for everybody, I feel like they will be more comfortable to come out of their shells and meet people."

Alaman said his top tip for freshmen is to leave their door open so students who pass by can stop in to talk. He also recommends hanging out in the common areas.

"The best thing to do to make friends is to not stay in your room," he said. "Even though it can be hard because you want to be in your comfort space, you really have to step out."

Han Mach, 4EG, a Lakeside Residential Complex RA, seconded the significance of getting involved in dorm life.

"I highly encourage incoming freshmen to show up to all the RA events and Gator nights because those are peak places to meet other freshmen looking to make friends," she said.

She also emphasized the importance of being a good roommate.

"You have to set clear boundaries and communicate effectively," she said. "From the beginning, be very direct and honest about what you want in the dorm. That's how you can get along really well with your roommate."

Former Graham and Simpson Hall RA **Richard Ebanks** (BS '21), now a UF medical school student, said freshmen should take the Gator-to-Gator roommate agreement seriously, being honest about expectations for bedtime and study time. Using the agreement and the roommate connect portal can help freshmen make a good roommate match, he said.

"They can become a friend from just being a random roommate," he said.

Kicking it Old

THE WORD GAMES CRAZE CIRCLES BACK TO SCRABBLE

BY JILLIAN RODRIGUEZ, 4PR

It might seem strange, a game invented in 1938 gaining a foothold with the digital natives of Generation Z.

But after a lifetime of playing Scrabble with his dad, one of the first things **Aidan Persaud** looked for when he arrived at the University of Florida was a Scrabble Club. When he didn't find one among the 900 or so clubs on campus, he started one.

"I thought at UF there might be some people who could be serious contenders with me," Persaud says.

On Instagram, the club has about 200 followers, but on a given meeting day — meetings are Scrabble games — about 20 people show up, and all wordsmiths are welcome. Student Government required three officers and some paperwork and wrote the club a \$500 check. Persaud bought 10 Scrabble boards, and the club was in business.

For Persaud, Scrabble is almost a sport.

"My friends from high school hated playing with me," Persaud says. "Every new friend I'd make, I'd play them once and they'd be like 'we're never playing this again.'"

Persaud realized if he wanted to play Scrabble in college, he'd have to curb his competitive spirit a bit. The days when an adversary would ask to use the dictionary and he'd say no — "but I'd say it really mean" — are over.

"It's more enjoyable to relax the rules."

Persaud began honing his Scrabble prowess at about the age of 10 in long games with his dad on a deluxe board with a turntable and grooves for letter tiles. One



PHOTO COURTESY OF AIDAN PERSAUD

Scrabble ace Aidan Persaud, center, opted for a more relaxed approach to the game when he started a Scrabble Club at UF.

- **At Scrabble Club, sometimes a lucky player can spell out Gators,** but it's just 14 points. The 'G' is two points, the other letters are one, and then the first player gets a double word score.
- **Persaud's highest score off one play is 71.** The word was "rations," with all letters worth one point. He played it on a triple word score square, for 21 points, then got 50 for playing all seven letters in his rack. It's called a bingo, and he keeps a list of them. "It's three or four turns worth of playing."
- **Persaud's favorite word is "aa,"** which means basaltic lava. "It's obscure, not something you'd use in everyday conversation."

time, he says, he flipped a tile over so it would look like the coveted blank tile that can be any letter.

"My dad knew. There are only two blanks, and this extra one appeared. He gave me the points that one time, but he said, 'no cheating.' He taught me the values of good sportsmanship. How to be a fair winner and a graceful loser."

His childhood losing streak came to an end in high school when he beat his dad for the first time.

"He was like 'wow, this is an important day,'" Persaud says. "He always congratulates me when I win, and I always congratulate the winners in the club."

Persaud says his dad is toe-to-toe guy." Over the last three years, he has lost only two games at Scrabble Club.

Persaud plays other word games — Wordle and its diabolical spinoffs — with a New

York Times games subscription, a gift from his dad. Wordle, he says, is too easy, but he still plays and tries to get the word by guess two or three, and his mom sends him screenshots of her two-guess “wins.”

Although Wordle and Scrabble have wordplay in common, psychology professor Matt Baldwin said the games are on different planes.

“Wordle was a social phenomenon that went viral,” Baldwin says. “Scrabble is a classic.”

Persaud said when he tables for the club, he finds STEM majors reluctant to join. He tells them he is a computer science major, living proof that STEM people can be word people, too.

“It’s not very mathy, not computationally intensive. So it kind of lets the other side of my brain have a little fun,” Persaud says.

Although Scrabble has been around since UF’s early days, Persaud says he doesn’t consider it old school.

“It still belongs to my generation,” Persaud says. “It’s not old school to me.”

UF Provost Joe Glover announces transition

Following a UF-record 15 years as provost, Joe Glover has decided to relinquish that position at the end of July.

The tenure of the average provost hovers around four years nationally. But in his 15 years, Glover has either led or had a hand in many accomplishments:

- UF’s rise to become a top-five institution from its 19th place ranking in 2012
- UF’s AI initiative
- The birth of UF Online, now ranked No.1 among online baccalaureate programs
- Faculty hiring that included the Preeminence program to hire 100 faculty, followed by the faculty 500 hiring plan, followed most recently by the AI 100 hiring plan
- The Creative B summer program
- Creation of the PaCE admissions program



- UF’s reaccreditation
- Creation of the Innovation Academy
- Partnership with the vice president for research to create UF’s Moonshot research initiatives

Glover will continue to serve the university as senior adviser to President Ben Sasse.

Details of a national search for the next provost will be announced in the spring.

YOUR JOURNEY TO HIGHER EDUCATION BEGINS TODAY

“My experience in the UF DBA program reflects its excellence as a top 5 national university. The faculty are second to none and are eager to engage with students throughout the program. They work hard to prepare and position students for success once they graduate. I graduated with the tools and skills necessary to transition to a full-time faculty role at an AACSB-accredited business school and am proud to be part of The Gator Nation. Go Gators!”

DR. CLINK BUCK (DBA Alumni Class of 2022)
Assistant Professor, Department of Accounting and Finance
Abilene Christian University



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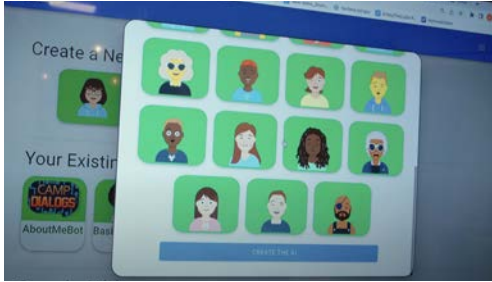
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GETTING CHATTY WITH AI

UF SOFTWARE HELPS MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS PROGRAM THEIR OWN CHATBOTS



PHOTOS BY UF PHOTOGRAPHY

Camp DIALOGS, a free two-week summer camp designed to teach Alachua County middle schoolers fundamentals of artificial intelligence, was supported with a grant from the National Science Foundation.

BY JENNY ROGERS, 4PR

Watch out, Siri and Alexa. Here comes Soccer-bot and Fashion-bot.

The chatbots were developed with help from a National Science Foundation grant as part of Camp DIALOGS, a free two-week summer camp designed to teach Alachua County middle schoolers fundamentals of artificial intelligence. The camp is part of the University of Florida's AI-for-all approach and started in 2021.

The success of the first year inspired the founders, professors **Kristy Boyer** and **Maya Israel**, to develop a first-of-its-kind child-friendly software of their own, and in 2022 they premiered AMBY, or AI Made By You.

“We wanted to reach out to different demographics of students and give them the opportunity they would otherwise not have to participate in a camp like this.”

— GLORIA KATUKA (BSBA-IT '19, MS-IOM '19)

The software led to impressive new chatbots, like Soccer-bot, which answers questions about soccer, and Fashion-bot, which offers fashion advice.

“They built things at the end of the first week that were substantially more sophisticated than what they built by the end of the second week last year,” said Boyer, of the UF Department of Computer

& Information Science & Engineering. “Seeing the kids use it so successfully is very rewarding.”

NSF funded the program for four years at \$1.5 million to extend computer science education to schools with limited access to STEM education, and the camp will continue this summer.

“One of the most important kinds of



Using AI and patient medical records to predict Alzheimer's disease

Using data in electronic health records, University of Florida researchers have designed an artificial intelligence system that can predict which patients will develop Alzheimer's disease up to five years before receiving a diagnosis.

Currently, there are no early screening tests for Alzheimer's disease. By the time patients develop symptoms, the disease already has caused significant brain damage.

Real-world clinical data like electronic health records have the potential to be powerful screening tools for conditions like Alzheimer's disease, said **Jiang Bian**, chief data scientist for UF Health and a professor of biomedical informatics in the College of Medicine. Many risk factors for Alzheimer's disease, such as obesity, hypertension and high cholesterol, routinely are recorded in patients' electronic health records.

A team led by Bian and **Jie Xu**, a new UF AI hire and an assistant professor in the department of health outcomes and biomedical informatics, published findings in *Alzheimer's and Dementia*, the journal of the Alzheimer's Association.

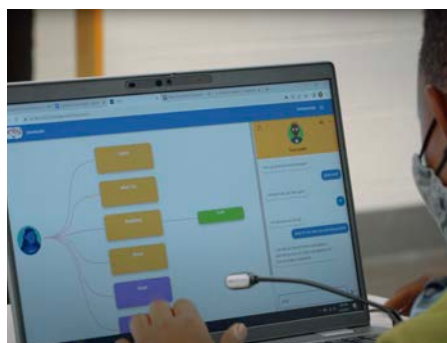
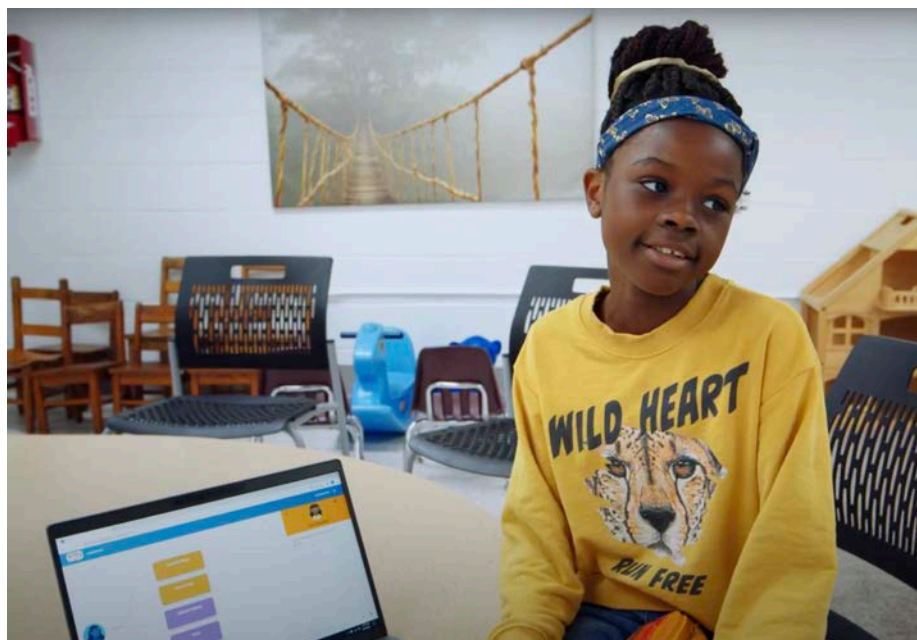
The researchers reported that both of the AI models they tested scored in the 'excellent' to 'outstanding' range using standard performance measures that determine how well an AI model completes a given task.

"More testing is needed before these AI tools are available to doctors and their patients," Bian said.

More than 6.5 million Americans 65 and older are living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. Research suggests that changes in the brain leading to Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia begin much earlier than previously thought — perhaps as early as middle age.

"The earlier physicians and high-risk patients can intervene, the better the odds that those interventions will work," Xu said.

For more, please visit: uff.to/8rf7eb



Using AMBY, a child-friendly software developed by professors Kristy Boyer and Maya Israel, campers learned to make chatbots. Soccer-bot answered questions about how to play the game, and Fashion-bot doled out advice on style. One chatbot even told jokes.

The 26-year-old from Nigeria applauded the focus on free, accessible education.

"We wanted to reach out to different demographics of students and give them the opportunity they would otherwise not have to participate in a camp like this," she said.

Camp facilitator **Xiaoyi Tian**, 23, a third-year Ph.D. student from China, said the camp could build the student's confidence that they could have a career in AI.

"Middle school is the golden age to cultivate a career identity," she said.

At the end, the students demonstrated for their parents. Israel said it was important for the students to see that AI is not something created just by other people.

"They can do that, too."

Boyer said she hopes the results from the camp advance what is known about how to support kids in AI learning in a way that is broadly usable.

"With UF's focus on AI research now, there's no doubt that one of the most important components of that is how we're going to prepare the next generation of researchers," Boyer said. "And we have to do that in an inclusive way."

artificial intelligence right now is the kind that has conversations with human beings—we see it all over in our daily lives," Boyer said.

"You've used these anytime you say 'hey Siri' or 'hey Alexa' or 'hey Google.'"

Camp DIALOGS is designed to encourage diversity within computer science education.

"We develop these attitudes about whether we belong in tech and computer science very early," said Israel, of the UF College of Education. "There is such an issue of equity in terms of who has access and who doesn't have access to computational experiences and camps."

Camp DIALOGS also creates opportunities for graduate students.

Gloria Katuka (BSBA-IT '19, MS-IOM '19), a third-year computer science Ph.D. student, contributed to curriculum development and guided camp facilitators through a three-week training before the camp.



UAA PHOTOGRAPH BY MADDIE WASHBURN

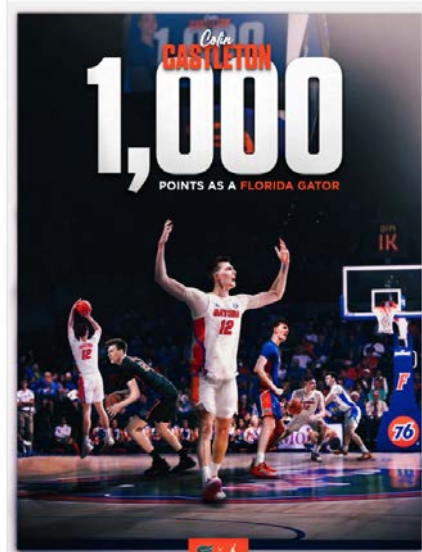
Senior Day #2 for Colin Castleton, flanked by stepfather Steven Bapp and mom Karen Bapp.



Love this school with everything in me ❤️

Florida Gators Men's Basketball @GatorsMBK · Jan 14
Newest member of the Gator 1K club 🐊

Congratulations @Castleton_ for reaching another career milestone 🎉🐊
#GoGators



‘LOVE THIS SCHOOL WITH EVERYTHING IN ME’

Castleton sticks around for an extra senior day

Three-time All-SEC forward **Colin Castleton** (BS '22) is thought to be the only Gators' mens basketball player to opt to do Senior Day twice.

Castleton took part in Senior Day in 2022 and with the extra NCAA COVID season could have left for one more season elsewhere or embarked on a professional career. Instead, at the urging of new Coach Todd Golden, Castleton stuck around for another year, put up career numbers for the Gators and chose to take part in Senior Day 2023, a somewhat bittersweet ceremony after suffering a season-ending broken hand in February.

Why a second Senior Day?

“Because I love this place,” says Castleton, the first three-time All-SEC player at UF in a decade. “Obviously, Coach Golden and the vision he has . . . I believe we are in good hands.

“Down the line I’m going to come back here and stay connected because of how I feel about this place. I love Florida. There is nothing more I love than to put on the jersey.”

“I love Florida. There is nothing more I love than to put on the jersey.”

— COLIN CASTLETON



PHOTOS BY MATT PENDLETON

Spurrier Gets His 'Way' at Celebration Pointe

The street that runs adjacent to Spurrier's Gridiron Grille at Celebration Pointe was christened "Steve Spurrier Way" in February.



AT LEFT: Steve and Jerri Spurrier in front of Steve Spurrier Way.

ABOVE: Spurrier's trophies and memorabilia have a home at Spurrier's Gridiron Grille.

BY CHRIS HARRY, Floridagators.com

On a given night, it's not unusual to see signs out in front of Spurrier's Gridiron Grille reserving parking spots for the likes of Billy Napier and Todd Golden. You won't see one holding a place for the Head Ball Coach himself, however.

When **Steve Spurrier** goes to his popular namesake restaurant he doesn't come in the front door. That's not his style.

"I like to park in the back by the dumpster," the former Florida football coach and Gators icon said. "I have a little sign I put on my dash that has my name on it. I haven't gotten a ticket yet, so it's working so far."

If Spurrier changes his mind and decides to park in front, however, a new road sign might yield even more parking privileges. The Celebration Pointe thoroughfare formerly known as SW 31st Place was christened Steve Spurrier Way at a ceremony in front of the HBC's popular restaurant in February.

The idea to rename the street was the brainstorm of Spurrier's



Wehbe

business colleague, Gridiron Grille managing partner Freddie Wehbe, along with Celebration Pointe developer **Svein Dyrkolbotn** (BS '96), a former Gators basketball player on the 1994 Final Four squad.

"It's very fitting," Wehbe said. "Now Steve Spurrier Way will run through the heart of Celebration Pointe just as the legend himself runs through the heart of Gator Nation."

Local landmarks honoring Spurrier already included a Heisman Trophy statue in front of Steve Spurrier Field at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium. The Science Hill High School field he starred on in Johnson City, Tenn., also bears his name. Now, Steve Spurrier Way.

What's left?

Spurrierville, perhaps?

"Someone told me they should have called it 'Steve Spurrier Pass,'" he said. "That would have been pretty good."



AARON DAYE

President Ben Sasse with the Academy of Golden Gators. Left to right, representing the Pressly family, Grier and Kristy Pressly, Jamie and Katie Pressly, Sasse, Elisabeth DeLuca, Humanitarian Prize winner Dr. Herbert Wertheim, Harvey Oyer III, incoming UF Alumni Association President Barbie Tillman and husband, Matt Tillman.

Game Changers & History Makers

Two ceremonies in West Palm Beach in March honored philanthropists and volunteers for their dedication to the University of Florida.

UF's 10th Academy of Golden Gators ceremony honored:

Elisabeth DeLuca, an altruist protecting one of the state's last frontiers;

Cammy Abernathy, outgoing dean of the Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering;

The Jamie and Katie Pressly family, a multi-generational family of UF graduates;

Harvey Oyer III, a legal partner in Shutts & Bowen LLP.

In a separate ceremony, Miami

optometrist, physician, engineer, entrepreneur and philanthropist Dr. Herbert Wertheim, whose contributions to the University of Florida are redefining its teaching and research missions, received one of the most prestigious awards ever bestowed by the university.

The Dr. Herbert Wertheim Humanitarian Prize, named in his honor, recognized Wertheim's leadership and unmatched support of UF. In coming years, the prize will be awarded to "dynamic and audacious leaders who foster innovation and positive change to help meet the world's greatest challenges," according to university officials.



AARON DAYE

Dr. Herbert Wertheim received UF's first Humanitarian Prize.

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SCAN ME



THE BLACK EXPERIENCE AT UF



JOHNCYNA MCRAE REFLECTS ON INTEGRATION AT UF

She is one of the original seven black students who integrated the campus in 1962

BY BLAKE TRAUSCHKE (BS '20)

There was a time when new students at the University of Florida received a punch card containing their class information, with limited space for their first and last name.

In 1962, a freshman received one of those cards.

"John Williams," it stated. The card listed the student's classes and housing: a boys' physical education class and a room in a boys' residence hall.

Except "John Williams" did not exist. Johncyna Williams was the name, and she, along with her roommate was about to make history.

UF desegregated its graduate and professional schools in 1958. But UF would not integrate its undergraduate student body until 1962 — the same year Johncyna



THE FLORIDA GATOR; UF PHOTOGRAPHY

LEFT: A photo of Johncyna at UF student orientation that ran in *The Florida Alligator* student newspaper in 1962.

RIGHT: Johncyna from a video where she tells her story at

uff.to/h5ysvn

and six others began their studies at UF.

"I had no clue at 17 – 18 years old," Johncyna said. "... I didn't know there weren't other African American students at the time."

The same year Johncyna started at UF, W. George Allen finished as the first African American to graduate with a law degree. He had traveled to Johncyna's still-segregated high school to encourage students to apply to UF. He told them other applications from Black students had been "lost" and taught them how to use certified mail. She and one other girl from Lincoln Memorial High school in Palmetto came to UF that

fall.

Johncyna lived in Mallory Hall all four years while getting a degree in education. She and her roommate, Rose, also went to some football games.

"One was an Alabama game. They're Roll Tide? They kept chanting that and had the Confederate flag waving," Johncyna recalls. "Rose and I said, 'So much for football.'"

Residence hall life allowed Johncyna's white peers to become comfortable in asking what she referred to as "curious questions." One asked her if the NAACP was paying for them to attend UF. To which Johncyna replied, "I wish they were!"



PHOTOS BY AARON DAYE

A story decades in the making

The Black Experience Installation, a display of photographs and text that tells the stories of Black students, faculty, staff and alumni at the University of Florida over the decades, was unveiled in December on the second floor of the Reitz Union.

The wall is divided into four themes: determination, pride, strength and community.

From 1945 and 1958, nearly 100 Black students applied to UF and were rejected. In 1949, Virgil Hawkins applied to UF's Levin College of Law and was denied based on race. Thanks in part to his efforts, UF's graduate and professional schools were integrated in 1958. The first black undergraduate students enrolled in 1962.

The African American Storytelling Wall joins UF's collection of campus locations and monuments designed to celebrate Black members of the university's community throughout history.

— Emma Richards, 4PR



Ty Hollowell, of UF's Division of Student Life, stops to read the pride-themed panels at the unveiling ceremony.

Another told her she had never spoken to a Black person. Johncyna said she still exchanges Christmas cards with one of her floormates.

Throughout her time at UF, Johncyna kept her sights on her dream of becoming a teacher following in the footsteps of her mother, a teacher, and her uncle, the superintendent of Black secondary education in Florida.

In 1966, Johncyna graduated with a

bachelor of science in education. Out of the original seven who integrated the campus, Stephan Mickle finished first in 1965. Johncyna is unsure if any of the others finished but not obtaining a degree from UF wasn't an option for her.

"My parents were paying for this," she said. "I knew I had to get my degree and get a job. Whatever came up, I had to deal with it."

Johncyna worked as a teacher in Manatee

County for five years before marrying professional baseball player Hal McRae, who had a 42-year career. They are retired and living in Bradenton.

"All in all, it wasn't a bad experience. It helped to be young and naive," Johncyna said. "Looking back, I got the education my parents wanted me to get."

For a longer version of this article and a video of Johncyna's reflections, please visit:

uff.to/h5ysvn

GATOR

DIVES

of the

DECADES

A look back at the has-been haunts that, well, um, “rounded out the UF student experience” when we were a known party school. Stagger down memory lane with us as we pay tribute to a century of iconic pubs, clubs and hangouts (some that may have come with hangovers).

Sure, sure. College is about higher learning — mastering knowledge that will enable lifelong job satisfaction. No argument here. That’s how it should be. But, come on, even the most studious student needs a break from the books now and then.

Luckily, Gainesville is, and always has been, loaded with places to relax and unwind. After a lengthy debate around the office water cooler, and with a nod to the NCAA Final Four Tournament, here are 10 memorable Gator hangouts, along with a March Madness-inspired bracket of our all-time Top 64.

Let the debate begin.

College Inn: Place most likely to bump into Wally and the Beaver. During its heyday in the 1930s, ’40s, ’50s and early ’60s, College Inn was a popular diner where the Boys of Old Florida grabbed cups of coffee and read newspapers. (As years passed and segregation laws were challenged, The College Inn became a lightning rod for Gators protesting the cafeteria’s “whites-only” policies.)

Cotton Club/Blue Note Club: Best blues and jazz. A plain, almost windowless wooden building, the onetime Camp Blanding World War II store-turned-movie-theater-for-Gainesville’s-Black-community-turned-nightclub was a welcoming stop on the “Chitlin’ Circuit.” In the 1950s it attracted performers like BB King, Ray Charles and James Brown and was a popular hangout for the Gator football team.

Florida Gym: Best campus hotspot. Alligator Alley, as it was unofficially named, opened in 1949 and from the start was UF’s “everything” venue: basketball games, commencement ceremonies, Fall and Spring Frolics, Blue Key banquets and concerts. Even a memorial service for President John F. Kennedy took place there. For under \$5, students could see the likes of The Carpenters, Joan Baez, Donovan and Harry Chapin.

Dub’s: Best rock ‘n’ roll club. For a quarter century, Dub’s was the place to be on a Saturday night in Gainesville. Owner James “Dub” Thomas handpicked the club’s performers, including rocker Bob Seger and comedian John Belushi, and sold cheap beer. While other hangouts came and went, Dub’s thrived to the delight of Gators until Thomas’ unexpected death in 1990.

The Rathskeller: Best place to catch a rising star. U2 at UF, what else needs to be said? Affectionately known as “The Rat,” the campus eatery was a popular gathering spot for Gators until it burned down in December 1987. Famous bands that performed there before hitting the bigtime include Mudcrutch (later Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers), Lynyrd Skynyrd, the Allman Brothers and, of course, U2.

Great Southern Music Hall: Best concerts. The old Florida Theater was remodeled and reopened as the Great Southern Music Hall in 1974. Just down the street from UF’s campus, GSMH soon became students’ go-to venue for some of the hottest musicians of the 1970s and ’80s. Jimmy Buffett, Ike and Tina Turner, James Taylor, Jerry Lee Lewis, Muddy Waters and other legends performed there.



Old College Inn (1)

The Alibi Lounge (16)

Dub's (2)

Press and Ed's BBQ (15)

The Rathskeller (3)

Wilbert's (14)

Snuffy's Malt Shop (4)

Wise's Drugstore (13)

Big Daddy's Lamplighter (5)

Original Pizza Palace (12)

Nell's Take-Out (6)

Rickenbacher's (11)

Joe's Deli (7)

Bilbo & Gandalf's (10)

Mama Lo's (8)

Mom's Kitchen (9)

Purple Porpoise (1)

Ballyhoo (16)

Skeeter's Big Biscuit (2)

Goerings Book Store (15)

Nickel's Alley (3)

The Atlantic (14)

ABC (The Revolver) (4)

Lillian's Music Store (13)

Cin City (5)

Happy Hour Billiards (12)

Chaucer's (6)

Florida Theater (11)

Hardback Café (7)

MFP (My Friends Place) (10)

Hyde and Zeke Records (8)

Great Sthrn Music Hall (9)

Old College Inn (1)

Dub's (2)

The Rathskeller (3)

Snuffy's Malt Shop (4)

Original Pizza Palace (12)

Rickenbacher's (11)

Joe's Deli (7)

Mama Lo's (8)

Purple Porpoise (1)

Skeeter's Big Biscuit (2)

Nickel's Alley (3)

Lillian's Music Store (13)

Happy Hour Billiards (12)

Chaucer's (6)

MFP (My Friends Place) (10)

Great Sthrn Music Hall (9)

Dub's (2)

The Rathskeller (3)

**BOOMER
REGIONAL**

Original Pizza Palace (12)

Joe's Deli (7)

Purple Porpoise (1)

Nickel's Alley (3)

**GEN X
REGIONAL**

Happy Hour Billiards (12)

MFP (My Friends Place) (10)

Dub's (2)

Dub's (2)

Original Pizza Palace (12)

Purple Porpoise (1)

Purple Porpoise (1)

Happy Hour Billiards (12)

UF

GREAT
HANGOUTS
TOURNAMENT

Purple Porpoise

Purple
Porpoise

GATOR NAT

First Magnit

Great Gator
A Different Kin

It's not just the annual Final Four Tournament that leaves us giddy (and sobbing in our beer). In honor of the best event in college sports, we proudly present our very own Great Gator Hangouts Tournament, where everyone's a winner.

Unlike the NCAA's, our brackets are



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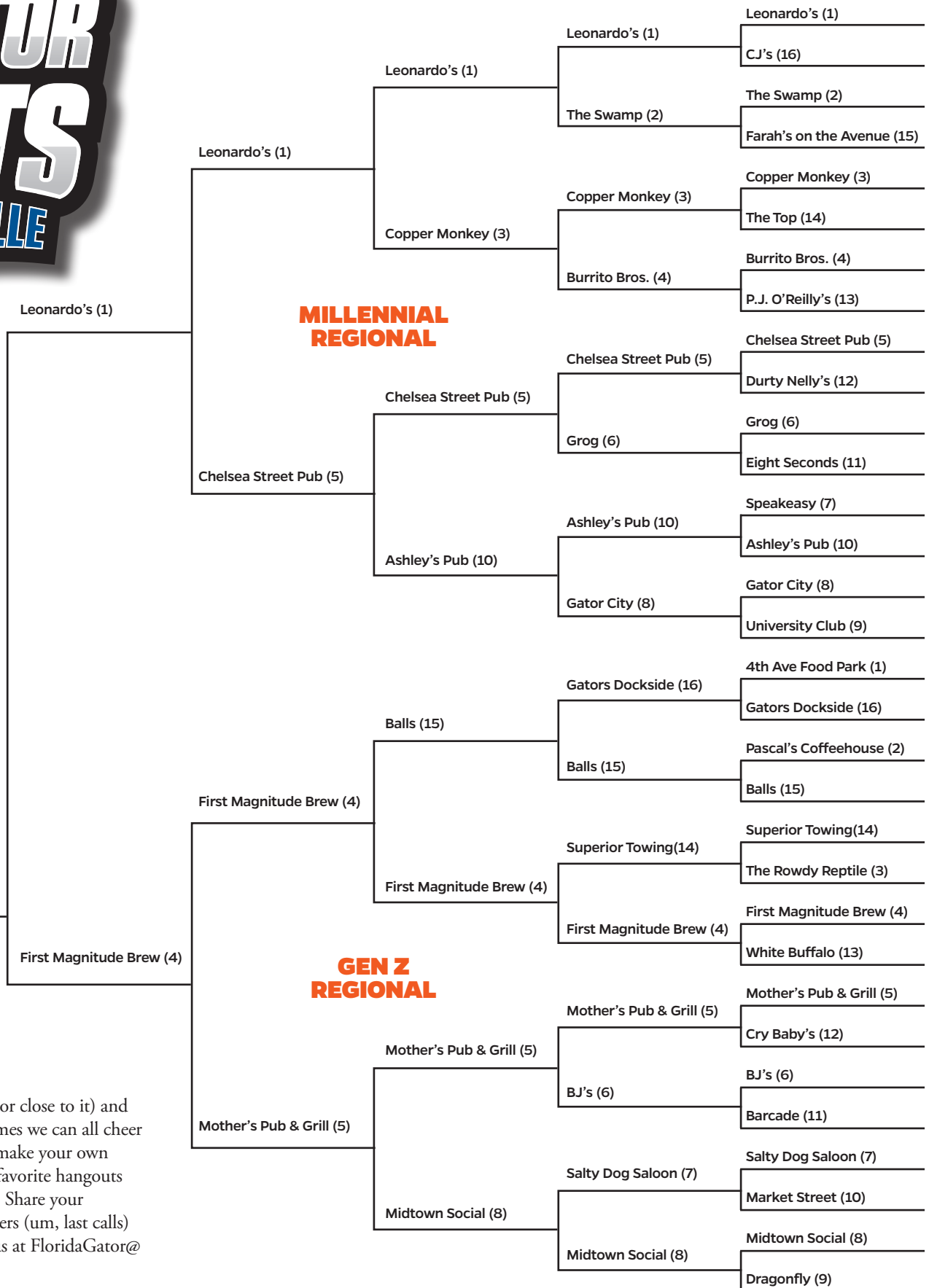
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ION CHAMP

ude Brew (4)

Hangouts: and of Madness

chosen by generation (or close to it) and are populated with names we can all cheer for. We invite you to make your own picks to see how your favorite hangouts match up against ours. Share your memories, buzzer-beaters (um, last calls) and slam dunks with us at FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu.



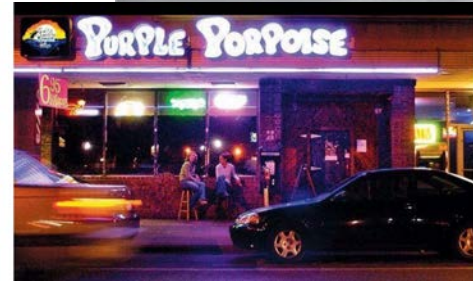


Skeeter's Big Biscuits: Best place for a midnight meal. The 24-hour restaurant on 13th Street has been called a “campy-country-hangover-grub joint.” Gators of a certain era (1970s, '80s and '90s) liked to grab a bite there after a night on the town to fill their stomachs and clear their heads. On weekends, the longest lines to get in the door started forming around 2 a.m.

Purple Porpoise: Best place to see a ghost. It could have been due to the bar's notorious Kamikaze Halftimes, but patrons there would occasionally report seeing spirits of the ghostly kind in the upstairs hallway. (An unsubstantiated rumor: a female student was killed there in the 1960s.) When the much-loved Porpoise closed in 2002, grieving Gators held a candlelight vigil. Bartender Pete Delmonico spoke for all of us when he told the Gainesville Sun, “This place has seen a lot of craziness, a lot of marriages, a lot of divorces and a lot of debauchery. And I've loved every minute of it.”

Leonardo's: Stickiest floor. Far more than inexpensive pizza and garlic knots, Leonardo's was a Gator ritual for almost 50 years — a friendly place to celebrate a graduation, take a break from finals or grab a bite between classes. Whether from the cooking grease residue or decades of foot traffic, the popular restaurant's floor was as sticky as a Gecko tongue. Patrons waiting in line to order would practically need to peel their shoes off the tile. A casualty of COVID-19, Leonardo's closed in 2020 to make room for UF's music school.

Salty Dog Saloon: Most lovable underdog. Squeezed into a row of newer joints on the north side of campus, the Salty Dog is a longtime Gator hangout that just won't go away. The cramped little bar has weathered competitors with big bank accounts, a pandemic and seemingly endless University Avenue construction projects. Through it all, the Salty Dog has hung on like, well, a hound with a bone.



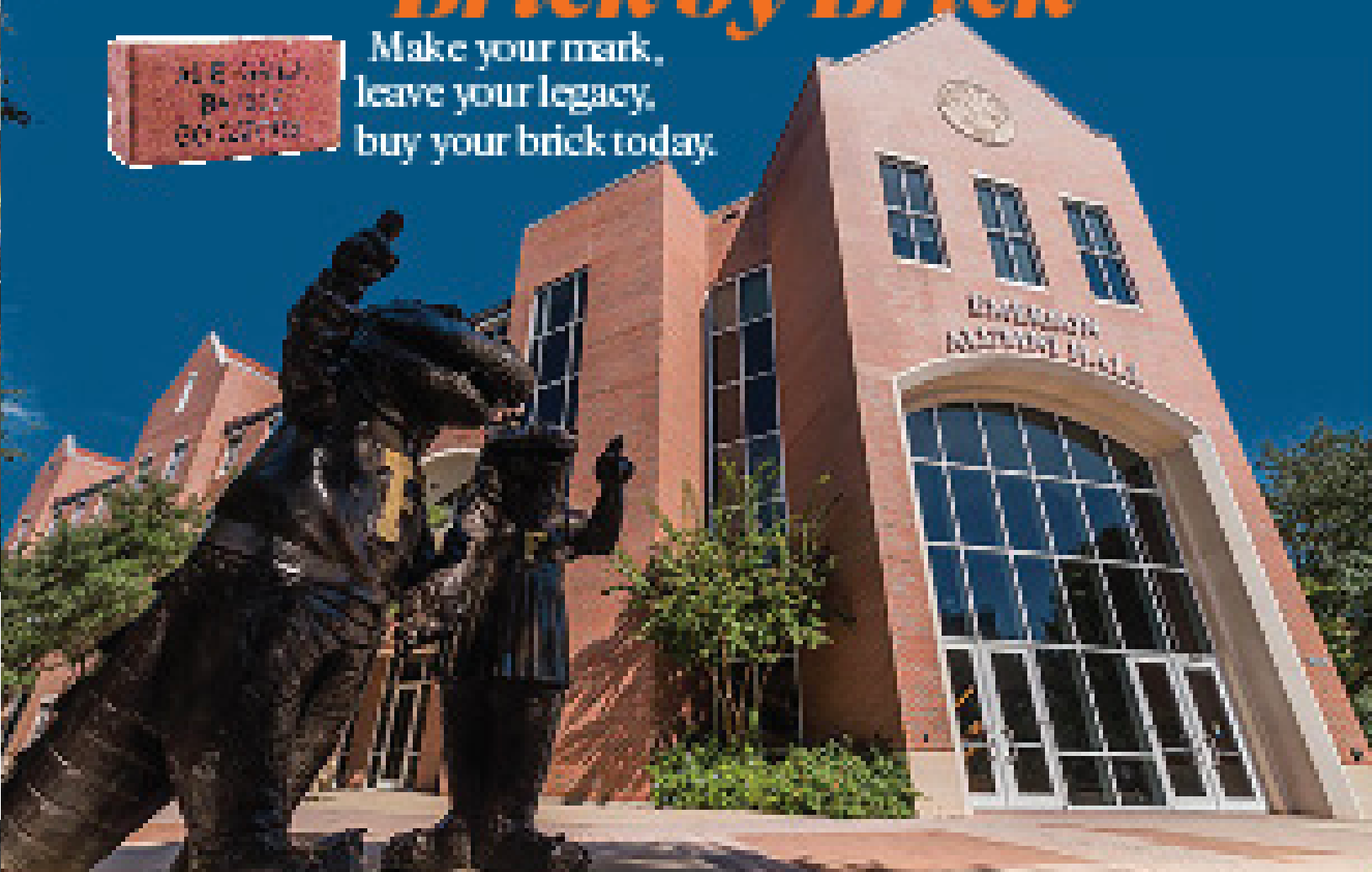
HONORABLE MENTION

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aw Shucks • Blue Eagle • Boca Fiesta • Brewmasters • Café Espresso • Captain Louie's • Cinema and Drafthouse • Common Grounds • Corner Drugstore • Crocodile Rocks • Cypress Lounge • Donigan's • Down to Earth • Eddie C's • Fat Daddy's • Fat Tuesday • Gold Coast • Granfalloon • Guthrie's • Hop Top Lounge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • House of Beer • Islands • Kazbor's Grille & Bar • Knife and Fork • Luke's Bagels • Mad Monk's Inn/Long Branch Saloon • Main Street Billiards • Mellow Mushroom • Miller's Ale House • Napolitano's • OAK (Original American Kitchen) • Orange & Brew • Phil and Nicks • Q and Brew • Rockeys Dueling Piano Bar • Royal Blue • Sarah's Restaurant • Sidcar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simon's • Speakeasy • Stubbies and Stein's • Swamp Head • Tall Paul's Brew House • Temple Bar • Tony and Pat's • Tom's Tavern • Trader Tom's • The Bent Card • The Sky Night Club • The Keg • The Side Bar • The Woolly • Whiskey River • White Rabbit • Windjammer • Wuv's Hamburgers |
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RETRACING HISTORY

Everglades trek a challenge for a modern Willoughby Expedition



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE WILLOUGHBY EXPEDITION

While the Everglades is much changed, the horizon-to-horizon sky is likely a scene shared by both expeditions.

BY CINDY SPENCE (BS '82, MA '17)

IN 1897, HUGH WILLOUGHBY PADDLED into the Everglades wilderness with science and adventure on his mind.

On his 30-day trek into a landscape he called terra incognita, he kept field notes, logging creatures and plants and keeping a glossary of Seminole vocabulary he picked up along the way. From his dugout canoe, he also collected the first samples of Everglades water and sent them to a university lab up north, establishing a baseline for water quality in the River of Grass.

More than 100 years later, **Christophe Vandaele** was indulging his love of history and old books, rummaging through a used book bin at a shop in South Florida. One book caught his eye: “Across the Everglades: A Canoe Journey of Exploration.”

Vandaele, a former Belgian Special Forces member with a taste for adventure, snapped up the book, kept it on his coffee table for a while, then one day picked it up again and decided to look up the author.

“I started researching Hugh Willoughby,” Vandaele says, “and I realized this is not just some guy.”

Willoughby was learned and accomplished in many ways, but Vandaele was most interested in one thing. Willoughby was the first non-native traveler to cross the Everglades from coast to coast, starting at the mouth of the Harney River near Flamingo and ending at the Miami River.

Inspired by Willoughby, an idea took shape. Vandaele began to query friends: Would they accompany him on a trek to retrace Willoughby’s path? There were no takers, and he sat on the idea



HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MARTIN COUNTY

Explorer Hugh Willoughby in the Florida Everglades, 1897.

for a while, until a chance meeting at his child’s Palm Beach County school. There, he met **Harvey Oyer III** (BA '90, JD '98), who immediately signed on.

Between Vandaele and Oyer – two modern-day gentleman explorers – there are multiple expeditions across the globe, to the North Pole and deep into jungles and across mountain ranges.



On the second night, the team slept on an old wooden platform that used to be an experimental station.

Their next expedition, they decided, would be the one right in their back yard.

The Willoughby Expedition 2022 was born.

Florida Roots

Oyer's great-great-grandparents were the first non-native American settlers of southeast Florida in 1872, so his interest was almost genetic. The timing was good. The team would embark on the journey on the 125th anniversary of the original expedition and on the 75th anniversary of Everglades National Park. Oyer hoped the journey would draw attention to the value of preserving the Everglades, a World Heritage site.

Vandaele and Oyer pulled in **Carlos "Charlie" Arazoza** (JD '86), an experienced Everglades guide, to help with orienteering.

"We had all done some of the segments before, so we each knew some of the terrain," Oyer says.

Oyer is the author of a children's book series, "The Adventures of Charlie Pierce," that takes place in and around the Everglades, and he says part of the value of the expedition was exposing youngsters to the natural world at the tip of Florida.

Every morning the team Zoomed with schools in Miami-Dade and in Palm Beach County in a partnership with the Cox Science Center, which did a Junior Willoughby Explorer program.

"This was a great opportunity to share with the world what the Everglades are, what they used to be, what they are today, possibly where they're headed tomorrow," Oyer says.

Oyer was intrigued, too, by the idea of repeating Willoughby's water testing.

"Even the idea of taking a water sample is pretty advanced for 1897, let alone marking the coordinates."

Floating Science Lab

Oyer and Vandaele decided to expand on Willoughby's science by adding sampling for emerging contaminants. As an alumnus, Oyer thought UF might be willing to help, so he called the Water Institute looking for an expert to give them a crash course in water chemistry. He ended up chatting with **Tracie Baker**, an associate professor in the Department of Environmental and Global Health in the College of Public Health and Health Professions.

"We had a conversation about microplastics and what you would need in order to collect them, and how you would do that in a canoe," Baker says.

Baker, recognizing a unique scientific opportunity, suggested



As the scientist for the expedition, Tracie Baker's job was collecting the water samples. She tested her lab gear in a trial run on Lake Wauburg. Here, she is trying out a collection net for microplastics, after modifying the design to keep the contraption from sinking.



ABOVE: Tracie Baker and Harvey Oyer III shared a canoe that functioned as a floating laboratory.

AT RIGHT: Christophe Vandaele squeezes through the mangroves in his vessel, the Willoughby II.



the explorers also test the water for antibiotic resistance genes, eDNA, pesticides and PFAS, manmade chemicals widely used since the 1940s in industrial and consumer products. After all, it's not everyday scientists travel to the most remote regions of the Everglades.

It soon was clear that taking the samples and storing them in a way to keep them useful for science was a challenge. Water chemistry could not be boiled down to just a few conversations.

"Harvey said later he could tell I was concerned about how much they were absorbing," Baker says.

When she offered to be the "science officer" on the trip, they jumped at the offer and she could sense their relief, but now the pressure was on her.

"All of a sudden, the conversation went from me helping them figure out how to sample, to me going on this expedition and doing all this other stuff, too."

Baker's lab swung into action, figuring out how to turn a canoe into a floating lab. They descended on Lake Wauburg armed with sampling equipment and figured out how to fit nets and pipettes and beakers into the canoe Baker would share with Oyer, her new lab partner.

"We went out to Lake Wauburg, and we arranged the gear in canoes to figure out how I would get to everything," Baker says. "I couldn't get out of the canoe, so if I was sitting in front, how would I reach everything?"

She express-ordered a floating collection net from Australia, which arrived in time, but sank when she tried it out on the lake. Baker, a forming engineering school adjunct, rigged buoys to keep it afloat.

"Being able to do the Lake Wauburg test run was pivotal," Baker says. "We tested the gear on a Friday and left the next Tuesday."

Oyer says the original team could have handled the simple tests Willoughby did.

"I thought, 'how hard can it be?' We just put some water in jars and mail them to Gainesville," Oyer says. "But the other substances had different handling requirements. Some could be in plastic jars, some needed to be in glass jars. With some, you can wear sunscreen, others you can't."

The Need for Testing

Additional tests were important, Baker says, because traces of some chemicals are popping up everywhere.

"They come off anything that's waterproof, but also they're in makeup and personal care products and microwave popcorn bags and fast food wrappers. Some of these things have health effects and we're ingesting them."

And eDNA testing helps with forming an accurate census of wildlife. Getting deep into the Everglades to survey wildlife is difficult, and even then, some creatures might never be seen. But animals shed their DNA in their urine and feces, and that ends up in the water. So testing the water provides a genetic ID that helps in determining which creatures call the Everglades home.

Baker says the tests are a starting point, almost a survey, and are being funded by Florida Power & Light Company. Preliminary results showed microplastics in every sample, some more than others. Each testing site also turned up pesticides and PFAS and most turned up pharmaceuticals.

When the final test results are available, scientists hope to determine how contaminants are moving across the Everglades and whether mangroves and seagrass are able to filter them.

"Hopefully, we can get more people looking at the Everglades and helping with taking these chemicals out," Baker says.

Baker's science expertise was unquestioned, and when it came to



ABOVE: The packed lab canoe left just enough room for Oyer to paddle.

AT RIGHT: Along the Tamiami Canal, the team picked up volunteers from Belen Jesuit Prep School, which gave them a classroom to sleep in overnight.



trekking, Baker had chops of her own. Her childhood vacations with her Marine dad revolved around camping and hiking. And Baker, an All-American swimmer in college, had completed five Ironmans, 20 marathons and hiked the north country in Alaska. In retrospect, the team said, Baker is likely the first non-native woman to cross the Everglades coast to coast in one journey.

“She was spectacular,” Oyer says. “On an expedition, physical fitness is only half the battle. You have to be mentally strong. It’s just hours and hours and days and days of exertion, and mental endurance is harder than physical endurance.”

Oyer says Baker’s job was the hardest.

“She physically had to do everything we did, but then she also had to do her science experiments and stay up after everyone else went to bed, or get up early. And keep track of 30, 40, 50 jars.”

From Coast to Coast

On Oct. 27, Arazoza strapped a GoPro to his noggin and began chronicling the modern-day Willoughby Expedition.

“Day 1, the mouth of the Harney River, ready to head inland. We’ve been paddling for 20 minutes, and the mouth of the Harney doesn’t seem to be getting any closer.”

As he narrated and paddled, Arazoza noted the ways the Everglades can trick a traveler. In open water on the Harney, the distance is deceptive. But perhaps the most challenging aspect was navigating sawgrass.

Seated and paddling, they could only see a foot or so ahead.

With the sawgrass towering above their heads by about six feet, even standing up did not yield a better view. So Arazoza looked down. As an experienced Everglades paddler, Arazoza used the water flow along the bottom to tell where to go.

“There are a thousand ways to go wrong, and one way to get there right,” he narrated. “The trick isn’t to get to the grass; the trick is to get to the grass where the airboat trail is.”

In Willoughby’s day, the indigenous inhabitants of the Everglades left well-traveled paths, and Willoughby followed them. In the modern Everglades, airboat trails make navigation possible.

“If it wasn’t for the airboat trails, going through the sawgrass would be impossible,” Arazoza says. “That might sound like cheating, and it might not sound like what Willoughby went through, but the reality is that in Willoughby’s day, the Seminoles and Miccosukees were transiting this area regularly, and the water levels were much higher. So he was basically following their trails, like we’re following the airboat trails.

“He had advantages, we have advantages,” Arazoza says.

On Day 4, they encounter three airboats and paddle aside to let them pass.

“Now the traffic jam’s over,” Arazoza says.

The sawgrass proves to be the most taxing segment. On Arazoza’s GoPro, you can hear the sawgrass scraping the canoe and Arazoza grunting from the exertion of padding through it.

One night, they knew from the GPS that the levee they wanted to camp on was on the other side of some mangroves, maybe 60



AT TOP: Once the team hit the Miami River, all signs of the old Everglades disappeared.

AT LEFT: Baker and Oyer collected six Mylar balloons within reach of their canoe, a sign, Baker says, that the urban world can intrude on even the most impenetrable regions of the River of Grass.

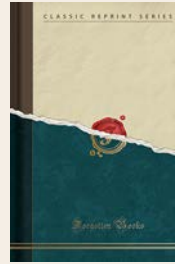
meters away.

“We would go forward and get caught, then go backward,” she said. “The levee was right there on the other side of these mangroves, but it took us three hours.”

The Everglades

In Willoughby’s day, the Everglades was on the verge of becoming a commodity, a swamp to be drained and tamed, not a World Heritage Site.

The lush landscape of abundance that came to be known as the River of Grass was filled to the brim with life: fish, rookeries with all kinds of birds, small mammals and, of course, the not-yet-endangered alligators and panthers.



The popular impression has always been that the Everglades is a huge swamp, full of malaria and disease germs. There was certainly nothing in our surroundings that would remind one of a swamp. Around the shores of the little islands the mud may be a trifle soft, but pure water is running over it, and no stagnant pools can be found. In the daytime the cool breeze has an undisturbed sweep, and the water is protected from overheating by the shade the grass affords. ... As will be seen by the analysis, this water is quite wholesome to drink . . . I had no hesitation in drinking it whenever the canoe stopped, taking two or three glasses at a time, when thirsty from the exertion of poling.”

From “**Across the Everglades: A Canoe Journey of Exploration**” Hugh Willoughby

In the most remote areas, Baker says she imagined she could see what Willoughby saw.

“Once you get past the places where you are basically pulling on sawgrass or macheteing through mangroves, you come to an area where really no one goes that seems very pristine, untouched.”

Except for one reminder of the modern world in even the most impenetrable spots: Mylar balloons.

“We could only see five feet in either direction, so the fact that we found six balloons . . .” Baker says. “There have to be so many out there.”

Among the creatures they kept an eye out for were alligators, crocodiles, water moccasins, pythons, spiders and mosquitoes. But they didn’t see a single mammal, casualties of the pythons that have taken over as the apex predator of the Everglades.

The Everglades sky, blue from horizon to horizon by day and filled with stars on the clear nights, might be the one thing they shared with Willoughby.

Paddling into one evening, Arazoza talked into his GoPro: “Welcome to the River of Grass. We have about three and a half hours to go. The moonlight from behind makes it look like you’re paddling on milk. Very peaceful.”

Oyer and Vandaele say the expedition might not compare to a trek into the Arctic or the jungle, but it is special in its own right.

THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH

And 8 Other Gator Heroes, Legends And History Makers

In August 1960, Joe Kittinger stepped into the emptiness 19 miles above New Mexico. His 4-minute, 36-second freefall teased the speed of sound and paved the way for space exploration. He's not the only Gator who deserves a chapter in history books.

BY DAVID FINNERTY

A LITTLE OVER 100 YEARS AGO, 102 MEN ENROLLED IN THE UNIVERSITY of Florida's new Gainesville campus. Since then, Gators have been eyewitnesses to some of human history's most breathtaking wonders and unbelievable triumphs, as well as our worst hours of shame.

Meet some alumni you might not know — but should.



One Giant Leap

For a moment ... a twinkle in time ... the world paused on July 20, 1969. A billion people stopped squabbling and stirring to sit beside radios or squeeze around TVs to witness what had never been. That summer night, astronaut Neil Armstrong opened the hatch on NASA's Eagle lunar modular, climbed down a ladder and stepped onto the moon.

As a mesmerized audience 238,855 miles away watched and listened, Armstrong declared: "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

Except, not exactly.

The real giant leap, the unthinkable small step that led to Armstrong's boot print in moon dust, was years earlier.

And it was a Gator who did it.

Three times.

In August 1960, **Joe Kittinger** (1928-2022) stepped into the emptiness 19 miles above New Mexico in a prelude to space exploration. It was his third trip into the stratosphere in a gondola strapped to a helium balloon. His 4-minute, 36-second freefall clocked in at 614 mph, teasing the speed of sound. Three miles over the desert, his right hand swollen to twice its size because of a malfunction in his pressurized glove, Kittinger opened his parachute.

The feat was so remarkable Life magazine put it on the cover on Aug. 29, 1960. In the photo, Kittinger looks like a small green dot tumbling into an ocean of clouds. The record 102,800-foot jump stood for 52 years; his time in freefall is still the longest ever.

"There is a hostile sky above me," Kittinger

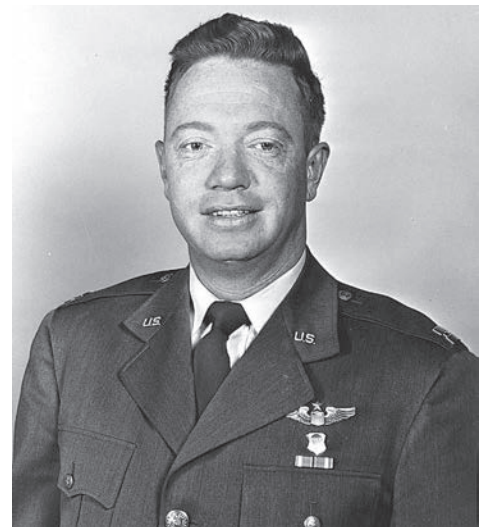
('46) said over the radio moments before that 1960 jump. "Man will never conquer space. He may live in it, but he will never conquer it."

So daring were Kittinger's high-altitude jumps — 76,400 feet in November 1959, 74,700 a month later and finally 102,800 — the first American in space insisted he wouldn't have done them. "Hell, no," Alan Shepard once said. "Absolutely not."

Shepherd wasn't the only one. The tests were too risky. On one, a faulty valve cost Kittinger his oxygen supply. On another, his faceplate fogged and a cord wrapped around his neck, causing him to spin so violently he momentarily passed out in freefall. After the last jump, Kittinger wrote: "I am on the ground, apparently in one piece. I am surrounded by sand, salt grass and sage, but no Garden of Eden could look more beautiful."

Kittinger died in December at the age of 94. He wasn't as celebrated as the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo astronauts, but if not for his leaps from the edge of the heavens NASA engineers wouldn't have been able to design the spacesuits worn into orbit or other equipment used in spaceflights.

"We knew damned little at that time," original Mercury Seven astronaut Deke Slayton explained to historians. "That was an ambitious thing he did, and it was a valuable thing for the space program because when we got into Gemini, we had ejection seats for the first time, and a lot of information Joe gathered went right into the design. He also tested the prototypes of the pressure suits we wore."



Joseph Kittinger, USAF



Kittinger in the Excelsior gondola wearing an experimental pressure suit.

A RECKONING FOR NAZIS

The sins of World War II were laid bare in Nuremberg, Germany, November 1945. That month — half a year after Adolf Hitler's suicide and Germany's surrender — war criminals began facing their accusers.

The city was a symbolic choice for the trials. The Nazi Party had held rallies there and passed laws stripping Jews of their citizenship.

The Nuremberg Trials themselves had been a compromise. The Soviet Union's Joseph Stalin suggested the mass execution of up to 100,000 German officers; British Prime Minister Winston Churchill wanted to execute high-ranking Nazis without a trial. In the end, the Allies agreed criminal proceedings would better document genocide and other crimes.



Sebring

In all, a series of 13 trials unfolded from 1945 to 1949 — 199 defendants, 161 convictions, 37 death sentences. One of the judges was **Harold Sebring** (1898-1968) a graduate of UF's law school.

Sebring ('28), then a justice on the Florida Supreme Court, oversaw the "Doctor's Trial" — 20 doctors and three other Nazi officials accused of conducting

medical experiments on concentration camp prisoners, torture and mass murder.

"[This is] no mere murder trial," chief prosecutor Telford Taylor argued in his opening statement. "[The defendants] treated human beings as less than beasts."

The trial took eight months. When it ended, seven of the 23 were acquitted and seven sentenced to hang for their atrocities. The rest were sent to prison.

When All Hell Broke Out in Baseball

Major League Baseball's opening day, that season in 1947, was like no other. It wasn't just baseball changing that April. It was, to some Americans, life's natural order itself — a Black man in a big leaguer's uniform a stick in the eye of what was supposed to be.

So when Jackie Robinson, the Brooklyn Dodgers' 28-year-old rookie, jogged onto the diamond for the first time in his MLB career, his own team's crowd hissed racial slurs. The 26,623 New Yorkers at Ebbets Field that afternoon were Dodgers fans, not his. To hell with the color barrier.

Red Barber (1908-1992), the Dodgers' legendary radio announcer and a UF graduate, was in the press box.

"Fans waited to see how the Mississippi born announcer would handle it," historian Rufus Ward wrote in 2022, commemorating the 75th anniversary of that remarkable ballgame. "He handled it by treating Robinson no differently than any other player. It was simply, 'Robinson at the plate' or 'Robinson in the field.' Barber's calls treated Robinson as an equal ... That act from a native Mississippian, who was expected to oppose the entry of a Black man into the majors, helped bring Robinson acceptance."

But it almost didn't happen.

When general manager Branch Rickey broke the news that the Dodgers were getting ready to sign Robinson, Barber considered quitting on the spot. The thought of broadcasting a game with a Black ballplayer seemed unimaginable.

"I believe he told me about it so far in advance so that I could have time to wrestle with the problem, live with it, solve it," Barber ('30) later confessed. "[As a boy] I saw Black men tarred and feathered by the Ku Klux Klan. I had grown up in a completely segregated world."

Robinson's ball skills and witnessing how he withstood "vicious abuse" made Barber rethink that attitude, he wrote in "1947: When All Hell Broke Loose in Baseball," his book recounting Robinson's rookie season. Barber soon became an ardent supporter.

"All I had to do when [Robinson] came was treat him as a fellow man, treat him as a ballplayer, broadcast the ball," Barber said.

The Dodgers, as it turned out, would win the World Series that season and Robinson would be chosen Rookie of the Year. Barber would go on to call 13 World Series and four All-Star games over a four-decade career behind the microphone.

Not one as memorable as opening day, 1947.



BETTIE LANE/SCHLESINGER LIBRARY, RADCLIFFE INSTITUTE, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Shere Hite in 1987.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

It was a peek into America's bedrooms.

Pseudoscience, some called it. Mind-blowing, others countered. "Fascinating" ... "man-hating" ... "trash" ... "flawed" ... "overdue" ... "vindication" ...

In 1976, everyone, it seemed, was talking — and had an opinion — about UF alumna

Shere Hite's (1942-2020) controversial, taboo-busting "The Hite Report."

Her 478-page book, officially titled, "The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality," turned what we thought we knew about sex upside down and inside out. The big takeaway: a lot of women weren't satisfied with their sex lives. Critics called her research "lax" and mocked the book as "sheer hype." Playboy magazine dubbed it "The Hate Report." She even got death threats.

The public, however, couldn't get enough. The book's cover alone was tantalizing: "3,000 women, ages 14 to 78, describe in their own words their most intimate feelings about sex." "The Hite Report" was an instant bestseller. Readers cheered its frankness. Women said it was reassuring.

"When people say, 'It's not scientific' what they really mean is, 'You're not a man. You're not wearing a white coat. It's just women talking. That's ... not important,'" Hite ('63, '66) told the Washington Post.

Years later, she tried to explain the book's hullabaloo to USA Today.

"It was trying to say that women need to be half of the equation," she said. "If we're going to have equality in sex, it has to be rethought."

STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA, FLORIDA MEMORY



Red Barber, Brooklyn Dodgers' legendary radio announcer.



Jackie Robinson, first Black man to play in Major League Baseball.

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Hugo Zacchini shot out of a cannon to deliver the first ball in the Astrodome, April 8, 1977.

When the Circus Came to Town

The old circus posters paint a heart-stopping picture. A cannon as big as a smokestack fires a man into the skies, a circle of smoke and a flash of reddish vapor trail his silhouette. “The Human Projectile ... The Sensation of the Century,” the posters tease.

The honest-to-goodness cannonball — the daredevil who crawled inside the barrel — was Gator **Hugo Zacchini** (1928-2016).

Zacchini ('51, '52) was practically destined to be a human cannonball. The circus was in his blood — juggling, tumbling and trapeze skills passed from generation to generation. That a Zacchini would eventually be shot from a cannon was a matter of time.

The stunt itself wasn't new. Circus performers had been pretending to be lobbed from cannons since the 1800s. But those acrobats were launched from rubber springs.

The Zacchini Brothers' cannon, in 1922, was the first to use compressed air, which meant performers could go farther (up to 200 feet) and faster (75 mph or more). The finishing touch was a cup of black gunpowder that ignited a blast and a boom.

Their feat dazzled audiences across Europe. When John Ringling discovered it at a show in Copenhagen, he signed the Zacchinis to his world-famous Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus, and the large Italian clan moved to Tampa.

Up to his retirement at 63, Zacchini climbed into the cannon twice a day for the better part of 40 years.

I AM WOMAN, HEAR ME ROAR

On Sept. 20, 1957, Tampa housewife Gwendolyn Hoyt crushed her husband's skull with a baseball bat. It took an all-male jury just 25 minutes to find her guilty of murder. Arguing that the verdict was unfair because state law made it all but impossible for women to serve as jurors, she appealed. The Florida Supreme Court, however, upheld the decision, claiming “the practice of excluding women from the jury pool ... [protected them] from the filth, obscenity and atmosphere of the courtroom.”

The ruling, to some observers, was a slap to all women — the latest in a long history of discriminations.

America's women had had enough.

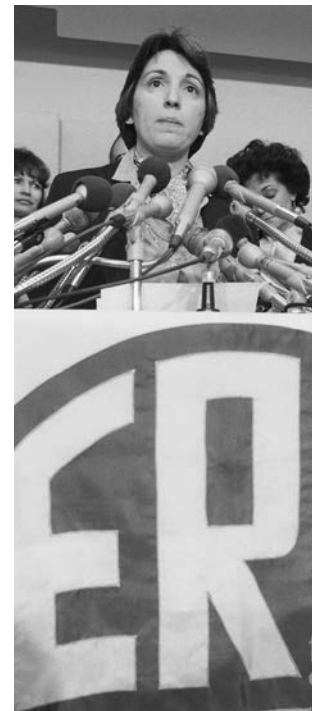
A gender rights revolution was bubbling, and one of the loudest voices belonged to UF alumna **Eleanor Smeal** (b. 1939).

“There's no question in my mind that rights are never won unless people are willing to fight for them,” the thrice-elected president of the National Organization for Women once said.

To make that point, the first March for Women's Lives — bringing 100,000 fed-up demonstrators to the steps of the nation's Capital — was Smeal's doing. So was the Equal Rights Amendment. To convince Congress to pass it, Smeal organized a yearslong grassroots lobbying campaign. She coined the term “gender gap” to encourage more women to vote.

An icon of the feminist movement, Smeal ('63) had a hand in every milestone women's rights victory since the '60s. Girls in Little League Baseball, stronger support for women's collegiate sports, laws to stop discrimination on the basis of pregnancy and to protect women from violence, fairer salaries, better childcare — all had her influence.

In 2006, someone asked Smeal about Katie Couric becoming the anchor for CBS Evening News. The answer could have summed up Smeal's life's work. Her words: “Move over a little more gracefully, boys.”



Eleanor Smeal, former president of NOW.

No Man Is Above the Law

For breakfast, on Aug. 9, 1974, his last in the White House, Richard Nixon asked for corned beef hash and poached eggs. A few hours later, he boarded Marine One, raised his arms to flash his signature “victory” gesture, and left Washington, D.C., a disgraced former president.

“I have never been a quitter,” he told the nation the prior evening from the Oval Office. “To leave office before my term is completed is abhorrent to every instinct in my body. But as president, I must put the interest of America first.”



Some historians believe it was **Chesterfield Smith** (1917-2003), a UF alumnus and at the time president of the American Bar Association, who convinced Nixon to resign.

Smith Two summers earlier, five burglars had been caught breaking into the Democratic National Committee’s Watergate headquarters. When reporters and investigators discovered ties to Nixon, his administration tried to cover up evidence.

The Watergate scandal, for Smith, became unbearable on Oct. 20, 1973 — the “Saturday Night Massacre,” as it would later be known. That night, Nixon ordered his attorney general to fire Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox. When the attorney general resigned in protest, Nixon turned to the deputy attorney general, who also refused. With options running out, the president told the Justice



Nixon boarding Marine One to leave Washington, D.C., after resigning in 1974.

Department’s third-most-senior official, Solicitor General Robert Bork, to do it, and he did.

“No man is above the law,” Smith (’46) wrote in an open letter the next day calling for Nixon’s impeachment.

That letter, coming from the ABA’s president, a man who’d supported Nixon’s 1968 and ’72 presidential campaigns, made national headlines and put Nixon on notice that it was time to go.

RUN LIKE THE WIND

In the 1970s, short shorts and sweatbands were cool. Credit, or blame, belongs to UF alumnus **Frank Shorter** (b. 1947)

Going into the 1972 Munich Olympics, most Americans didn’t give a hoot about long-distance running. The last time the USA had won gold in the marathon, Teddy Roosevelt was president and there were only 46 states. But that summer, in a dramatic finish seen on TVs across the world, Shorter ended the losing streak.

His victory inspired a global running boom. Everyone, it seemed, suddenly wanted to jog around the block in a new pair of sneakers. Overnight, there were running clubs and weekend road races, running magazines and shoe wars. In the few years following Shorter’s Olympic glory, 25 million Americans took up jogging — President Jimmy Carter one of them, he and Rosalyn in their matching warmup suits at Camp David.

Rumor was the craze caused pack-a-day smokers to quit cold turkey, alcoholics to give up beer and couch potatoes to say no to pizza. True or not, the sport’s newfound popularity stunned the running community.

“Most Americans had no idea what the marathon was, let alone its weird 26.2-mile distance [until Shorter’s gold medal],” fellow runner Joe Muldowney recalled. “Some folks may have heard of the Boston Marathon ... but few Americans had the desire to tackle the race itself.”

Shorter (’74) is reluctant to claim the running boom started with his triumph in Munich.

“I was a piece in the puzzle,” he told a writer in 2022. “I wanted to show we could be distance runners. Americans were not considered endurance people.”



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Frank Shorter runs through Munich in the 1972 Olympic marathon on his way to Olympic gold.



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The crew of the B-29 bomber Enola Gay, Col. Paul Tibbets, center.

A Sheet of Sun

A bomb so destructive it turned an entire city into smoldering ruin fell from the clouds over Japan on Aug. 6, 1945. The blast that morning in Hiroshima killed 80,000 people in a blink. “A sheet of sun,” one survivor called the explosion.

Never before — and just once since, three days later on sister city Nagasaki — has a nuclear weapon been used in combat.

The pilot who dropped it? UF alumnus **Col. Paul Tibbets** (1915-2007).

“I thought, we’re going to prove to the Japanese the futility in continuing to fight ... They’re not going to stand up to this thing,” Tibbets told National Public Radio years later. “After I saw what I saw, I was more convinced that they’re going to quit. That’s the only way I could do it.”

The 10,000-pound atomic bomb, christened Little Boy by its makers, was meant to underscore, in no uncertain terms, that it was time to end World War II. Japan’s emperor had refused earlier overtures. Japan’s men, women and children would never give up, he’d warned. If there was an invasion, America’s soldiers would pay with relentless Kamikaze suicide attacks.

Tibbets and his now famous B-29 bomber Enola Gay (named for his mother) released Little Boy at 8:15 a.m. local time. The loss of weight caused the plane to jump 10 feet. Below, five square miles were soon obliterated. Ground zero sizzled to 7,000 degrees. Bronze statues melted. Muscle and bone turned to vapor. Scientists feared the shockwave alone might swat the Enola Gay out of the air.

“The whole sky lit up when it exploded,” Tibbets recalled as an older man. “There was nothing but a black boiling mess hanging over the city. You wouldn’t have known Hiroshima was there.”

Afterward, in a broadcast heard around the world, President Harry Truman said: “Sixteen hours ago an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima, an important Japanese army base. That bomb ... is harnessing the power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East.”



NATIONAL ARCHIVE

Hiroshima after the atomic bomb.

A little over a week later, Japan’s Emperor Hirohito surrendered, citing “a new and most cruel bomb.”

Controversy over the nuking of Hiroshima dogged Tibbets to his grave. So much so that before his death in 2007, Tibbets asked that he have no funeral or headstone for critics to desecrate.

To others, Tibbets was a hero. Their argument that the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki unquestionably saved American lives and, in the long run, Japanese ones.

“Our best answer to anyone who doubts this [was necessary] is that we did not start the war,” said Lt. Gen. Leslie Groves, who directed the atomic bomb program. “If they don’t like the way we ended it, remember who started it.”

Tibbets, who came to UF to be a doctor but left early to enlist in the Air Force, never regretted piloting the Enola Gay on that mission.

“I have been convinced that we saved more lives than we took,” he wrote. “It would have been morally wrong if we’d have had that weapon and not used it and let a million more people die.”



THE



Chase started his journey with Betty White, his white 2017 Dodge Caravan, on Aug. 27 with Nevada at New Mexico State at Aggie Memorial Stadium in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

PILGRIMAGE



Ben Chase's record-breaking road trip is an homage to college football

BY CINDY SPENCE (BS '82, MA '17)

TO BEN CHASE, COLLEGE FOOTBALL is a religion.

No matter what they worship any other day of the week, on Saturday, college football fans are praying for points, alongside thousands of others among the football faithful.

"Nothing brings people together more than college football," says Chase (BS '14), who set out last fall to break the record for most college football games attended in a season. He did it with room to spare and gained insight along the way.

"I've been to 77 games in 75 stadiums," Chase says. "That's 75 cathedrals to me."

Chase started Aug. 27 – Nevada at New Mexico State – with a goal of breaking the record, which stood at 57. Betty White, his white 2017 Dodge Caravan, already had 74,000 miles on her, so he took her in for a bumper-to-bumper checkup before heading out on the 1,800-mile drive to Game 2 in Pittsburgh.

He had only gone 2,100 miles when Betty rebelled. After an

unplanned pitstop and \$1,100 in repairs, a seeming reality check for most, Chase posted the only glum installment in what became an upbeat trail of posts that turned him into a social media phenom for football lovers.

"I need Betty to get through Week 1," he says, filming the selfie video in the dark in his van. "I should not be eating based on emotion, but it's Oreo McFlurry time."

He could have bailed, but even just one game in, he felt committed. He was in it to win it.

"I just couldn't fail," says Chase, who did end up renting a car 48 games in when Betty went on injured reserve with a blown transmission after he pushed her a mile too far. "I wanted to just go for it, and I thought I could figure it out. I made the rules, and I stuck by them."

Among the rules: never ask for money and stay to the end of every game. He bought a shirt and hat at every venue and sat with the home teams, a nice safety-in-numbers rule as a perpetual visitor everywhere except in the Swamp.

And, as a diehard Gator, Chase had his limits.

"There were six teams on the trip whose logos I would not wear:



Chase took some ribbing from West Virginia fans after the Virginia Tech-WVU contest, Game 13, when Virginia Tech lost.

LSU, Florida State, Miami, Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee,” Chase says. “My rules.”

He invited followers to blow up his DMs – “they keep me awake” – as he traveled from college town to college town. Along the way, when he stopped for gas, he’d pull out his phone and answer questions:

- Can I afford this? Absolutely not.
- Why do it? I love meeting people and I love college football.
- How do you stay awake? I live on Celsius Tropical Vibes.

On Sept. 1, he stopped to pay his rent, showered at a Planet Fitness and hit the road again, keeping an eye out for well-lit 24-hour parking lots to catch some zzz’s on the way to Game 4, Florida-Utah.

Mondays were his designated coffee shop days, when he’d connect to Wi-Fi to check schedules for the week ahead. He tapped a buddy to help keep up with game times as they were posted.

“I’d always try to see if I could add another game to my Saturday,” Chase says.

Sometimes he called audibles, and that’s how he ended up in Game 42 watching the Kansas Jayhawks storm the field and tear down the goalpost after beating Oklahoma State and becoming bowl-eligible for the

first time since 2008.

By week 8 or 9, it was lockstep, and in the postseason he had a stretch of 14 games in 16 days.

His childhood nickname, Ben Solo, resonated on the drives, but when he and Betty pulled up to a stadium, tailgating and adult beverages made for instant community, his football family growing along the way. He won’t pick a “best” for tailgating, but says The Grove at Ole Miss, Game 55, on Thanksgiving is “everything you hear it is.”

At App State, Game 30, a coach’s wife asked if he needed an introduction to smooth the way at a future stop. He ended up on a group chat with Karen McElwain, wife of former UF coach Jim McElwain, and found a warm welcome for Game 45 in Mount Pleasant, Michigan.

“Next thing I know I’m hanging with the moms at the moms’ tailgate at Central Michigan.”

The McElwains took him in, and one of his 35 nights sleeping in a bed was spent as their guest.

Along the way he did interviews and podcasts, many of the hosts picking up on his zeal. SEC Network checked in with Chase from time to time, and

Chase stopped to do an interview from a McDonald’s parking lot just west of the Arizona-California border on National Championship Game Day en route to kickoff.

Chase told the panel he would be wearing purple and “praying for a plague of frogs,” a reference to Texas Christian University’s mascot, the Horned Frogs – the “underfrogs” to the Georgia Bulldogs.

Host Dari Nowkhah told Chase he was “doing the Lord’s work.”

He maxed out two credit cards on the trip, scraping by just paying the minimums, but he was fine with that. He said it was the equivalent of a last-semester-of-college debt, and the education in college football traditions was worth it. At the Florida game, for example, he met a guy who’d been in the same tailgate spot for 29 years.

Baylor, Game 52, he says, is among the most memorable because of the fans. Freshmen sign up to run on the field and form the Baylor Line, a tunnel players run through to take the field. In reserved front-row seating for students, the crowd yells on every defensive play to drown out the opposing team’s QB signals. Every snap, there’s a “sic ‘em Bears” chant.

Then there’s the gourmet concourse food, although he says it’s hard to beat the Texas Twinkie in nearby Frisco: a jalapeño stuffed with cream cheese and smoked brisket and wrapped in a slice of thick-cut bacon.

Later, in the postseason, Baylor also provided stadium seating for history as the coldest college football game ever.

At Tulane, Game 50, Chase says he almost cried.

The University of Southern California was favored and had the Heisman QB. Tulane had had just five winning seasons this century and went 2-10 the year before. Tulane upset USC and went 12-2 for one of the greatest turnarounds in college football history.

“It was emotional,” Chase says.

Even the smaller schools on the list earned his respect. Shorter University, Game 31, rents a high school football field from the city of Rome, Georgia, and plays to sellout crowds.

“People said I was going to games that didn’t matter, but they were some great competitive games,” Chase says.

“Seeing the coaches and kids at schools

The fans at Washington State, Game 35, were among the more hospitable fans Chase encountered, even letting him mug with Dash Dog, an honorary Washington State cougar.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BEN CHASE

that may never have a chance to make the college football playoffs, seeing their joy,” Chase says, “that changed my mindset on what success looks like.”

In some stadiums, he found kindred spirits, like the father who had attended every national championship game since 2014 and was now bringing his daughter along, and the beverage guy aiming to sell beer at every football and baseball stadium in the country.

Chase says he’s always enjoyed driving and entertained himself with college football podcasts, naturally, and his own “music.”

“At 2 a.m. or 3 a.m., when I was falling asleep, I’d sing along to ‘Hamilton’ or ‘The Greatest Showman’ or the ‘Glee’ soundtrack,” Chase says.

Friends and Twitter followers checked in from time to time, and one friend texted him, saying, “Can you share your location with me? My mom’s worried about you.” His own mom created a Twitter account to keep track of him.

When he passed the previous record and hit 58, he could have stopped, but the postseason was just starting. He thought, “why not?” There were still games on the schedule, the season wasn’t over.

Chase drove overnight from Texas to LA and never actually went to his \$1,000 seat at the championship game. He found one of his Twitter followers near the 50-yard line, and with the adult beverages right behind him, he took in the game there.

As the game clock hit 0, he hightailed it out of SoFi Stadium, drove to the nearest Taco Bell, turned off location sharing and passed out.

“I had shared for 135 days,” Chase says. “This is the hardest thing I’ve ever done in my life. And I took the LSAT.”

For now, Betty White is getting a much-needed rest and her own driveway to park in every night in Gainesville. Chase is loving his new job with the Gators (see sidebar) and paying down his credit cards. While the bar is high, he says his record is “definitely beatable.”

“If someone went for it, I’d be at the national championship to buy them a beer,” Chase says.

Is he sick of college football? Not a chance.

“When you go to a game, you see people from every denomination and religion, all wearing the same colors,” Chase says.

“I only love it more.”

Coming Full Circle

Along the social media road to the championship, Chase tweeted that he would have a big announcement at the end of the big game.

When it became clear the Georgia Bulldogs would rout Chase’s adopted TCU Horned Frogs (UGA won 65-7), he decided it was time for the reveal. In the third quarter, he posted: “Coming home.”

“My phone exploded,” Chase says.

Chase, 34, announced his new role as director of NIL strategy for the Gators, then turned his phone off and then hit the road from Los Angeles to Gainesville after the game, with stops along the way to pack up his apartment in Tucson, for barbecue in Texas and to catch up with his mom in Orlando.

Armed with his law degree from George Washington University and law license, Chase had spent time the year before the road trip working for a company doing Name, Image and Likeness programming, such as launching NIL collectives at Arizona and Gonzaga and facilitating opportunities for student athletes at Oklahoma. When the company reorganized, he seized the opportunity to go on the road.

His college football roadtrip, he says, intersected nicely with NIL.

“I was never an athlete, but in 135 days, I went from not being anyone to having deals with national companies, like being on the 1-yard line with Applebee’s,” Chase says. “I’ve met and still talk to student athletes and athletic directors from all over the country about best practices in the NIL space.

“The relationships help,” Chase says.

His goal as director of NIL strategy for the Gators is to make sure every coach and every athlete feels supported.

“At the end of the day, if the coaches are happy and the players are happy, to me that’s success.”

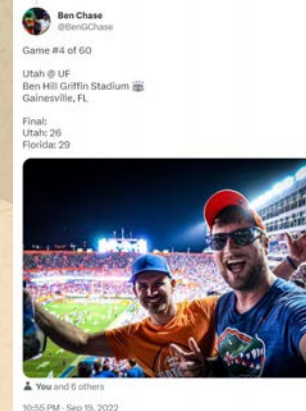
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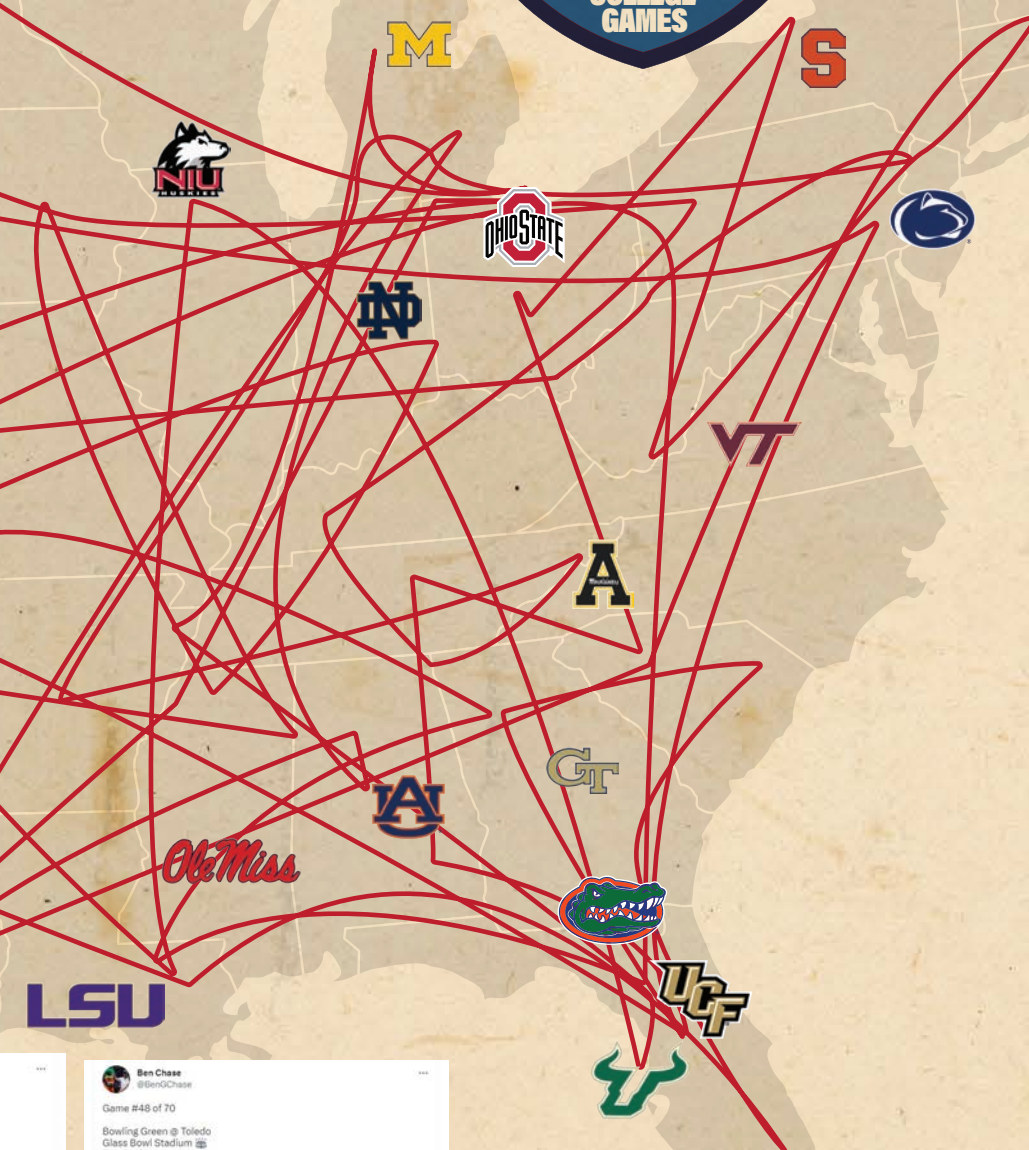
2023

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

JANUARY 9 | LOS ANGELES

START AUG. 27, 2022
LAS CRUCES, NM





BEN'S TRIP, BY THE NUMBERS

77 115
games teams

+60K
miles

48 10
states oil changes

1 2
blown Jiffy Lube
transmission gift cards

\$9K
in car repairs (approx.)

\$7.49
Highest gas price, in Calif.

\$2.30
Lowest gas price, in Atlanta

14 63
paid tickets free tickets

100
nights sleeping in a vehicle

35
nights sleeping in a bed

\$500
Gifts from 2 strangers on Venmo

3 1
weddings lost wallet

2 vehicles
phones

FLORIDA GATOR | 43



Natural LEADERS





Oríana Molaes (BS '22) and Coleen Sailsman (BS '22) kayak along a tributary of the Silver River in Ocala. Photo courtesy of TESI.



PHOTO BY KRISTEN GRACE, FLORIDA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

During the Spring Break field experience, students tagged horseshoe crabs in Cedar Key as part of the Florida Horseshoe Crab Watch.

The Thompson Earth Systems Institute shows students the environment needs all majors

BY NATALIE VAN HOOSE (BA '06)

WHEN AADIL RAHMAN (BS '23) APPLIED TO THE INAUGURAL ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS FELLOWSHIP, an innovative program offered by the University of Florida Thompson Earth Systems Institute, he hoped to learn more about the state's most pressing environmental challenges and meet similarly motivated students.

He got much more than he bargained for.

Expecting a smattering of guest lectures and Zoom meetings, Rahman instead found himself in a host of unfamiliar scenarios – and loving

every minute. He zipped across the Gulf of Mexico on a skiff to see how clam farms work. He threaded his way along a tributary of the Silver River as a novice kayaker; gingerly collected and tagged horseshoe crabs; witnessed a dolphin corralling fish along a living shoreline; and roasted his first s'more. Rahman was well versed in biology and ecology, thanks to his undergraduate



Rahman

zoology courses. But savoring Florida's natural wonders firsthand was an entirely different – and life-changing – experience.

"Growing up, I never thought snorkeling, kayaking or birdwatching were things that Brown people did," Rahman said. "I just didn't feel welcome in natural areas. The fellowship definitely changed my view on that 100%."

Rahman was so eager to share these experiences that he coordinated a snorkeling trip with his mother and sister and a camping excursion with a childhood friend, initiating his loved ones into the outdoor life.

"Reframing being outside as something that we all can do, versus just being stuff that white people do – I think that's so



PHOTO BY MARIELA PAJUELO, TESI

The 2021-22 cohort represented 13 unique majors. From left to right: Angie Pinilla, Sarisha Boodoo, Oriana Molaes, Kayla Ehrlich, Aadil Rahman, Coleen Sailsman, Dulce Diaz Roa, Yveline Saint Louis, Connor Milton, Isabelle Gain, Kamya Bates and Arran Wass-Little.

important,” he said.

Empowering students from diverse backgrounds to participate in environmental research, outreach and civic engagement was a primary goal of the fellowship, said Sadie Mills, TESI coordinator and one of the fellowship organizers. Mills and co-organizer Rebecca Burton (MS '14) also recruited students from an array of majors, not just traditional STEM fields.

“Solving environmental crises requires an all-hands-on-deck approach. You don’t have to be a science major to be an environmental leader,” said Burton, TESI communications manager. “We all have unique skill sets that we can use to help the planet, and we wanted this program to reflect that.”

The program, funded by a grant from the Henry David Thoreau Foundation, brought together 12 UF students from November 2021 to April 2022, immersing them in educational experiences and equipping them with the know-how and confidence to navigate professional opportunities and advocate for environmental stewardship in Florida and beyond. A stipend also boosted the program’s inclusivity, bringing it within reach of students who would otherwise need a job to cover their living expenses.

The Environmental Leaders Fellowship epitomizes TESI’s mission of advancing education and communication about Earth systems science, broadly defined as the study of interactions between air, water, land and life, Mills said.

“Investing in the next generation of environmental leaders exponentially expands TESI’s reach,” she said. “Undergraduates are well poised to leave UF knowledgeable about Earth systems and to use that information in their future careers, but they’re also taking it back to their families and friends.”

To shape the program, TESI worked with Megan Ennes, Florida Museum of Natural History assistant curator of museum education, to learn what the pilot cohort wanted. The students identified three main needs: meeting other students interested in the environment; learning how to navigate the university and its resources; and developing the ability to communicate science to a variety of audiences. Post-program interviews showed students grew in these target areas.

“This suggests that we were able to work with the students to design a fellowship that was tailored to their specific needs and aspirations, rather than what we felt they should need,” Ennes said.

Students explored a range of Florida-based environmental topics, with the help of UF faculty, Extension agents and community partners. These included sustainable agriculture and aquaculture, erosion and living shorelines, food security, wildlife monitoring, water quality and supply, climate change, how Florida’s indigenous people have interacted with their natural surroundings over time, science communication, education and how to mediate cultural differences in science and policy. A highlight was a weeklong field

“Solving environmental crises requires an all-hands-on-deck approach. You don’t have to be a science major to be an environmental leader.”

— REBECCA BURTON, TESI COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER



AN INVESTMENT IN THE PLANET

The Thompson Earth Systems Institute was started in 2018 with a \$10 million gift by **Jon** (BS '61, MS '62) and **Beverly** (MED '62) **Thompson** to address Earth systems studies and problem-solving. TESI is working to secure funding for the next student cohort. To support the program, visit ufgive.to/yb3h0c

Coleen Sailsman picks up a pair of horseshoe crabs to survey and tag as part of the Florida Horseshoe Crab Watch in Cedar Key. Photo by Kristen Grace, Florida Museum of Natural History.



experience over spring break in North Central Florida.

For many fellows, the experience was career-changing. As a double major in political science and sustainability studies, Sarisha Boodoo (BA '22) previously felt intimidated to dive into environmental spaces. The welcoming, interdisciplinary nature of the fellowship drew her. Soon, Boodoo, who had been intent on working in the policy sector, found herself captivated by science communication as a meaningful way of bridging the gap between researchers and the public.

"You're getting out there, you're learning about all these different topics, speaking to different experts, speaking to different community members," Boodoo said. "That for me was eye-opening."



Boodoo

Her final project, creating educational materials about Florida's aquifers for schoolchildren, left her eager for her next creative communication challenge. She and Rahman were among four fellows later hired by TESI to develop and launch the Environmental Leaders Network, an online community that connects UF students with opportunities on campus related to the environment. The brainchild of the fellows, the network now has more than 200 members.

Having honed her communication skills in the program and internship, Boodoo recently started a new job as the science writer for Florida Sea Grant.

"This fellowship was one of the most transformative experiences I've had as an undergraduate," she said.

Yveline Saint Louis (BA, '22) credits the fellowship with guiding her current Ph.D. studies on medical anthropology in the tropics.

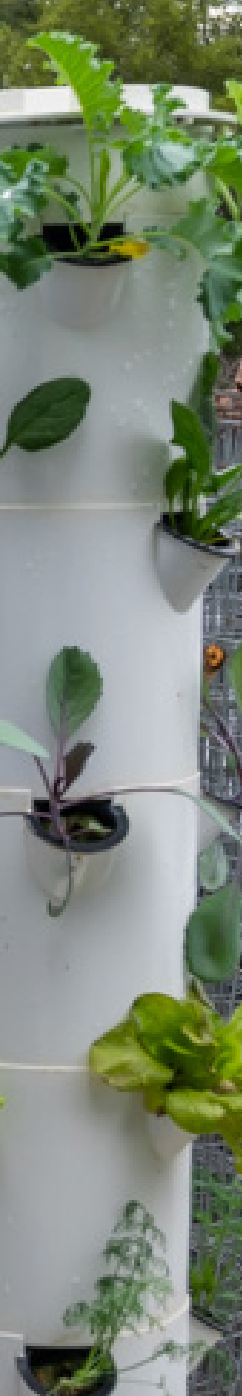


PHOTO COURTESY OF TESI



TESI/ MARIELA PAJUELO

AT LEFT: On the final day of the Spring Break field experience, Fellows toured the UF Field and Fork Farm and Gardens where they learned about sustainable agriculture. ABOVE: Throughout their Fellowship, students were exposed to civic engagement opportunities, such as removing invasive species from McCarty Woods on the UF campus. (From left to right: Sarisha Boodoo, Yveline Saint Louis, Angie Pinilla, Isabelle Gain, Oriana Molaes, and Alan Ivory—TESI Scientist-in-Residence).

“This fellowship was one of the most transformative experiences I’ve had as an undergraduate.”

— SARISHA BOODOO (BA '22)



Saint Louis

When she applied to the fellowship, Saint Louis was eager to delve into climate action and connect with students with similar interests.

The program fulfilled those goals and added a new one – to use her position as a researcher to listen to and help meet the environmental needs of communities.

During the Spring Break field experience, Saint Louis learned about Cedar Key’s burgeoning clam industry and interviewed residents about what they perceived as the area’s top environmental threats. The experience brought home to her the importance of directly engaging communities in research.

“Hearing their perspectives was fascinating,” said Saint Louis, now a Ph.D. student at the University of Washington. “If you’re trying to do any type of research that impacts people, actually

talking to the people who are impacted by the problem, and centering them in the research process, is so important. Without that, what is all that knowledge really being used for?

“This was definitely one of my favorite things about my time at UF.”

For Mills, a personal highlight was the close bonds forged among the fellows themselves, most of whom had endured the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic for two years of their undergraduate experience. After a camping trip Mills had carefully planned for the group was rained out, several fellows put together their own trip that summer and sent Mills the photos as a surprise.

“It just made my day that they had done that on their own – and these were students who didn’t know each other before the fellowship,” Mills said. “That warmed my heart.”

Alum wins Genius Grant for work on plastic wastes

Jenna Jambeck (BS '96, MS '98, PHD '04) was enjoying the Memorial Day holiday in 2021 when she received a surprising message.

A fisherman had found something he thought belonged to her: a plastic bottle. She had attached a note with her contact info and dropped it into the Mississippi River in St. Louis to learn how trash travels in waterways.

"I get this message saying it's in west Baton Rouge," says Jambeck, an environmental engineering professor at the University of Georgia and now a MacArthur Genius in recognition of her groundbreaking work to investigate the scale of plastic pollution and address it.

"I'm thinking to myself, 'this must be a joke.' "

She asked the fisherman to send a photo. It turned out the bottle, named Rogue One by the Star Wars-loving Jambeck, was one she dropped upriver 881 miles away near St. Louis.

The bottle's GPS tracker pinged its location for 32 days. About 30 miles downstream, it got stuck. It began moving again, but then went silent when the battery died. By the time the fisherman called, Jambeck had given up on finding it.

Even to a researcher who specializes in how misplaced trash can find its way to unlikely places - like the gyres in the middle of the ocean — it was a reminder of just how far a piece of plastic, used once and discarded, can go. And it's a glimpse of the massive challenges posed by the cumulative effects of billions of discarded pieces of plastic.

Photo by Andrew Davis Tucker/University of Georgia





PHOTO BY DOROTHY KOZLOWSKI/UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Jenna Jambeck won a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation award for her work on plastic wastes. She says about 11 million metric tons of plastic enter the oceans each year.

Quantifying the Plastics Problem

Jambeck's work as an internationally renowned waste management expert caught the attention of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, which named her a 2022 fellow. The honor, known as a Genius Grant, comes with \$800,000 to support her work.

Among her innovations is the Marine Debris Tracker app, developed with a colleague and which she used in the Mississippi River project. To date, community members have logged more than 6.5 million items into Debris Tracker. More than 70% of that garbage was plastic.

This isn't surprising.



Rogue One, a plastic bottle with a GPS transmitter, traveled 881 miles.



In 2015, Jambeck led a landmark study, published in *Science*, estimating that around 8 million metric tons of plastic enter the world's oceans each year. Today, she figures that number has grown.

"Right now, we know that there are about 11 million metric tons of plastic entering our oceans every year," Jambeck says, "which is more than a dump truck of plastic every minute."

A follow-up study revealed 90.5% of plastic is never recycled. That finding was named the International Statistic of the Year in 2018 by the Royal Statistical Society. The statistic lent a sense of scale to the problem of global plastic pollution.

In another study, Jambeck's team discovered that humans had generated 8.3 billion metric tons of plastic since the large-scale production of synthetic materials began in the early 1950s. Of that waste, the researchers found 79% wound up in landfills or in the environment.

"I think people feel stuck. Asking people to simply choose less plastic is like asking people to drive less when their entire transportation system was designed for cars. It is nearly impossible to avoid disposable plastic in the majority of our current world. That's what I hope my work and open data can help to change," Jambeck says.

With thanks to Leigh Beeson, University of Georgia, who wrote the articles from which this feature is excerpted.

To read Beeson's story on Jambeck's work with the Mississippi River City and Towns Initiative, please visit uff.to/b3wh4e



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Rebuilding Scotland Cay, Gator-style

THE COLLEGE OF DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND PLANNING TEAMS UP ON BAHAMAS PROJECT

When Hurricane Dorian ripped through Scotland Cay in 2019, homeowners on the tiny private island in the northern Bahamas had to decide: stay or go?

When **Chip Reid** (BS '75) learned of the situation, he met with **Bob Edmunds** (ME '68), the president of Scotland Cay's homeowner association. The two gathered a group of alumni, faculty and students in the University of Florida College of Design, Construction and Planning and staged a Gator Nation takeover to help the Bahamian community bounce back.

About 75% of the homes on the island about 160 miles east of Palm Beach were severely damaged by the hurricane, which caused \$3.4 billion in damages.

Reid reached out to **Kim Stanley**, DCP's associate director of development and alumni affairs, and **Dan Manley** (MLA '01), then the interim chair for the UF Department of Landscape Architecture.

"One of the things we were trying to do was make this a successful project where a graduate student could answer their research questions and at the same time provide a tangible benefit to the residents in the form of providing a master plan document," Manley explained. "The solution that came out of it was a great partnership between the community and the university."

In August 2021, **Blake Linquist** (MS '22), a landscape architecture graduate student at the time, jumped in and began working on a strategic plan to help the homeowners. The plan became his graduate terminal project for his master's degree and focused on encouraging a stewardship mentality by creating spaces that are enjoyed across multiple generations.

Linquist created a document for Reid, Edmunds and the community, going over where Scotland Cay had been and then surveyed residents on what they wanted for the future. His goal was to create a "heart and soul" for the island.

"I took all the things I learned from the UF landscape architecture program and the experiences I had on the island and applied it in that fashion," Linquist said.

Chris Fadely (MA '17) was the architect on site.

"It's sort of an interesting approach to have a full circle operation for the design. It started off with the alumni who lived on the island and then circled right back through graduate school and then the professional sphere."

—CHRIS FADELY (MA '17)

Reid says DCP students are trained to collaborate across disciplines.

"I think one of the really cool messages here is how private industry and alumni can work with the university to create a strategic plan by using the resources of the university to create a meaningful document, and I think it was a very, very cool thing that happened," said Reid, a graduate of the M.E. Rinker, Sr. School of Construction Management.

"Gator Nation is everywhere, right?"

Excerpted from a story by Grace Ballantine. See the full story here:

uff.to/7zwb49

DCP grad takes on climate change from Gainesville

Dan Zhu (MS '11, PHD '15) was named Gainesville's first chief climate officer in January.

"Gainesville is already ahead of the curve when it comes to climate mitigation, but I feel it can benefit more by having a climate action plan in place," Zhu said. "My vision is for Gainesville to not only be a climate action leader in Florida, but to be the climate action leader of Florida."

Zhu, a 12-year resident of Gainesville, moved into the new position from the city's Department of Sustainable Development.

City Manager Cynthia W. Curry said Zhu is an expert in creating equitable ways to promote efficiency and sustainability. As a city planner, Zhu has interacted with partners at every level. She also serves as the liaison for the city's Development Review Board and is involved with the Environmental Justice Subcommittee.

In the Department of Sustainable Development, Zhu worked on the city's lighting ordinance, which is designed to improve safety while protecting wildlife.

Zhu has traveled the world, preparing the first LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified campus in Shenyang, China, and developing a plan to fight sea level rise in Pangkalpinang, Indonesia.

Zhu's doctoral research focused on environmental science and sustainability. She has a LEED Green Associate credential, which signals a high level of knowledge about how to use urban efficiency and sustainability to mitigate climate change.



Dan Zhu says Gainesville is ahead of the curve on climate mitigation.



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Building Community an Hour at a Time

By Luena Rodriguez-Feo Vileira, 4JM

Dannielle Obermeier dresses in scrubs and heads to work at the UF Health Shands Cancer Center before the sun comes up. On Wednesdays, she reaches for her radio dial and tunes to 90.1 WMBT-FM, Shift Change Radio Hour.



Michael Claytor, left, and Andrew Hix came up with the idea for a radio show for UF Health during the height of the pandemic but found its audience still listening as pandemic concerns eased. Photo courtesy of Michael Claytor.

The hourlong broadcast – each Wednesday morning and evening at 6 o’clock – was created with health workers like Obermeier in mind, and its intimate style fosters community among the 10,000 or so workers of UF Health.

Hosts **Andrew Hix** (BA ’09) and **Michael Claytor** (BA ’10) collect requests from nurses’ stations and work with on-air guests like UF Health patients Matthew White and Bertis Mackey. On air, White debuted a song he wrote during cancer treatment, while Mackey described how dancing distracts from the pain of her sickle cell disease.

Boosting voices like theirs encourages others to participate, a ripple effect that builds more community, connection and art, which is what the Arts in Medicine program is all about.

Hix, an integrative therapies practitioner and Shands writer-in-residence, coproduces Shift Change with Claytor, Shands musician-in-residence and local performer. Throughout the hour, the two spotlight workers’ song requests, shoutouts, patient testimonials, musical performances and guest DJs.

“It’s a platform for storytelling of all kinds related to arts and health,” Claytor said.

When they’re not on air, Claytor and Hix spend their time at patients’ bedsides, with Claytor playing his guitar and Hix writing poetry and songs with patients or guiding them through tai chi.

Shift Change began in fall 2021 as a side hustle to give back to health care workers at a time when Florida’s highest average COVID-19 death rate was peaking.

As the nation pushed toward a new normal in the 55 episodes since Shift Change’s premiere, public concern for COVID eased, but health care workers’ shifts remained constant. And so does the radio show’s appreciation.

“This is a great outlet to remember we are loved - and we are shouting it from the rooftops through the radio waves,” said Obermeier, a registered nurse and clinical leader.

Shift Change gives listeners a chance to hear themselves on air, whether by curating personally meaningful songs for the “Music as Medicine” segment or by performing original music and poetry.

People want to tell their stories, Claytor says, and Obermeier says hearing those stories has brought her to tears.



Betsy Fisher, the mother of a former Shands patient, grew close to the Arts in Medicine staff throughout the four years of her son Marshal’s lung cancer treatment. Marshal passed away in 2018. Fisher said the Arts in Medicine program provided solace for her son, and the community is still there for her.

Fisher worked with Hix over several months to turn her journal entries about her time with her son into poems, then two songs. She performed the pieces on the air, which helped her “process grief in different ways, creatively.”

Hix says Shift Change is “part of the fabric of what it is to live in Gainesville,” and Claytor says it’s here to stay.

“What we once thought of as something that might go away after a few weeks became something that’s like an engine for art-making in the hospital.”

• To listen to archived episodes, visit uff.to/nvcn89



*When
Albert*



*Met
Alberta*



Back in the day, these alums ruled the Swamp as the ultimate Gator power couple

By **Barbara Drake**, (MFA '04)

Seventeen years ago, life reached a thrilling crescendo for Gators **Brian** (BA '04, MED '05, EDS '16) and **Kourtney** (DPH '06) **LaPlant**, then 23 and 25 years old, respectively.

On the evening of April 29, 2006 — eight years after their first date as shy teenagers in southwest Florida — Brian surprised Kourtney by proposing to her on the 50-yard line at Florida Field. A local news photographer captured the romantic spectacle (candles! ring! kiss! champagne!), and the feel-good story was picked up by the Associated Press.

What made their gridiron courtship so irresistible, even for non-football fans?

From 2002 to 2005, the couple performed together as Albert and Alberta — the university's official mascot couple — cavorting in plush alligator suits for up to 90,000 screaming fans at the Swamp and posing for photos with admirers. Like all students who don the furry clawed feet and oversized gator heads, they were sworn to secrecy about their game day identities, and for three years, the pair chomped, cheered and publicly flirted as their reptilian alter egos — while falling deeper in love in their off hours.

Students who have served as UF mascots (or “friends of the gator,” as they call themselves) cite it as a highlight of their college years. But for Brian and Kourtney, being joined at the hip as Albert and Alberta yielded an unexpected bonus: strong indicators they were cut out for a lifetime partnership.

“We were doing appearances together nearly every day,” remembered Brian, now vice principal at Sidney Lanier Center, in Gainesville. “We were always together, and it just felt right.”

“It solidified our relationship,” said Kourtney, an oncological pharmacist with the Department of Veterans Affairs' Benefits Management.

Even baking hand in hand on hot Florida days in the mascots' heavy, pre-2015 uniforms — subsequently redesigned with lightweight fabric — revealed their love was more than (alligator) skin deep.

“When you get to work with your best friend, under those conditions, it teaches you a lot about each other,” said Kourtney. “By the end of a game, we were sweaty, smelly, disgusting — and we still wanted to go home with each other!”

From Lemon Bay to Hogtown

The pair met in 1998 at Lemon Bay High School, in Englewood, where they performed in the jazz band. Kourtney, a junior, played alto sax; Brian, a sophomore, rocked the stand-up bass. She gave him a ride home from school one day — he didn't have a license yet — and he worked up the nerve to ask her out to dinner at Steak n Shake, on a date still firmly etched in Kourtney's mind: “April 28, 2006,” she recited with cheerful exactness.

Kourtney headed to the University of Florida in fall 1999, enrolling in the College of Pharmacy. Brian made a couple of academic pit stops before settling in as a sociology major at UF's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in spring 2002.

But their future as a reptile twosome beckoned before Brian received his Gator1 card.

As a sophomore in 2001, Kourtney answered an ad in the Independent Florida Alligator for mascot tryouts. She got the part of Alberta, and Brian, who traveled to Gainesville on the weekends, gallantly lugged her 40-pound costume to games and cheered her on from the sidelines.

“He learned the trade from the other Alberts,” remembered Kourtney. “He would always tag along with the group, so it was natural for him to try out when he was eligible.”

Initially, Brian didn’t want to step on Kourtney’s, well, claws, but later decided, “If I’m carrying the uniform and I’m at all the events anyway, I might as well do it [myself].”

Seeing the World Together Through Tiny Eyeholes

Their reign as Albert and Alberta coincided with a lull in Gator sports: between the winning Spurrier years and the 2005-06 national basketball championship.

“We got to celebrate and feel the energy that the Gator Nation brings, win or lose,” said Kourtney. “The fans create the atmosphere that pumps everybody up.”

Together, they created skits to highlight Albert and Alberta’s silly and teasing sides, keeping the antics PG enough to satisfy Spirit Squad guidelines — not always an easy task, they admitted.

“While we were doing it, the [Florida Gators] marketing department never solidified for us what Albert and Alberta were,” said Kourtney. “Were they a couple? Were they married? Were they friends? Were they siblings? There was always this ‘we don’t know’ thing.”

“The directive was, don’t go too extreme on anything,” said Brian. “It’s hard because the relationship between Albert and Alberta is always flirty, but it’s not spelled out.”

However, one mascot rule was crystal clear: no talking publicly while in uniform.



Kourtney and Brian LaPlant said the relationship between Albert and Alberta was never spelled out, but they had an idea where their relationship was headed. They’ve been married since 2007.

“We had hand signals to communicate what we were going to do, like a squeeze that meant it was time to go —” said Kourtney.

— or, ‘I’m about to pass out,’” laughed Brian.

Eventually they didn’t even need that system.

“Because it was us, and we were comfortable with each other, we could ‘read’ each other, even in the costume,” she said. “Not that we were telepathic but ...”

“... it was easy to know what the other person was thinking,” finished Brian.



Brian and Kourtney LaPlant pose with statues of their alter egos, Albert and Alberta.

Married, with Hatchlings

The pair’s last football outing as Albert and Alberta was Coach Urban Meyer’s first Orange and Blue game, on April 9, 2005, in front of 61,000 fans. The end of an era for them, a new one for the Gator Nation.

By April 2006, he was teaching social studies at a middle school in Alachua, while Kourtney was nearing the finish line for her doctorate in pharmacy.

It was time to take the plunge, he decided. He chose the eighth anniversary of their first date, plus one day since Kourtney couldn’t go out on the 28th.

After a dinner date, he led a blindfolded Kourtney onto Florida Field. When he took off the blindfold, revealing the candle-lit grass, Kourtney burst into tears.

Brian knelt before her with a ring. “Will you marry me?”

Their friends in the bleachers, along with exercisers running steps, burst into applause.

Brian and Kourtney got hitched at Gainesville’s historic Sweetwater Branch Inn in 2007.

Dr. Kourtney LaPlant is a clinical pharmacy program manager in oncology for the VA’s Pharmacy Benefits Management and serves as a career coach for the UF College of Pharmacy. After 20 years with the Alachua County Public School District, Brian is now at Sidney Lanier Center (a continuous education program for students from kindergarten through age 22).

He and Kourtney are parents to Brock, 11, and Brooklyn, 8.

Like anyone who puts down roots in their college town, the LaPlants are constantly reminded of their younger selves. At the Swamp and O’Dome. At Spirit Squad reunions. At tailgates for F Club members (comprised of card-carrying, dues-paying Gator letterwinners, including former mascots, whose ID cards are still stamped “Mascot” in big, black letters).

Sometimes they get the itch to perform, like when someone brought the revamped Albert and Alberta costumes to a spirit squad reunion.

“We tried on the heads,” admitted Kourtney. “I kinda wanted to ask to put the rest of the suit on, but, well, we didn’t want to be those kind of people, you know?”

When Dan Met Joy: A Love Story

BY JENNY ROGERS, 4PR

To generations of reporting students in the College of Journalism and Communications, professor **Mike Foley** might seem to be an unlikely cupid.

But in 1969, in the days before mix tapes and curated playlists, Foley (BS '70, MA '04) had a hand in recording an album with buddy **Dan Flynn** (BS '69), and Flynn says that album helped him land the woman of his dreams, now his wife of 51 years.

Dan met Joy the summer of 1968 before his fourth year as a journalism student and track athlete at UF. He was working as a lifeguard on Long Island, and Joy worked at a nearby tennis club prior to grad school at Michigan State University.

They were chatting at a local bar when they discovered they share the same birthday - Feb. 13 - a year apart.

"I figured anyone with my birthday couldn't be all bad," she laughed.

The summer romance didn't end in August, although one headed north and the other south. They wrote letters and stayed in touch.

The long-distance courtship found encouragement in the friendship and musical collaboration Dan and Mike already had going since their elementary school days in Clearwater.

"I was the new kid in school - I didn't have a uniform or anything," Mike said. "Dan came over to me, shook my hand and



After Mike and Dan recorded an album, Dan created an album cover by sandwiching negatives together.

frat parties and at UF's gritty pub, the Rathskeller.

In Dan's fourth year, he and Mike recorded six love songs. After hours in the darkroom developing photos and sandwiching negatives together, Dan created an album cover and titled the album "Songs for Joy."

"I think you could say that the University of Florida, the journalism school and professor Foley played a big part in my winning the hand of the woman I've loved since 1968," he said.

One spring morning in 1969, Dan packed a bag, stuck out a thumb and hitchhiked more than a thousand miles to see Joy.

The following November, Dan proposed on the streets of Paris as passersby hummed "Here Comes the Bride."

"It was really quite cosmic," Joy said. "There's no other man I've met that is as caring and solicitous."

Now 76 and 75, they are retired in Quogue, New York. Joy said she and Dan push each other, and most recently they represented the United States at the World Masters Athletics in Finland, where they competed in senior division track competitions.

"Everything I do is because he's encouraged me," she said.

"We don't believe in absence making the heart grow fonder," Joy laughed. "We do everything together."



Dan, far left, and Mike, far right, teamed up in a Beatles tribute band called The Termites.

welcomed me. We've been friends ever since."

When the Beatles came to the U.S. in 1963, Dan, Mike and a few other friends formed a tribute band called "The Termites," covering songs at events across Clearwater. With Dan singing to Mike's guitar, the two occasionally performed in college for free beer at



Dan and Joy have been married 51 years. Dan, left, gets a congratulatory handshake from Mike as a beaming Joy looks on.

Pawsitively Perfect Pets

GATOR PRIDE GALORE

Our furry friends love to rep the orange and blue just as much as we do. These cuties clearly know how to show their Gator pride. There can never be too many pawsome pets in the Gator Nation. Send photos of your furry, feathery and scaly friends (pet portraits only please, no humans) to:

FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu

Include your name, occupation, town and your pet's name, along with a sentence or two about your pet.



Or, share online **@ufalumni**
#gatorpets

*This feature compiled by
Julia Bauer, 4JM.*

THIS FLUFFY BUNNY WAS ADOPTED BY CRAFT TALBOT (BSBA '21, MIB '22) FROM THE GAINESVILLE RABBIT RESCUE. HE IS NAMED AFTER THE MARSTON SCIENCE LIBRARY, AND HIS FULL NAME IS MARSTON ALBERT WARRINGTON TALBOT. CRAFT IS A FORMER CICERONE AND WORKS FOR A TECH STARTUP IN FRANKFURT, GERMANY.

MARSTON IS HANGING OUT WITH FAMILY IN JACKSONVILLE IN THE MEANTIME.



Duncan

Twelve-year-old **Duncan** and his owner, **Ted Steinwender**, (BBC '69) make a wonderful pair. Every time they go on walks in Cary, North Carolina, they show their Gator pride; Duncan wears the Gator collar he has had his whole life, and Ted wears a Gator shirt and hat.

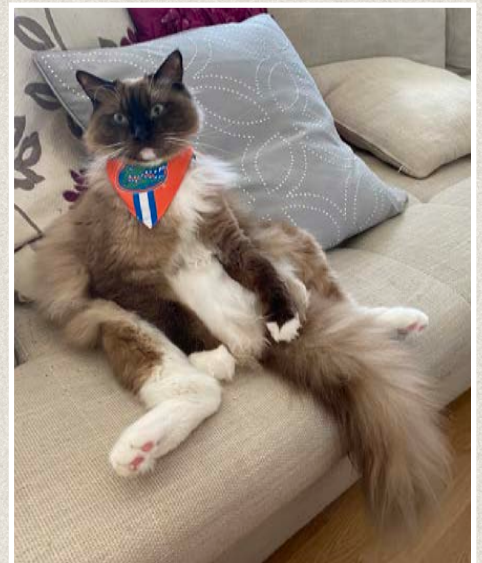


Cali

Cali is looking extra cute in her paper Gator helmet. She loves cuddling with her owner, **Tonya Sherwood** (BA CLAS '94), in Louisville, Kentucky.



Ronan



Ronan is a proud Gator from Tampa. He will give you a high five after the Gators score a touchdown in exchange for a treat. His owner, **Erin Elaine Harris** (BS CLAS '08), is the recognition program manager at Fisher Investments and manages his growing TikTok account: **@Ragdoll_Ronan**.

Maxwell

Maxwell proudly reps the Gators in Bellaire, Texas. He and his owners **Debbie Kaplan** (BSPR '87) and **Brooke Kaplan** (BSPR '19) are patiently counting down the days until Gator football season starts again.



Gin

Two years ago, veterinary technician and student **Leah Kapela** (4CALS) found **Gin** outside of Depot Park meowing for help when she was less than 2 months old. She is now queen of the house in Miramar and a proud Gator fan.



Cooper

Tina McCandlish-Warden (BSAC '89, MACC '91) is a CPA for Cardinal Health in Powell, Ohio. She is also the owner of **Cooper**, a die-hard Gator fan with an exquisite haircut. Despite living in Buckeye Country, he loves Tim Tebow.



Dewey

Dewey was rescued by **Dennis Tackett** (BSEE '81) in Cary, North Carolina. He loves to snuggle and cheer for the Gators from his favorite tent.

Sage



Geoff Wolf (BS CLAS '90, MD '93, HS '96) and **Laura Hill Wolf** (BS CLAS '90, MD '93, HS '97) are private practice anesthesiologists from Vero Beach. The lovely feline wearing the Gator jersey is **Sage**, their rescue cat, who bleeds orange and blue. She loves cuddling with their daughter Emma, who hopes to attend UF in the future with Sage by her side.

Teddy

Teddy is a 3-year-old bichon frise and poodle mix, also known as a bichonpoo, living in Clearwater. He loves drinking milk and playing with his favorite toy: a Florida Gators football. He runs around the house with it until owner **Loan Lam** (BSA CALS '98) plays football with him.





GATORS GO GLOBAL

Reader-submitted photos from across the globe



Normandy, France

Harry Conner Griffin Jr. (BA '93), his wife Evelyn and their children Michelle and Harry Connor Griffin III displayed their Gator gear with pride at Mont Saint-Michel in Normandy. Originally from Orlando, they love traveling the world and meeting Gator Nation citizens everywhere they go.

THE GATOR NATION IS EVERYWHERE



Please send your photos and captions to FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu.

Include names left to right, degree and year, hometown, and a few words about what is going on in your photograph.



Or, share online [@ufalumni](https://www.instagram.com/ufalumni) #gatortravels

This feature compiled by Julia Bauer, 4JM.

Santorini Island, Greece

The Bosang family gathered on Santorini Island for a family wedding. After completing a 6.5-mile mountain ridge hike from Thera to Oia, they posed in this mountaintop town to display the 2006 Year of the Gator flag.

Left to right: **Rick Bosang** (BSADV '74), **Matt Bosang** (BSA CALS '05), **James Luster** (BA CLAS '05), Jill Bosang, Missy Bosang, **Lindsay Bosang Luster** (DPH '07), **Kelli Bosang** (BSN '08).



Tel Aviv, Israel

Rebecca Hayes (BA CLAS '98), of Ashburn, Virginia, showed her Gator pride in Tel Aviv. She bought her Hebrew shirt in the Old City market of Jerusalem. The Gator Nation is everywhere.





Annecy, France

The Vega family repped the orange and blue while hiking the Tour Du Mont Blanc and spent a few days in Annecy.

Left to right: **Cecilia Vega** (BS CALS '19, MS CALS '21), **Manuel Vega** (BSAC '87), **Manuel Vega IV** (BA CLAS '17), **Amy Vega** (BS CLAS '88)



Cimarron, New Mexico

While backpacking 70 miles at Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico, **Rick Walker** (BSBA '92) and his son Griffin summited Baldy Mountain at 12,400 feet. Rick is a heart attack survivor who vowed to recover and hike Philmont. Despite 60-knot winds and freezing sleet, he reached his goal while showing his UF pride.



The German Alps

Linda Kelley Eargle (BS PT '66) of Sun City Center and **Sharon Floyd Jones** (BA CLAS '66) of Indialantic were roommates at Jennings Hall and dreamed of attending the Passion Play in Oberammergau in the German Alps. Fifty years later, their dream came true.



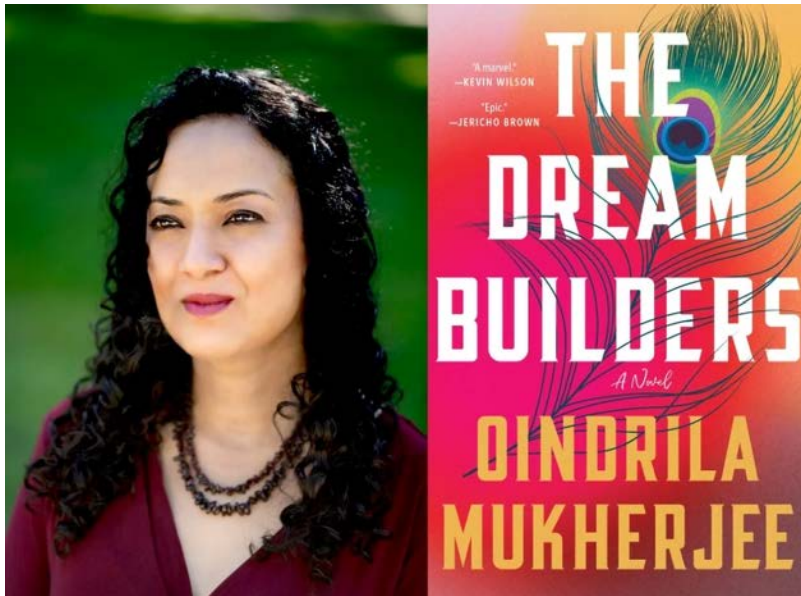
The Canadian Rockies

Phyllis Simpkins and **Lorenz Simpkins** (BEE '62) are standing on the Canadian Ice Field during their trip to the Canadian Rockies. They are still showing their Gator pride after graduating 60 years ago!

GOOD GATOR READS

BY BARBARA DRAKE (MFA '04)

The Dream Builders



A graduate of UF's Creative Writing program, **Oindrila Mukherjee** (MFA '04) vividly brings to life the complexities of modern-day India and the perils of globalization in her debut novel, "The Dream Builders" (Tin House, 2023), a Good Morning America Best Book of January 2023.

After living in the US for years, Maneka Roy returns home to India to mourn the loss of her mother and finds herself in a new world. The booming city of Hrishipur where her father now lives is nothing like the part of the country where she grew up, and the more she sees of this new, sparkling city, the more she learns that nothing — and no one — here is as it appears. Ultimately, it will take an unexpected tragedy for Maneka and those around her to understand just how fragile life is in this city built on dreams.



ALL THINGS BEAUTIFUL: WONDERS FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF THE FLORIDA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

With more than 300 color plates, "All Things Beautiful" (Univ. Press of Florida, 2022) reveals some of the remarkable animals, plants, fossils and cultural heritage materials that make up the 40 million+ specimens in the Florida Museum of Natural History. Award-winning environmental journalist **Heather Dewar** captures the vast scope of the curators' activities — from living in the field with Komodo dragons to discovering new species — and stunning photography by alum **Kristen Grace** (BSJ '03) reveals extraordinary color, form, pattern and textures.

THE PARIS DAUGHTER

New York Times bestselling novelist **Kristin Harmel** (BSJ '01) offers a gripping tale about two mothers who



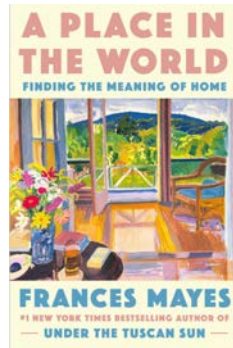
must make unthinkable choices in "The Paris Daughter" (Gallery, 2023), set in Paris in 1939. Young mothers Elise and Juliette become fast friends after meeting in the beautiful Bois de Boulogne. Targeted by the Nazis, Elise entrusts Juliette with hiding her young daughter in her bookstore. But when a bomb reduces the store to rubble, Juliette takes up a desperate search that leads her to New York — and to Juliette — one final, fateful time. "A heart-wrenching wartime story of motherly sacrifice, guilt, and above all, love" (Jennifer Rosner).

NIGHT LETTER

A teenager returns to the Panhandle to understand his violent past and the woman who haunts him in “Night Letter” (Akashic, 2023), the ninth novel by **Sterling Watson** (MA ’71). “In this bleak and beautiful noir, we follow

18-year-old Travis Hollister, just released from reform school, driving through the Panhandle and trying to find the woman he’s pined for since he was 12 — his aunt, who’s also four years older.”

(CrimeReads). Publishers Weekly favorably compares “Night Letter” to the works of S. E. Hinton (“The Outsiders,” “Rumble Fish”). Watson is the co-director, with Dennis Lehane, of the Writers in Paradise program and is Emeritus Professor of Literature and Creative Writing at Eckerd College.



A PLACE IN THE WORLD: FINDING THE MEANING OF HOME

This lyrical and evocative collection of personal stories from the bestselling author of “Under the Tuscan Sun” finds the queen of wanderlust reflecting on the comforts of home. In “A Place in the World” (Crown, 2022) **Frances Mayes** (BA ’62) ponders the power of place in our lives, from the earliest imprint of four walls to the startling discoveries of feeling the strange ease of homes abroad, of friends’ homes, and even the momentary homes that spark desires for other lives. “Spellbinding” (Publishers Weekly, starred review). Longlisted for the PEN/ Diamonstein-Spielvogel Award.

FATAL INTENT

A practicing anesthesiologist and tenured professor at the UF College of Medicine, **Tammy Euliano** (BS ’87, MD ’91) brings riveting authenticity to the medical suspense genre in her Kate Downey Medical Mystery Series, which includes “Fatal Intent” (Oceanview, 2021), described below, and “Misfire” (Oceanview, 2023). End of life care? Or assisted death?

When her elderly patients start dying at home days after minor surgery, anesthesiologist Dr. Kate Downey wants

to know why. The surgeon, not so much. “Old people die, that’s what they do,” is his response. When higher-ups put her on probation for too much probing, Kate must prove her innocence to save her career. With her own husband in a prolonged coma, it’s

all she has left. “A chilling medical thriller!” (Publishers Weekly).



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IN MEMORIAM



CJC Dean John Wright

John Wright, professor emeritus and former dean of the College of Journalism and Communications, died on Dec. 31, 2022, at the age of 73.

During his 36 years at the college, Wright served as dean, executive associate dean, associate dean for graduate studies, graduate coordinator, and interim department chair — the only person to serve in all those roles. He retired in 2018.

Wright arrived at UF in fall 1982 as an associate professor in the Department of Telecommunication. He quickly emerged as a leader and was among a small group of graduate faculty members who designed and founded the college's doctoral program in the 1980s.

Wright was dean of the college from 2007-2012. During his term as dean, he advanced a number of critical initiatives in the Division of Media Properties, including the planning and development of the Innovation News Center and reorganization and unified management of the college's media properties, making them financially sustainable and enhancing professional development for students.

Also on his watch, the college began its partnership with the University Athletic Association, moving GatorVision into Weimer Hall. He opened the college's research lab and the AHA! CoLab. The Marion B. Brechner First Amendment Project was founded during his deanship, and it was during his tenure as dean that the college launched its first online master's program. Working with two students, he launched WUFT Noticias, the college's first Spanish-language newscast.

Wright also secured a gift from college alumnus Frank Karel and his wife Betsy to endow the first Chair in Public Interest Communications in the country.

He accomplished all of this while serving as dean during the Great Recession.

Linda Hon, retired public relations professor, worked with Wright during the years he was interim dean and dean.

"John was an enormously kind person who lit up the Dean's Office with a smile when he walked in each day," Hon said.

"He made everyone there feel valued and supported. He was also a wonderful professor, mentor, role model, and friend to me and countless others. He is truly irreplaceable. The college has lost one of its finest."

Keith Tennant: Professor, Coach, Athletic Hall of Famer

L. Keith Tennant, the inaugural coach of the University of Florida's wrestling team, died Jan. 13, 2023.

Tennant was an author and respected authority on sports psychology. He retired from UF in 1997 with emeritus status following a 30-year career in the College of Health and Human Performance, then went on to West Georgia and the University of Kansas, before retiring again in 2005.



Keith Tennant, seated in center, with wrestling alums.

To those who recall when Southeastern Conference schools had wrestling teams, Tennant is best remembered as the inaugural coach of UF's wrestling team, appointed by then-Florida athletic director Ray Graves to launch the program in October 1969.

The upstart program flourished under Tennant's leadership, earning him a spot in the National Wrestling Hall of Fame.

Former Gators wrestler Jeff Davis, inducted into the UF Athletic Hall of Fame in 2013, shared a Facebook message from Tennant's wife, Laurie.

"I want his wrestlers to know that I stayed by his side and told him over and over how much you all love him, and he was able to react as best he could in his final hours," Laurie Tennant wrote.

Tennant coached the Gators for five seasons, leading the team to a 57-13 record in dual matches from 1970-74. He continued to teach at UF after stepping down as the wrestling coach following the 1974 season, replaced by one of his former wrestlers, Gary Schneider. Florida disbanded the program in 1979.

In 1996, the Tampa Tribune contacted Tennant about how high school wrestlers in the state had to leave home if they wanted to compete at the collegiate level.

Tennant recalled how the program started out competing in front of usually just family and girlfriends at Florida Gym but eventually started to draw fans and, in 1975, attracted nearly 8,000 fans for the SEC Tournament. Tennant's impact was recognized in 1993 when the UF Athletic Hall of Fame inducted him as an honorary letterwinner.

Bruce Capin: Longtime UF Fencing Coach

Bruce Capin, who spent more than two decades as head coach of the University of Fencing Club, died Nov. 28, 2022. He was 60.



Capin advanced the fencing careers of countless young people while at the helm at the University of Florida, where he spent 22 seasons.

While some fencing coaches specialize in a single weapon, Capin found success coaching all three: the foil, épée and sabre. The list of fencers whose lives he impacted would fill volumes — a feat made even more impressive by the fact that most of the student-athletes he coached at UF were picking up a blade for the first time.

“Few college club coaches could take someone brand new and turn them into viable fencers in such a short time like Bruce could,” remembers Damien Lehfeltdt, epee coach, referee and founder of The Fencing Coach blog.

Capin coached his student-athletes to more than 50 North American Cup medals, and almost all of these student-athletes began their fencing careers as college freshmen.

Lela Myers, who fences saber at UF, remembers Capin as someone who was “full of wisdom and support.”

“His passing is not only a loss for the Florida Fencing Club, but a loss for the fencing community and the world,” Myers says.

Before Myers’ first fencing tournament, Capin gave her a piece of paper on which he had written the Seven Tibetan Concepts.

1. Let go.
2. Believe in yourself.
3. Experience the experience.
4. Adopt chaos.
5. Keep it simple.
6. Be willing to embark.
7. Act from the heart.

Myers says that advice helped her in that tournament and far beyond.

Capin was also a trusted referee who was qualified to officiate all three weapons. At USA Fencing tournaments, Capin will be remembered as a service-minded advocate for fencing — someone ready to pitch in whenever he was needed and quick to check in on others to see how he could help.

Donald Alperstein, a referee and member of the USA Fencing Board of Directors, remembers Capin as a “kind, gentle soul.”

“Human, animal or inanimate, he believed each creature and thing had a unique spirit and place,” Alperstein says. “He was filled with contagious, innocent wonder. Few like him walk among us, and we are diminished by his absence.”

Capin was himself a talented saber fencer.

He graduated from Penn State University, where he was a four-year letterman on the varsity fencing team and placed 15th at the 1985 NCAA Championships.

He was ranked for 10 years — 1985 to 1995 — and represented the United States at the 1987 World University Games and in 1990-91 World Cup Grand Prix events in men’s saber.

Capin also loved animals and, along with his wife, Erika, ran a big cat rescue in Alachua, where mistreated or abused big cats could live out their lives.

In a 2019 interview with The Independent Florida Alligator newspaper, Capin said he and his wife spent \$200,000 over the last 20 years to keep their animal sanctuary running — a cost that included fees, flights to get new cougars, veterinarian appointments and food.

Even with that hefty budget, they said they “wouldn’t change a thing, even the ‘dump of a trailer’ they live in.”

“It’s a run down double-wide,” Capin told the paper. “But when you walk out the front door and you hear the cougars calling you, we’re very wealthy.”

For more on Capin, visit uff.to/qp93fx

Steve Uhlfelder

Steve Uhlfelder (BSBA ’68, JD ’71), a major figure in Florida issues for more than half a century, died Feb. 12, 2023, in Tallahassee after a long struggle with Parkinson’s Disease and other health issues. He was 76.

Six governors sought Uhlfelder’s insight through the years. He was a lawyer, state official, civic activist and media consultant. In a statement from the family, he was described as one of the most respected and accomplished attorneys and lobbyists in modern Florida history.



Steve Uhlfelder, center, with George W. Bush and Jeb Bush.

Uhlfelder served as chairman of the Board of Regents for Florida’s state university system, chair of the global Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board and executive director of Florida’s Constitution Revision Commission. He worked on Gov. Jeb Bush’s statewide mentoring initiative

for children and was honored with the national “Point of Light” award by President George W. Bush.

Public relations executive Ron Sachs (BS ’72) was friends with Uhlfelder from his college days at UF.

“Steve was one of the most influential and impactful positive forces in the state for his entire life -- always a champion for children and important causes. His exemplary example will continue to inspire all of us who knew him,” Sachs said.

Excerpted from a story by James Call. To read the full story, please visit

uff.to/atws3r

The Father of Sports Massage: Benny Vaughn



Growing up Black in the Jim Crow-era South prepared him to be the leader and innovator he is today, he says.

By **Barbara Drake** (MFA '04)

Georgia-born **Benny Vaughn** (BSHSE '85) is a force field. Speaking from his home in Fort Worth, he radiates positivity as he reflects on more than half a century of blazing trails in sports: first as a champion runner and then as a pioneer of massage therapy for athletic training.

As a freshman in 1969, Vaughn broke barriers as one of the first five Black athletes to desegregate University of Florida Athletics and broke records in the half-mile event. After leaving UF, he became fascinated by a little-known therapy used by European runners to boost recovery and performance. He became a licensed massage therapist and a tireless advocate for his medical specialty, paving the way for massage to be incorporated in the US Olympic program in the 1990s.



Benny Vaughn, center, with his mother, Gladys Vaughn, and three of his siblings on the eve of their flight to Germany in 1961.

One of the first athletes to desegregate Gator Athletics in 1969, Vaughn now treats elite competitors at his 5,000-square-foot athletic therapy center in Fort Worth.

A certified athletic trainer, Vaughn has participated in five Olympics for the USA Olympic Track and Field Team, beginning with the 1996 Atlanta Games. He has supported countless professional athletes, as well as competitors at the World Athletics Championships and at NCAA competitions.

Named one of the most influential massage therapists of the last 100 years by *Massage Magazine*, Vaughn trains competitive athletes in physical and mental fitness at the 5,000-square-foot Benny Vaughn Athletic Therapy Center in Fort Worth.

In 1982, Vaughn returned to UF to earn a degree in health science education from the College of Health and Human Performance, his long-deferred, "driving, burning desire," he says. UF is also where he met his wife of 37 years, photographer **Joan Carroll** (MAPE '84, PHD '92), and where he was inducted into the HHP Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame in 2010. As a way of giving back, Vaughn and Carroll endowed a scholarship to support graduate students in Applied Physiology & Kinesiology and/or Athletic Training.

We recently talked with Vaughn about his career and how growing up Black in the Deep South of the 1950s and '60s forged his determination as an athlete and leader.

This might seem obvious, but why do athletes need therapeutic massage?

Why do all human beings require touch? Because it keeps them connected with their humanness. Studies show that touch is a critical element for the development of the infant's immune system and for the child's cognitive platforms. All mammals require touch as part of a healthy existence. Sports massage brings that into the competitive arena.

Beyond alleviating pain, how does your work enhance an athlete's performance?

When you're doing massage therapy, the athlete relies on you to create an energetic space that amplifies their preparedness to compete. The nervousness, the thrill and the pressure of walking into a stadium or onto a pool deck is intense. Certainly, at the Olympic level, it's tremendous. The role of the massage therapist is to create a quiet, safe energetic bubble for that athlete, amidst everything that is going on, and to support that athlete and remind them, you've done the work, you're prepared, you're ready, you've got this.

Let's go back to your roots. You're from Georgia, the oldest of five children ...

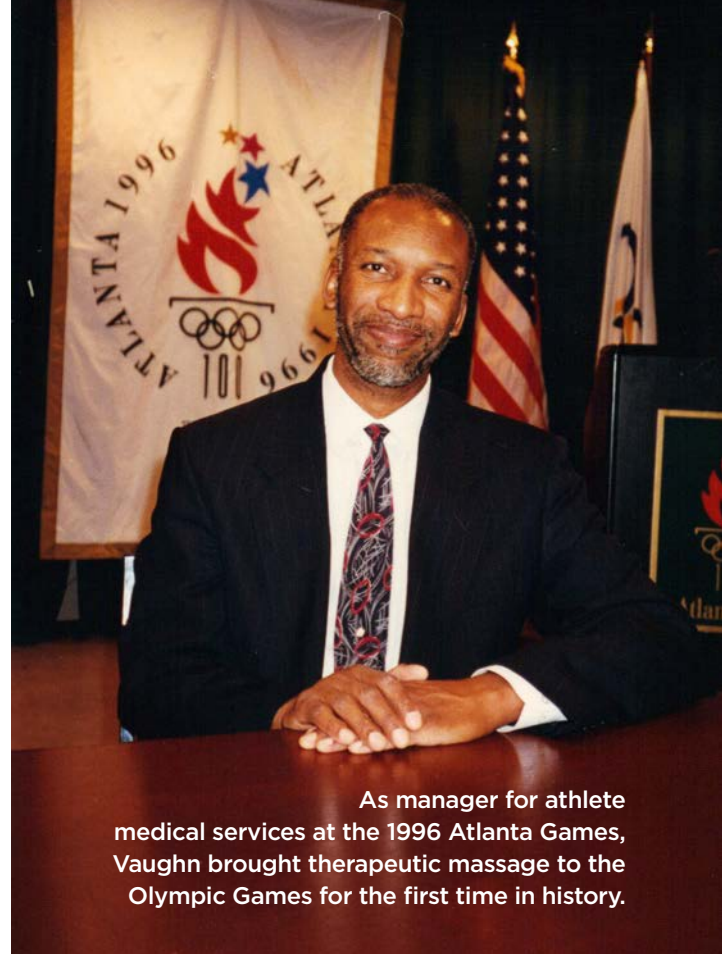
I was born at the Colored Women's Hospital in Americus, Georgia, in 1951. At the time, my father was a mess sergeant stationed in Korea. My family was living in the farming village of Smithville. There's a lot of peanut farming, cotton, corn, soybeans grown in that area, and my grandparents were farmers.

How did that environment shape you?

I was highly motivated and inspired by my grandparents. On their farm, we had no running water, barely any electricity. Every morning, I had to go out to the well and draw water for the day, filter it in a cheese cloth for drinking and the remainder for our baths. The original, organic, recycling people of America are the poor people of the South. We didn't throw anything away. We reused every jar, kept every scrap of paper. We had chickens, fruit trees, pecan trees. We were self-sustainable. So, I was highly motivated to be self-sufficient. My grandparents taught me that.



Vaughn did extensive outreach in his early career educating medical professionals, athletes and the public on the therapeutic value of massage. Photo courtesy Benny Vaughn.



As manager for athlete medical services at the 1996 Atlanta Games, Vaughn brought therapeutic massage to the Olympic Games for the first time in history.

In 1965, you were among the first Black students to desegregate Columbus's all-white Baker High School.

It was the first year of desegregation in Georgia high schools. They didn't want me or the other Black students there. And I had planned my whole life to go to the all-Black high school! The next thing, I know, it's like, 'Oh, I'm being bussed to Baker.'

That must have been rough.

True, but it was all wonderful preparation for me to be persistent and have a burning desire to stick with what I loved. So, in the end, I give gratitude to all the white police officers, to all the white kids that called me the N word, to all the store owners that wouldn't let me enter their store, to all the neighborhoods I wasn't allowed to walk through. I just give gratitude to all those people. Because what they did was prepare me to be the strong, persistent leader and innovator that I am today and to become a graduate of the University of Florida.

You were Baker High's star runner. At the 1969 Georgia High School Track and Field Championships, you won the mile, the 880 and the 440, and you anchored Baker High's mile relay win. Universities must have been clamoring to recruit you.

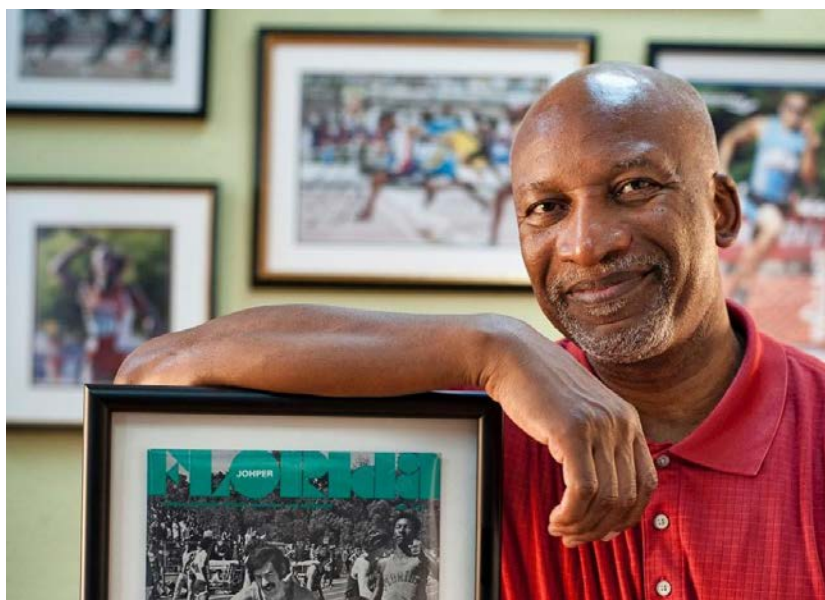
Yes. In 1969, universities were looking to integrate their sports, so I had recruiting visits to several SEC schools, to Auburn, to Tennessee and the University of Georgia.

What made you choose the University of Florida?

First, I was met at the airport in Jacksonville by two athletes on the track team: **Eamonn O’Keeffe**, (BSBA ’73), who was from Dublin, Ireland, a half-miler like myself, and **Johnnie Brown** (1968), an African American distance runner from West Palm Beach. I thought, ‘Wow, I’ve got a European guy and a Black guy meeting me as representatives of the University of Florida.’ That hadn’t happened with any of the other schools.

Also, when I visited the other SEC schools, everybody on the campus was from that same state, like from 40 miles away. But when I asked the students at UF where they were from, they said, New York, Wyoming, Maryland, Washington State.

Lastly, the UF coaching staff was awesome. The athletic director at the time was Ray Graves, “the Bull Gator.” When I signed with Florida, he wrote me a handwritten note welcoming me to the Gator family. I thought that was cool. I still have that note from Ray Graves!



A proud Gator, Vaughn says, “The journey of earning my degree, and who I became during that journey, is my greatest gift from the University of Florida.”



Vaughn, 17, signs a full-ride scholarship deal with the Florida Gators as UF track coach Jimmy Carnes, left, and Baker High coach Sam Roberts, right, look on, in May 1969. Clipping from May 23, 1969, Columbus, Georgia, Ledger.

How many African American student-athletes were at UF when you entered?

Only five, two in football and three in track and field, including me.

In the 1970s, you pivoted to studying massage therapy. What got you interested in that?

I read in Track & Field magazine about the use of massage therapy with European runners, to help them recover from hard training sessions and, ultimately, enhance their performance. I was running at the time, and I thought, ‘Wow, we’re not getting that here in the United States. What if we got regular massage? Wouldn’t that be helpful?’ Ultimately it became a 46-year career for me, at the highest level.

You returned to UF in 1982 to earn a bachelor’s degree in health science education. What prompted you to hit the books again in your early 30s?

When I finished my athletic career, I did not have a degree to reflect that college experience. Once your eligibility was up, it was up, and you were done with college. So, years later, I asked myself, what would I love? And the answer was that I would love to be a graduate of the University of Florida. That became my driving, burning desire.

I’m struck by your tenacity through all your uphill battles. How did you hone that?

Growing up in the Deep South as a young Black boy provided me with some of the best training to be persistent. So often people have asked me, “If you could change anything about your upbringing, what would it be?” And I wouldn’t change anything! It made me what I am today.

What does the University of Florida mean to you?

The university experience is life changing. You don’t know it at the time, but you feel it. As a student, I knew something important was happening. The journey of earning my degree, and who I became during that journey, is the biggest gift from my University of Florida experience.

Who gives you a massage?

Colleagues at my athletic therapy center. They all do it because I’m the old guy. I’m 71, they’re all in their 30s and 40s. The perks of being an elder!

Learn more about Vaughn and his newest ventures at uff.to/ntp79r

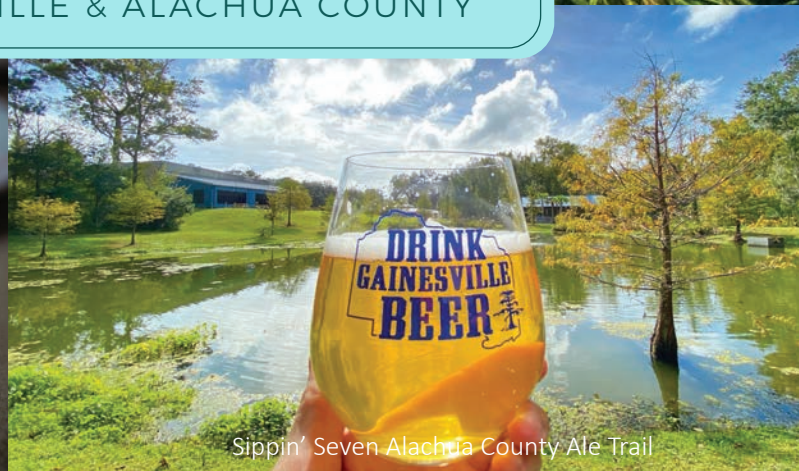
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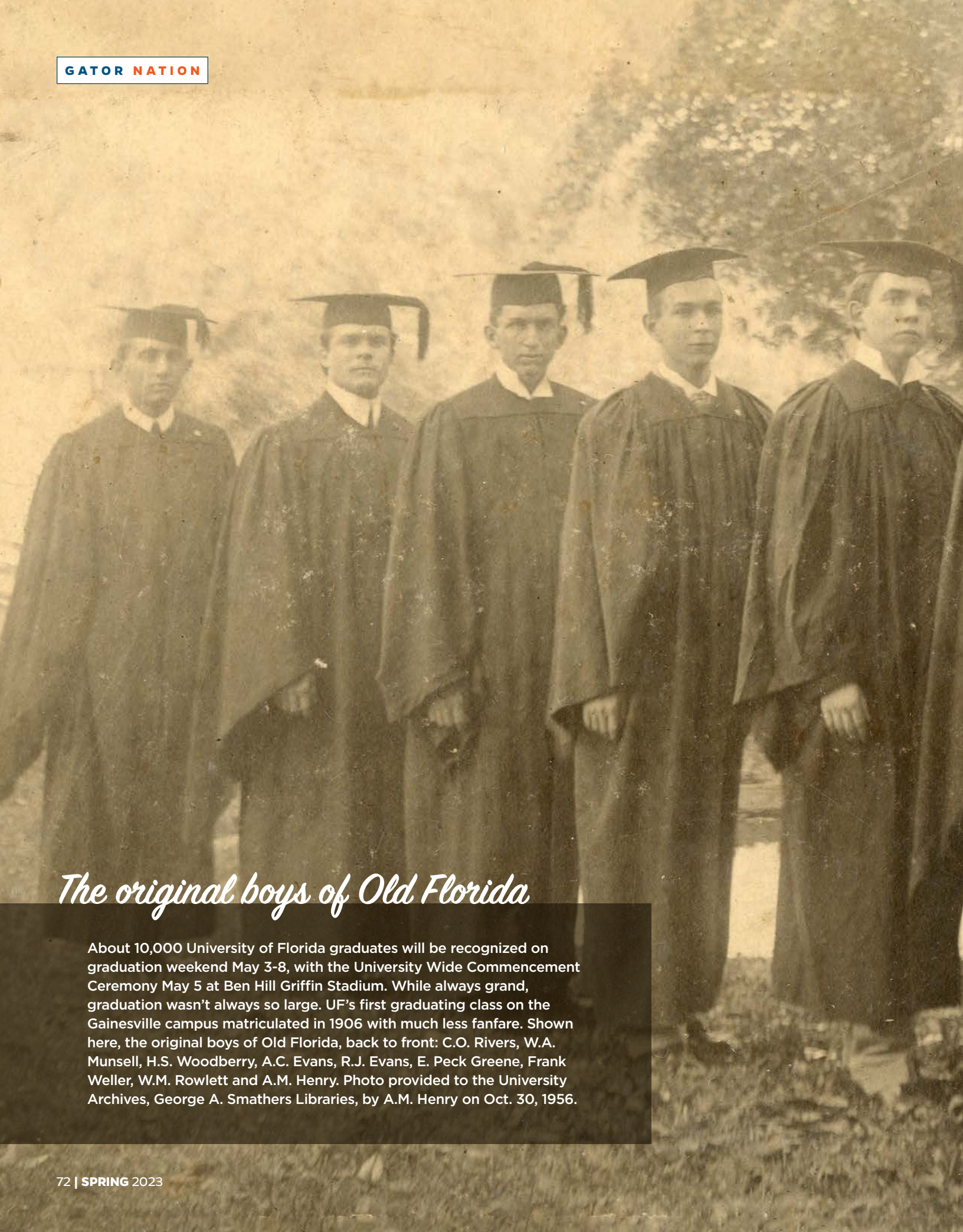


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The original boys of Old Florida

About 10,000 University of Florida graduates will be recognized on graduation weekend May 3-8, with the University Wide Commencement Ceremony May 5 at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium. While always grand, graduation wasn't always so large. UF's first graduating class on the Gainesville campus matriculated in 1906 with much less fanfare. Shown here, the original boys of Old Florida, back to front: C.O. Rivers, W.A. Munsell, H.S. Woodberry, A.C. Evans, R.J. Evans, E. Peck Greene, Frank Weller, W.M. Rowlett and A.M. Henry. Photo provided to the University Archives, George A. Smathers Libraries, by A.M. Henry on Oct. 30, 1956.



