

# GATOR

FLORIDA

SPRING 2021

## Thousands of Acres, *Thousands of Possibilities*

A massive gift of rural land to UF will help researchers understand Florida's past, present and future.

**PAGE 18**

UF COVID-19 expert shares his secret to surviving the pandemic. (It involves Hungarian paprika.)

**PAGE 26**

Meet the Gator who won the largest U.S. civil rights case in history

**PAGE 30**



# WE WILL RISE UP, FOR YOU

*Because of you and the passionate advocates who make Gator Nation one of the most productive forces for good on the planet, UF students, faculty and programs continue to thrive despite the pandemic's challenges. The following Gators (below and on page 4) are just a few of the visionaries whose investments through UF will improve the world for generations to come. In all kinds of weather, we all stick together! Florida Gator thanks these dedicated individuals for their generous support.*

### **BILL (BSChem '76, MSEng '77, MBA '07) & LINDA MCGRANE (BSPE '76)**

This Ormond Beach-based Gator couple advocate so strongly for education that they've endowed \$1 million faculty chairman posts in both of their colleges. Linda, a teacher, massage therapist and ocean swimmer, has the honor of creating the first endowed chair in the College of Health and Human Performance, where she earned her degree 45 years ago. Bill, a cyclist and chemical engineer turned college professor, invested his chair in the Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering's chemical engineering department. Both of their gifts will boost UF's efforts to recruit the best scholar-researchers, who in turn will provide a higher level of instruction and mentorship for students, as well as research prowess for their fields. This philanthropic couple made their gifts possible through a bequest in their wills. Between the chairs and their other investments over the past 40 years, the McGranes have contributed more than \$4 million to UF.



### **CHERYLLE HAYES & GARY SCHNEIDER (BSPE '74)**

Hayes and Schneider are longtime annual contributors to UF Performing Arts with strong ties to Gainesville. Hayes is a radiation oncologist and Gator by choice; Schneider is a former UF wrestler and UF wrestling coach turned Gainesville realtor who helped develop and shape many of Gainesville's upscale neighborhoods. In their lifetimes, they have seen the power of performing arts firsthand as it aids people in their healing process and brings a community together. Their recent substantial gift to UF Performing Arts will increase access to high-quality performances and educational programs through artist residencies within school and community groups. Their gift also honors the memory of Hayes' sister, who benefited from the therapeutic power of the arts during her lifetime, especially during her battle with cancer.



*(Continued on page 4)*

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## ON THE COVER



Elisabeth DeLuca gave more than just a large piece of land to UF. She gave a rare jewel — a swath of natural Florida that will provide UF scientists with clues to improving land management practices in the Sunshine State and beyond. Learn more starting on page 18.





## UF's CHAMPIONS

### **RACHEL (BA '98) & RON ANTEVY (BSCE '91)**

Civil engineer and co-founder of the construction management software company e-Builder, Ron Antevy is the son of immigrants and the first member of his family to attend college, navigating that experience on his own. For this reason, Ron and his wife, Rachel, are passionate about – and have invested in – the Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering's STEPUP program that helps aspiring engineers maximize their opportunities and realize their dreams. A few years after graduating, Ron teamed up with his brother, Jon Antevy (BDES '93, MSBC '94), to create e-Builder, a collaborative project management tool that never before existed. Knowing how crucial collaboration is to successful projects, businesses and innovations, Ron and Rachel have also funded the Faculty Commons in the new Herbert Wertheim Laboratory for Engineering Excellence where all engineering faculty from the college's numerous facilities can gather.



### **ANNE (BAEd '67) & JERRY GODSEY (BSR '61, MBA '67)**

The Godseys say UF is a part of who they've become. After all, they met on a blind date while students at UF and married on graduation day in 1967. The Atlanta couple believe strongly in the power of a high-quality education: Jerry was a first-generation college student and Anne, a teacher by trade. He spent his career as a brand manager for Coca-Cola Co., which took their family on an international adventure. Now retired, their goals are twofold: provide educational opportunities to other students and open students' eyes to cultures they may have never experienced through art. Thanks to the couple's recent gift of a bequest in their wills, they are funding Machen Florida Opportunity scholarships, creating a student internship in UF's Harn Museum of Art and giving the Japanese print collection they spent a lifetime amassing to the museum.







Conversation with UF President **Kent Fuchs**

# HISTORICAL MARKERS TELL UF'S STORIES

HOW WILL FUTURE GATORS LOOK BACK AT COVID AT UF?

**Y**ears from now, when COVID is a distant memory, UF students and scholars will look back to this time with the wisdom and perspective of history.

It's impossible to know what they will conclude. But if a UF historical marker program endures to that far-off future, their thoughts will likely wind up on a historical marker placed somewhere prominent on campus — perhaps labeled “The COVID Years.”

One of my favorite things about walking around our campus is happening upon the handsome blue-and-white markers showing how history has shaped UF, and UF has shaped history, since we opened our doors in Gainesville in 1906.

The first marker, installed in 2007, tells the story of Gatorade's invention by Robert Cade and his colleagues. Dr. Cade himself was a guest at the unveiling ceremony shortly before his death in November of that year. The marker is outside Gate 1 of the O'Connell Center, near the location of the athletic field where Gatorade was first tested in 1965.

Fifteen more markers have been placed, as well. As overseen by UF's History Advisory Council, the markers celebrate the university's major research achievements, remember individuals who made key contributions and pay tribute to our historic land-grant mission.

For me, they also accentuate the continuing influence of history on UF.

For instance, the Latin American Studies program marker tells how the Plaza of the

Americas was dedicated at the program's first conference in 1931 with 21 live oak trees planted to represent the republics of the Americas at that time. It is those very trees, grown tall and strong, that today shade the plaza so beautifully.

The marker about Flavet Villages tells how a massive influx of World War II veterans required the hasty construction of three “Florida Veterans” villages or “Flavets” to house the former soldiers and their families, in addition to numerous other buildings. The veterans graduated and moved on, but UF was forever transformed into a far larger and more comprehensive university.

The markers also show how individuals continue to shape UF. For example, the marker about the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature gives a brief biography of the library's namesake, UF librarian Ruth Baldwin. She spent her

life scouring bookstores and garage sales, amassing 35,000 books that she donated to UF. Today the library includes more than 115,000 volumes that are treasured by scholars and students around the world.

UF's newest marker, unveiled last February near Turlington Hall, commemorates the 1969 establishment of the African American Studies program.

It tells how, over a half century ago, students seeking to accelerate integration at UF led the charge to establish the African American Studies program. The program has grown into a national center of scholarship on the black experience and will soon become its own academic department.

I look forward to the future when COVID is history and a campus marker tells how our UF community came together to join the world in overcoming the pandemic.



PHOTO BY UF COMMUNICATIONS

The last historical marker — commemorating the creation of UF's African American Studies program — was installed in 2020. Learn more about the marker program at [uff.to/s5bvyz](http://uff.to/s5bvyz).

**UF** UNIVERSITY of  
**FLORIDA**

**FLORIDA GATOR**  
The University of Florida's  
alumni magazine  
VOLUME 8 ISSUE 3

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**FLORIDA GATOR**  
is published quarterly by the University of Florida Alumni  
Association Inc. for its members. Address changes may be sent  
to [ufalum@ufalumni.ufl.edu](mailto:ufalum@ufalumni.ufl.edu) or Alumni Records/UF Alumni  
Association, P.O. Box 14425, Gainesville, FL 32604-2425.  
Standard postage paid in West Allis, Wis., and at additional  
mailing offices. Membership and advertising queries may be  
sent to the above address.



## STAND UP & HOLLER: GIVING DAY SETS RECORDS, HELPS STUDENTS, PROGRAMS

# GATOR NATION



On Feb. 18, Gators around the globe – alumni, students, families, friends, faculty and staff — got up and hollered for the third annual **Stand Up & Holler Gator Nation Giving Day**, exceeding the goal of 20,000 gifts in 24 hours.

Gifts large and small poured in to keep UF's good work going strong — from scholarships to infrastructure improvements, championship athletics to cutting-edge research and so much more. Here are a few highlights from this amazing event:



### WORLDWIDE EFFORT

Gators in **48 states** and **21 countries** participated in the second annual event.



### CHALLENGES

Alumni and businesses issued **43 separate matching-gift challenges** that doubled or sometimes tripled gifts to compound the impact of alumni's generosity. Of those, 33 goals were met.



### GATOR CLUB PARTICIPATION

These five Gator Clubs had the most members participate in Giving Day.

<b>Atlanta</b>	294
<b>Nashville – Music City</b>	280
<b>Central Florida – Orlando area</b>	242
<b>Rocky Mountain – Denver, CO</b>	154
<b>Sarasota County</b>	148



### GIVING BY COLLEGES

These five colleges had the most alumni, friends, faculty and staff participate in Giving Day.

COLLEGE	GIFTS	RAISED
<b>Design, Construction and Planning</b>	1,233	\$1,042,396
<b>Journalism and Communications</b>	916	\$103,683
<b>Arts</b>	696	\$133,284
<b>Agriculture and Life Sciences</b>	640	\$164,300
<b>Business</b>	498	\$293,037



### UF CAUSES

These UF programs received the most gifts during Giving Day.

PROGRAM	GIFTS	RAISED
<b>Athletics</b>	3,198	\$3,087,598
<b>Dance Marathon</b>	2,141	\$92,939
<b>Alumni Association</b>	1,342	\$56,719
<b>Student Affairs</b>	1,022	\$72,807

If you missed it, you can still make a difference by visiting [GivingDay.ufl.edu](http://GivingDay.ufl.edu) and contributing a gift toward the UF college or program that means the most to you.







# ROARS FOR UF

**GIFTS IN 24 HOURS** **TOTALING**  
**22,198** **\$25,383,005**

Just a sampling of the images  
 posted on Twitter with the official  
 hashtag #AllForTheGators







The new Hotel ELEO on the south end of campus by UF Health Shands Hospital

## NUMBERS OF NOTE

# 173

**Number of rooms in the new Hotel ELEO** near UF Health Shands Hospital. Inspired by the Greek goddess of compassion, Eleos, the hotel was built with the intention of offering families of patients high-quality lodgings next door to the hospital.

# 43

**Number of UF alumni and students** who worked on the Hotel ELEO project, including the architect

# 31



**Years Alto Straughn** (BSAg '57, MAg '65) **worked at UF/IFAS to improve the blueberry and watermelon industries in Florida.** With his efforts in mind, UF/

IFAS assistant professor of horticultural sciences Patricio Muñoz developed a new breed of blueberry this year and named it "The Sentinel," which means "guardian," in honor of Straughn, a Florida Agriculture Hall of Fame member.

### 'The Sentinel' attributes:

- **Higher-quality fruit**, giving growers potential at the best market window.
- **Superior taste.** The variety was tested in multiple flavor panels at UF, and they rated 'Sentinel' "high."

Thanks in part to Straughn's work, Florida's blueberry industry is worth about \$60 million annually.



# 5TH

**Florida's rank among all 50 U.S. states for producing craft beer.** However, more than 90% of hops are grown in the Pacific Northwest. IFAS researchers are helping Florida farmers grow hops here, which will reduce the price of hops for local craft breweries and lower emissions caused when transporting hops across the country.

[uff.to/ghq046](http://uff.to/ghq046)

# 4

Intercollegiate hackathon awards won by **UF Digital Worlds** students **Jordan Smith, Patrick Molen, Austin Stanbury, Ines Said and Aadithya Gowthaman** this fall. Some of their award-winning projects include Voter, a virtual reality mobile application developed for Google Cardboard, and ShellCare, an augmented reality application using Microsoft HoloLens. The students are all working toward a master's in digital arts and sciences (MiDAS).

[uff.to/0knkdt](http://uff.to/0knkdt)



From left, Aadithya Gowthaman, Patrick Molen, Ines Said, Austin Stanbury and Jordan Smith.





## SENDING CELLS INTO SPACE

An out-of-this-world mission may help UF scientists understand why adults lose muscle strength as they age. Tiny muscle cells contained on tissue chips are part of an innovative experiment sent to the **International Space Station** in December. Led by associate professor of pharmacodynamics **Siobhan Malany**, study participants hope this experiment may also aid the development of new therapies for age-related muscle loss on Earth.

 [uff.to/g2ywfvr](http://uff.to/g2ywfvr)



UF HEALTH

Researchers in the UF College of Pharmacy designed a miniature laboratory that plugs into the International Space Station.

## UF PROFESSOR STARS IN OSCAR CONTENDER 'MANK'




PHOTO COURTESY OF MONIKA GOSSMANN/NETFLIX

In the film "Mank," about Hollywood screenwriter Herman Mankiewicz, UF theater assistant professor Monika Gossmann plays the role of Fräulein Frieda.





*"All of what I learn from my time on set, I can absolutely bring into the teaching space. As a professor, I think it is important that I remain active in the industry so that I can better communicate what is happening right now in the business to my students."*

**MONIKA GOSSMANN**, UF School of Theatre + Dance assistant professor  
 [uff.to/r9w2sa](http://uff.to/r9w2sa)

## DONORS GIVE THE GIFT OF A UF EDUCATION

**198** **UF scholarships created** with donations from Gator Nation members during UF's 2005-2012 Florida Tomorrow campaign.

**598** **UF scholarships created so far** with donations from Gator Nation members during UF's 2015-2022 Go Greater campaign. There are just 18 months to go before the close of the campaign. Scholarships are often created as a tribute or in memory of someone. The endowments begin at \$30K and can be funded in myriad ways, including life insurance policies, provisions in wills, pledge payments, cash and gifts-in-kind. Learn more at  [uff.to/zhx12e](http://uff.to/zhx12e)

**4** **New scholarships created for College of Education students**, thanks to the generosity of Gators who contributed to that college during last year's Stand Up & Holler: Gator Nation Giving Day. How much did your fellow Gators contribute to your college during this year's event on Feb. 18? Find out at  [GivingDay.ufl.edu](http://GivingDay.ufl.edu)

## \$1.39M

Amount of a national grant awarded to **Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies** researchers to extend their previous research on intervention strategies that support preschoolers. For instance, embedding instruction and learning opportunities in everyday routines and activities helped children with disabilities to learn new skills and to participate more fully in activities.

[uff.to/ktte3c](http://uff.to/ktte3c)

## \$2.6M

Amount of a grant that UF nursing associate professor **Miriam Ezenwa** received to study whether techniques to reduce pain and manage stress could help patients with sickle cell disease. The primary therapy for these patients now are opioids, which have dangerous side effects. Ezenwa's approach involves guided relaxation and distraction exercises that naturally evoke endorphins and other positive hormones that reduce inflammation and pain. This alternative approach has already been used successfully with cancer and HIV patients.

[uff.to/t6p38r](http://uff.to/t6p38r)

## 1,356

Amazon Basin households that took part in a research study with UF scientist **Denis Valle**. He was able to prove that as families move to urban areas, they eat less wild game. Illegal rural hunting has devastated some animal species, such as tortoises and freshwater turtles, some of which are endangered. The scientists estimate 1.7 million endangered turtles per year are among the bushmeat consumed by humans in Amazonas State, the largest state in the Brazilian Amazon. Valle also says programs to deter the illegal hunting of certain species are urgently needed. [uff.to/5qf7wc](http://uff.to/5qf7wc)

## \$4.5M

Amount the **U.S. Department of Agriculture** awarded three teams of UF scientists who are each studying new ways to fight the deadly citrus greening (Huanglongbing disease). The grants build on existing successes measured throughout Florida's citrus groves. [uff.to/dtxjmh](http://uff.to/dtxjmh)

*"I am a strong believer in diversity and student-faculty interaction. I preferred UF to other schools I spoke with because of the attitude of the engineering college and the entire university toward student health and wellness as a critical factor in academic success."*

**ERIKA MOORE**, UF materials science engineering assistant professor whose research on lupus led Forbes magazine to place her on its 30-Under-30 list.



ERIC ZAMORA

## A 'RISING STAR' SHINES

Among those **Forbes magazine** heralded on its "30 Under 30" list of influencers and innovators is one of UF's own: **Erika Moore**, a materials science engineering assistant professor whose research focuses on tailoring health therapies and using how immune cells can be used to repair tissue. Moore's work is cited as being a game changer for people with lupus, a potentially life threatening disease that can cause heart problems and affects predominantly Black women.



SUZANNA MARS/UF COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

Agbedidi performance in 2019.

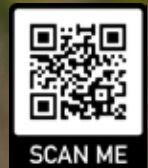
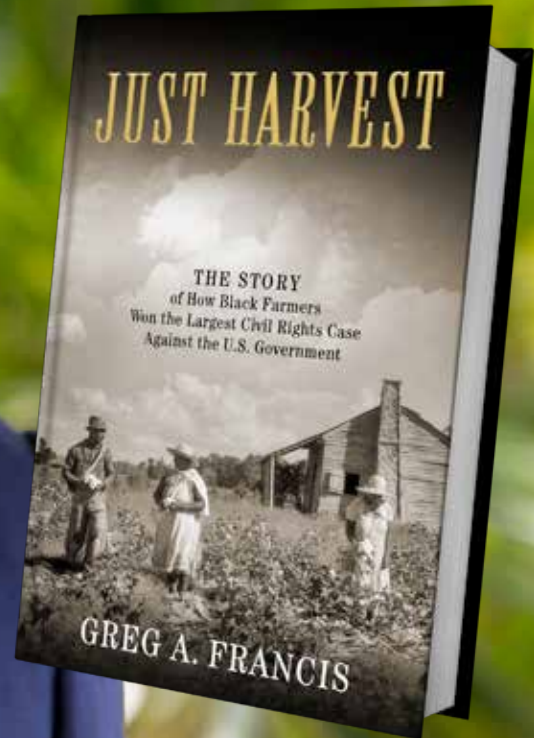
## ETHNICITY, CULTURE MEET ARTS, ECONOMY

American jazz. R&B. Hip hop and swing. The cultural influences of African and Latinx communities on American music and dance are too numerous to count. As are the influences of other migratory groups whose cultural practices have been integrated over time into our nation's industries and collective social fabric.

With this in mind, UF's **College of the Arts** has launched its **Center for Arts, Migration and Entrepreneurship (CAME)** to "connect networks of scholars, artists, creatives, entrepreneurs and advocates to the engines of creative and cultural economics at the heart of migration." Learn more about this new center at: [uff.to/1f31n3](http://uff.to/1f31n3)



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JOHN KAPLAN

## 22

Years professor **John Kaplan** taught **College of Journalism and Communications** students about photography before announcing his retirement in January. The 1992 Pulitzer Prize winner for feature photography instructed thousands of students, some who won top photo awards. Kaplan also

produced an autobiographical film about his cancer journey, **“Not As I Pictured.”**

## 7

Gators whose professional swim club, the **Cali Condors**, won the **International Swimming League championship** meet in November in Budapest. **Khader Baqlah** (4ENG), **Marcin Cieslak** (BSBA '16), **Caeleb Dressel** (4ALS), **Sherridon Dressel** (BSHED '20), **Kelly Fertel** (4JM), **Natalie Hinds** (BSTel '16) and **Mark Szaraneck** (BSChem '19) all contributed to the win. Baqlah produced a new 200 free record (1:44.59) for his home country of Jordan, while Cieslak set a new 100 IM Polish national record of 51.14. He would set this record three different times throughout the season.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SWIMMING LEAGUE

## 4

World records set by **Caeleb Dressel** (BSHED '20) during the **International Swimming League championship** five-day meet. His dominating performance led him to earn the season and championship MVP honors. He also is now the only swimmer to ever break 50 seconds in the 100IM (49.88 seconds in the championship's semi-finals; 49.28 seconds in the championship heat). Dressel also post the fastest swims ever in the 100 fly and 50 free events.

[uff.to/aj63fq](http://uff.to/aj63fq)

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PHOTO BY LYNN GROOMS

A device attached to the cow's halter enables scientists to measure the amount of methane emitted.

## GOOD NEWS FOR GASSY COWS

A **UF/IFAS** study determined that a feed supplement successfully reduced methane emissions in cattle by 11 percent. This device attached to the animals' halter enables scientists to measure the amount of methane emitted from its mouth and nose, since methane is generated in the rumen near the mouth and expelled in "burps," as opposed to popular opinion that cattle release it from their other ends. [uff.to/8chsef](http://uff.to/8chsef)

## JUSTICE FOR ANIMAL ABUSE

**UF College of Veterinary Medicine** forensic pathologist **Adam Stern** started two new UF programs called "A Dog Has No Name, and "A Cat Has No Name" to help law enforcement investigate abuse and death cases. In addition to animals brought to **UF's Small Animal Hospital**, Stern has received cases from law enforcement and animal control services across Florida and from other states. To date, more than 100 dogs and cats have been examined, some from as far away as California. Stern says since the pandemic began, some areas have seen an increase in dumped animals, both alive and dead. These programs' services are provided free of charge, and they rely on private donations.

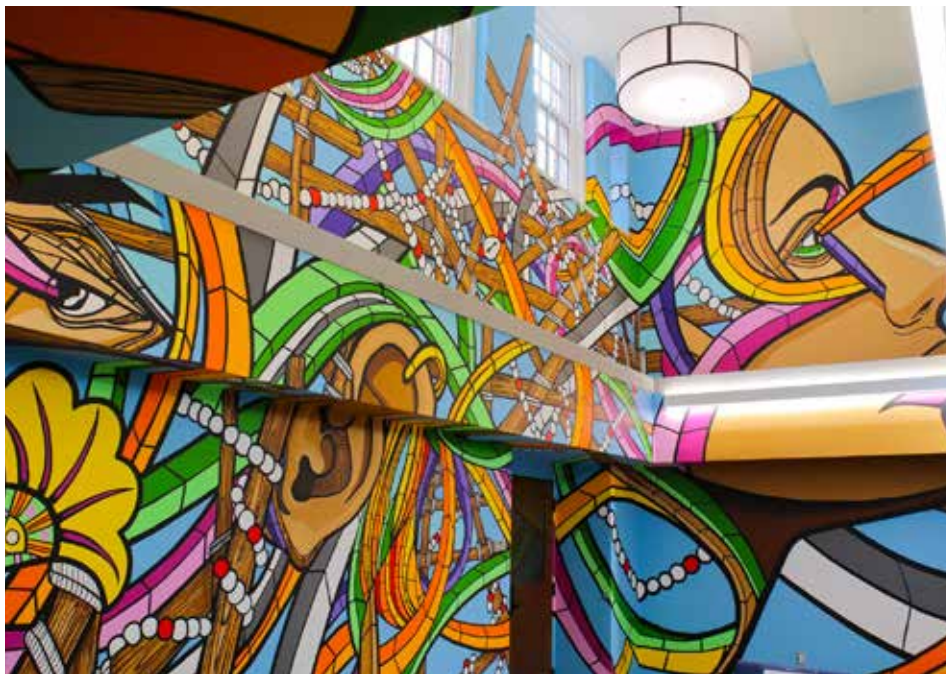


PHOTO BY NOA FRIEDMAN

## WHEN ART REFLECTS LIFE

As part of the **Norman Hall** rehabilitation project, artist **David Sepulveda**, aka **Don Rimx**, painted this mural, called *Curiosidad*. Striving to reflect his community-centered philosophy, Rimx said we are "humans, living in a city, state, nation and world where we advocate both for those whose voices need to be heard, and against principles that violate our commitments." See a time lapse of the mural's creation at [uff.to/2gf9z7](http://uff.to/2gf9z7)

## UF WELCOMES TWO NEW DEANS

### COLLEGE OF MEDICINE



UF's new College of Medicine dean is **Colleen Koch** (pronounced cook). She is the 10th dean and first woman to hold the post in the college's 64-year history. She comes from **Johns Hopkins Hospital** where she was professor and chair of anesthesiology and critical care medicine. The college is ranked No. 18 among all public medical schools in the country, includes 1,400 faculty members and annually trains more than 800 residents and fellows, as well as nearly 1,000 medical students, physician's assistants and graduate students. **Dr. Joseph Tyndall**, who has been interim dean for the past two and half years will transition to UF Health's associate vice president for strategic and academic affairs, as well as continue as chair of emergency medicine.

### COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION



**Hub Brown** is UF's new College of Journalism and Communications dean. He comes to UF from **Syracuse University** where he was associate dean and associate professor. Brown succeeds **Diane McFarlin** (BSJ '76) who retired in December after eight years of service. Brown has taught broadcast reporting, newscast production and performance, mass media ethics and media and diversity.

*"Hub's experience in academia ... and his experience as a working journalist give him invaluable perspective as he steps up to lead the college at this critical time in its history,"*

**JOE GLOVER**, UF Provost

READ ALL ABOUT IT!

# 'Evil Reporter Chick' Infiltrates Students' Hearts and Minds to Become ...

## UF TEACHER OF THE YEAR!

**M**oni Basu began her career as a journalist in Tallahassee and has been reporting and editing for 37 years. She's worked for CNN and major newspapers, including the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, and has reported on presidential elections, the 9/11 attacks, hurricanes, earthquakes and war.

She covered the Iraq War since its inception in 2003 and on several trips was embedded with the U.S. Army. Her resulting e-book, *Chaplain Turner's War* (2012, Agate Publishing), grew from a series of stories on an Army chaplain there. A platoon sergeant gave her the affectionate nickname "Evil Reporter Chick," and it stuck. You can follow that moniker on Instagram. She claims she's no superhero but she was featured once as a war reporter in Marvel Comics' "Civil War" series.

Prof B, as she is known by her students, began teaching advanced reporting and writing classes at UF in 2018 and quickly distinguished herself by being named Teacher of the Year.

Basu was born in Kolkata, India, and has been shaped by a life spent straddling two cultures. She took a few minutes to answer these questions for Florida Gator.



The pandemic has forced Basu to slow down. She's learned to cherish long walks with her "furry son," Gizmo.

### 18 QUESTIONS FOR MONI BASU

2019-2020 University of Florida  
Teacher of the Year

• Basu, author and award-winning journalist, is the **Michael and Linda Connelly Lecturer for Narrative Nonfiction** in the **College of Journalism and Communications**.

#### Q. What was your first journalism job?

**A.** I worked at The Florida Flambeau, an independent newspaper serving the Florida State community. At the time, the Flambeau was a feisty paper that took seriously the old newspaper adage "Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." I have never taken a journalism class and learned how to be a reporter at the Flambeau. Some of the people I worked with there are still my closest friends.

#### Q. What did you want to be when you were little?

**A.** I dreamed of becoming an Air India flight attendant. I loved the notion of being able to travel around the world on someone else's dime and being put up in 5-star hotels in cities like New York or Tokyo or Buenos Aires. I also admired the way the flight attendants carried themselves, swaying elegantly in their perfectly pressed printed silk saris.

#### Q. What's the best advice you've ever received?

**A.** Be patient. Or do you mean as a journalist? The answer is still the same. Be patient.

#### Q. Your go-to snack food?

**A.** I don't really buy packaged snacks too much, but once a year, I make a clandestine run to Popeye's to get a two-piece, dark meat chicken dinner, extra spicy, with red beans and rice.



PHOTO BY CURTIS COMPTON

While embedded with Iraq War troops, Basu earned the affectionate nickname "Evil Reporter Chick."

#### Q. Your most binge-worthy series?

**A.** Best show, hands down: *The Wire* on HBO.

#### Q. The best book you've ever read?

**A.** I read a lot so this is a hard question for me. Can I list more than one? Joan Didion's *The White Album*. Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. And I just finished Natasha Trethewey's *Memorial Drive*, which has to be some of the most beautiful prose I have ever read.

#### Q. A favorite saying or phrase?

**A.** "A word after a word after a word is power." — Margaret Atwood

#### Q. Where do you feel most at home?

**A.** I love to be at home in India. Wait. I love to be at home in Atlanta. I am an immigrant from India and feel I am never quite in my element here or back in Kolkata. I suppose my answer is I feel most comfortable at the intersection of two divergent cultures.

#### Q. Do you have a lucky charm or ritual you rely on as you write?

**A.** No. But I do a lot of laundry and my house is sparkling clean by the time I have finished my story.

#### Q. Who, living or dead, would you most like to meet?

**A.** My mother's mother. She died when I was 2.





PHOTO BY LOUIE FAVORITE



**AT LEFT:** Basu was left on the steps of an orphanage in Kolkata, India, at 1 day old. She was adopted six days later by Debabrata and Kalyani Basu. Her father, a world-renowned statistician, taught for several years at FSU.



**ABOVE:** CNN sent Basu to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in January 2010 to cover the catastrophic earthquake. “This car had been set on fire after the decomposing bodies of two people were found inside,” she says.

**TOP LEFT:** Basu interviews Gen. David Petraeus after a massive suicide bombing in Tal Afar during the Iraq War.

**BELOW:** Marvel Comic’s “Civil War” series included a representation of Basu and her work in Iraq.



MARVEL COMICS

I desperately want to know her, to ask her about my mother.

**Q. Who motivated you to do well in school?**

**A.** My father. He was a brilliant man who took the time to sit down with me and make sure I understood my lessons. (Basu’s father, Debabrata, was a much-lauded professor of statistical theory. Her mother, Kalyani, earned a degree in economics but did not work outside the home.)

**Q. When you’re not teaching and writing, what do you enjoy doing?**

**A.** I love to travel. I get on a plane every chance I get, off to a new destination, a new adventure. I cannot wait for a semblance of normalcy so that I can get away again. I started painting again during the COVID lockdown and surprised my friends – as well as myself! – by how much I enjoy it. Somehow, because I am a writer, I feel enormous pressure to produce beautiful prose. But no one is judging me on my brush strokes. The bar is set low and I find that liberating. I also enjoy gardening. What else? Well, lately, a perfect day for me has

been to walk six or seven miles with my furry son, Gizmo.

**Q. What are your bucket list destinations?**

**A.** West Africa, Antarctica and the Trans-Siberian rail from Vladivostok to St. Petersburg.

**Q. Would you rather travel 1000 years into the past or 1000 years into the future?**

**A.** Into the past. For sure. I think it’s important to never forget the past in order to make a better future. And to do that, you have to truly comprehend it.

**Q. In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge facing those entering the journalism profession today?**

**A.** That we have been called “the enemy of the people” and so many Americans have lost trust in journalists. I truly believe we will overcome the vast and rapid changes in the industry and that journalism will exist in some form or another. But regaining trust is a huge issue.

**Q. If a movie was made about you, who would you want to play you?**

**A.** Salma Hayek or Madhuri Dixit.

**Q. Has COVID-19 and its restrictions changed any of your ideas about your life?**

**A.** Changed? No. Amplified? Yes. I have come to value the simplest pleasures of life that for many years I did not make time for, like those long walks with my 7-pound dog.

**Q. If you could give just one piece of advice to all UF students, what would it be?**

**A.** Use your heart as much as your brain in all your endeavors.

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# SPREADING THE GATOR GOOD

UF INNOVATIONS SPARK IMPROVEMENTS ON LAND, SEA, AIR

## GOING WITH THE FLOW

UF scientists invented an affordable device that **monitors water quality across an entire watershed area**. Called GatorByte, the small buoys (about \$1,500) should be placed in a higher location. Then, as stormwater rises it is carried by the current, mapping water quality along the way via GPS, cellular communication and on-board data storage. When the buoys reach the bottom of the watershed area, they can be picked up and redeployed.



UF/IFAS

Assistant Professor Eban Bean demonstrates the GatorByte.

## CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

For people with otosclerosis, a hearing loss disease caused when three bones in the middle ear are frozen in place (unable to vibrate), a surgery that replaces those bones can be their **only hope at hearing anything**. But up until now, the shape of these artificial replacement bones have been standardized. So UF scientists developed a 3D-printed version of the stapes bone that can be customized according to individual measurements.

It is also made with a polymer that more closely relates to stapes bone tissue than the standard metal prosthetic.



## SELF-HEALING PARTS

UF researchers created a metal matrix composite that is **capable of self-repairing large-scale cracks** when heated. The aluminum-silicon-based alloy is a lightweight improvement on the old fashioned aluminum used for airplane fuselage and parts. It does not require additional materials, direct access or skilled application to repair. The repair bonds made by this composite are also significantly stronger than that of available technology, enhancing the performance, reliability and success of the repaired material.



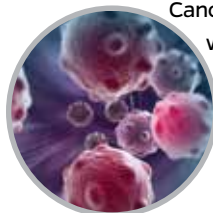
## LIGHTWEIGHT AND STRONG

Transportation companies are constantly in search of lightweight materials that could reduce vehicle weight for better fuel efficiency. Just a **10% reduction in vehicle mass increases fuel efficiency by 8%**. UF researchers addressed this issue by developing an alloy made from mainly aluminum, iron and silicon, along with some other elements. It has proven optimal for 3D printing and high-temperature systems, as well.



## TUMORS BEWARE

Cancer cells need lipids (fat) to grow and communicate with neighboring cells. So UF scientists discovered a cancer therapy (compound) that targets cell's lipogenesis pathway, **cutting off the tumor's food supply** with minimal side effects. This peptide drug has shown success with a variety of cancer types.



## NEW WAYS TO COMMUNICATE

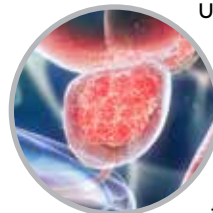
UF researchers developed a psychological test that allows a physician to **evaluate the decision-making ability of a patient, even if the patient can't see, speak or speak quickly**. Since many health care treatments require patient consent, physicians must be able to quickly determine how well patients understand what is said to them.

This auditory comprehension assessment measures patient understanding at two basic levels of difficulty, avoids confusion due to subtle voice cues, provides more accurate results and is easy to give, score and interpret.



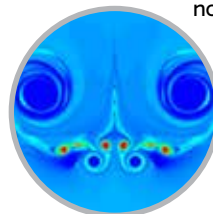
## BETTER CANCER DETECTION

UF researchers developed a 3D system that tracks and visualizes potential prostate cancer lesions, and **more accurately guides biopsies** of those cells. The system addresses flaws in the existing 2D imaging test, which can produce a false negative or potentially miss malignant tissue during the biopsy. This new system also **eliminates the need for an MRI** and radiologist, which lowers costs for patients and hospitals.



## SAFER, SMOOTHER AND SOFTER FLIGHTS

The motion of air flowing over airplane wings and helicopter blades generates vortices that contribute to instability and noise. These vortices linger behind the aircraft and can cause wake turbulence for the next passing aircraft. For rotorcrafts, these vortices reduce lift and are a significant source of noise. Passive systems to mitigate this issue, such as wing/blade coatings have proven inefficient. But now, UF researchers developed



an **active flow control system that reduces and inhibits the formation of these vortices**. What's more, their system requires no design alterations, ensuring the best aerodynamic performance, and works on any airfoil surface, stabilizing the flight of any aircraft, including drones. The growing market for aircraft actuators is projected to reach \$21 billion by 2030.





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# This Land Is

UF'S SCIENTISTS ARE GIDDY OVER  
THEIR NEW 27,000-ACRE OUTDOOR  
LABORATORY ... AND WHAT IT MEANS  
FOR OUR BIG BLUE MARBLE

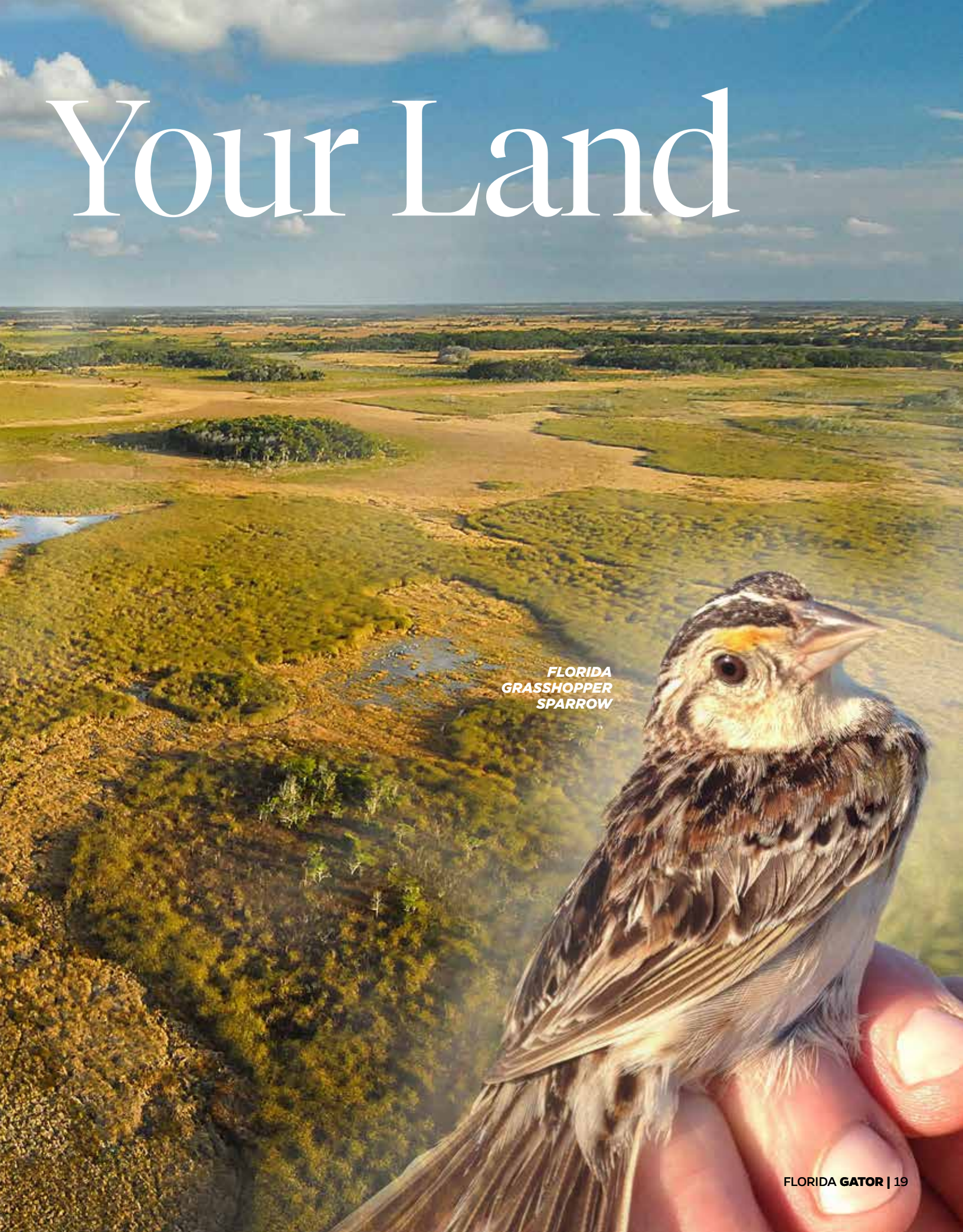
STORY BY DAVID FINNERTY  
PHOTOS BY CARLTON WARD (MS '08)

SOUTHERN OSCEOLA COUNTY IS OLD FLORIDA. Seminole Indians old. Ponce de León old. The wildest territories — such as the 27,000 acres gifted to UF last fall — are a step back to long ago, a glimpse at what the state was when Crackers withstood mosquitos and sun and solitude to homestead here in the 1800s.

Grounds and creeks are pristine here at the university's new outdoor laboratory, the pines and palmettos untouched, the sands and soils primal. It's a haven to the endangered Florida grasshopper sparrow and red-cockaded woodpecker, home to bobcats and black bears and gopher tortoises and indigo snakes.

Elisabeth DeLuca's donation of this land is among the largest real estate gifts ever to a university. It might be one of the most important, too. Here — the central peninsula's few remaining frontiers, a city-sized parcel just outside Yeehaw Junction, on the doorstep of Orlando to the north and beach communities to the east — UF's scientists hope to preserve a disappearing landscape and discover clues to our future.





# Your Land

**FLORIDA  
GRASSHOPPER  
SPARROW**





*It's the region's rawness, its horizon-to-clouds expanse, its isolation that make it so special.*

— BRENT SELLERS, UF/IFAS'S RANGE CATTLE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTER DIRECTOR

UF/IFAS researchers plan to use the land to study Florida's plants and wildlife, as the tract is one of the last refuges for a number of endangered and threatened animals.

"This land, because it's such a large piece of property, represents two things: what Florida used to be like and what it can be like," insists **Scott Angle**, UF's vice president for agriculture and natural resources. These possibilities make the land an unopened treasure chest to UF's scientists and students.

Its ranchlands, citrus grove, ponds, prairies and forests can be studied to find out how to conserve more water, improve farming and slow the spread of invasive species. Wildlife — much of it rare or threatened — can be saved. UF's discoveries can guide land developers, conservationists and policymakers who are balancing growth, agriculture and preservation around the state.

And that's just for starters, UF officials promise. Research here could influence things like hunting (which is legal on the property), ranching, logging and other industries.

Scientists are curious about the benefits outdoor sportsmen have on ecosystems, for instance, especially concerning troublesome feral pigs. Here, it can be measured. The same is true for cattle grazing's effects on plants and insects. UF professors can teach land and forest management. Fieldwork can be conducted. Classes here might range from plant sciences and soil sciences to entomology and wildlife ecology. UF/IFAS could even offer Extension-related services and Florida 4-H excursions.

"There's different things that we could do [on the land], like carbon sequestration, water quality, habitat — not only for wildlife but also pollinators," agronomy professor Brent Sellers says. "We know of two endangered species that are here right now ... And as far as other species, we're sure they're here but in this big an area it's hard to find them all."

*"This land ... represents two things: what Florida used to be like and what it can be like."*

— **SCOTT ANGLE**, UF'S VICE PRESIDENT FOR AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

It's the region's rawness, its horizon-to-clouds expanse, its isolation that make it so special, claims Sellers, UF/IFAS's Range Cattle Research and Education Center director.

"The hope is that when we do research we find answers, and this land absolutely gives us the opportunity to do that," he says. "We can actually start answering some of those big, big questions."

## A DATE WITH DESTINY

The DeLuca spread — so large 13 University of Florida Gainesville campuses could fit inside it — wasn't meant for UF, at least not at first. There was a plan to turn it into a town that would be called Destiny until a few years ago. Blueprints mapped out houses and apartments, a resort and hotel, a retail village and office district, schools and churches, golf courses and a shooting range, parks and a recreation complex.

But that wasn't the kind of destiny Elisabeth DeLuca wanted for her land.

"Few things in this world are as precious — and threatened — as our untamed lands and the wild animals that live there," the Pompano Beach philanthropist explains. "We need to preserve





## A REFUGE FOR THE ENDANGERED

Just a few of the endangered species that could be found on the DeLuca property include:



**FLORIDA  
PANTHER**



**GOPHER  
TORTOISE**



**RED-COCKADED  
WOODPECKER**

**TOP LEFT and ABOVE:** Students and faculty across numerous disciplines will use the pristine DeLuca land to better understand and protect wild places throughout the world.





*“Few things in this world are as precious — and threatened — as our untamed lands and the wild animals that live there. These acres are in good hands with the University of Florida, and it pleases me to know that UF will use them to learn more about our natural world and to train new generations of scientists and environmentalists.”*

**— ELISABETH DELUCA, WHOSE LAND GIFT IS AMONG THE LARGEST IN HISTORY**

what we can for the benefit of all of us. These acres are in good hands with the University of Florida, and it pleases me to know that UF will use them to learn more about our natural world and to train new generations of scientists and environmentalists.”

The land’s almost unimaginable size and diversity are unique now in the world of science, President Kent Fuchs says.

“Elisabeth DeLuca’s generous contribution of such a significant property is a gift to all Floridians and, really, to people everywhere,” he says. “The preservation of this land and what it will enable our scholars to learn, teach and achieve will reverberate around the globe.”

Grasshopper sparrows and red-cockaded woodpeckers are two of the first beneficiaries. The new conservation space is one of the last refuges for the endangered birds. Suburban sprawl in Central Florida and South Florida has claimed most of their natural habitat, leaving the Yeehaw Junction site as home to the globe’s largest population of grasshopper sparrows.

Perched just above the dividing line between Osceola and Okeechobee counties, UF’s 27,000-acre sanctuary sits between the Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park and Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area. It empties into the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge. UF officials believe the

university’s work in the region could create opportunities for community collaboration and large-scale research, which will set UF apart from its peer institutions.

Ducks Unlimited, the world’s largest private not-for-profit working to protect wetlands, is one of those collaborators. DeLuca gave the organization a conservation easement next to the property to help shelter the land from developers.

“For generations to come, students and researchers will make new discoveries alongside migrating waterfowl, endangered red cockaded woodpeckers and grasshopper sparrows on this massive outdoor laboratory,” Ducks Unlimited CEO Adam Putnam (BS ’95) predicts. “Future ranchers, waterfowlers, nature lovers and wildlife scientists will be able to apply what they’ve read in textbooks to what they’re observing on the landscape.”

That guaranteed stability is good news for all Floridians, Angle contends.

“There’s been so much change in Florida,” he says. “This property is beautiful. It’s well managed. It’s diverse. It’s been maintained to standards that very few pieces of property anywhere in the state of Florida are. So it becomes a living laboratory for our scientists and staff to study what the ecosystems of Florida have been, are now, and might be in the future.”





# 20 Questions with SCOTT ANGLE

*The new UF/IFAS chief talks sewage sludge, eating raw oysters and the future of Florida farming*

**H**E READS SCIENTIFIC JOURNALS TO RELAX; until recently, didn't own a television; once thought the heavens — rather than Earth — would be his scientific calling; and for a decade worked for UF's northern neighbor and football rival, the University of Georgia.

Last summer, the former director of the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture became a Gator. To be sure, UF/IFAS' new vice president is no ordinary administrator. Meet **Scott Angle**:

**Q. You've had an amazing career. Why did you want to join UF at this stage of life?**

**A.** I've known about UF/IFAS for many years and always thought if the VP role came open, I would apply. UF/IFAS, by some measures, is the No. 2 ag and natural resources program in the U.S. (second only to University of California, Davis) and No. 4 globally, and in my opinion the most responsive program to its state's citizens in the U.S. I wanted to be part of a program that focuses on solving real-world and immediate problems.

**Q. Sewage sludge in agriculture is one of your areas of expertise. Is it as disgusting as it sounds?**

**A.** Pretty much. Sewage contains all kinds of nasty things. In the past we dumped sewage into the ocean or buried it in a landfill, but it's our greatest opportunity for recycling. We fertilize crops with nitrogen and phosphorus to grow healthy yields. Humans consume crops and produce waste containing these same nutrients. The responsible thing to do is to recycle sludge-borne nutrients back

onto crops as fertilizer. It's actually more complicated than it sounds, but closing the nutrient cycle is the environmentally sound thing to do. We're experimenting with this on grazing lands.

**Q. You're a soil scientist. What's one cool fact about soil?**

**A.** It's soil, not dirt. Dirt is what we sweep under carpets; soil is what nourishes the food we eat. Did you know one ounce of soil has more than 100 million bacteria?

**Q. You're also an inventor with seven patents. Which one brings you the most satisfaction?**

**A.** A team I was on in the '90s helped develop a new technology called phytoremediation, which uses the unique ability of special plants to absorb metals from the soil and concentrate those metals in foliage. For example, soils around the world are contaminated with nickel. Traditionally the remedy had been to dig up these soils and send them to a landfill, which can cost about \$2 million per acre. Phytoremediation ... is a clean-up tool. Also, the nickel can be smelted out of the leaves, so it is not lost — it actually becomes an ore. So we turned a problem — soil pollution — into an economic opportunity.





A few of the threatened and endangered birds that UF/IFAS scientists could find on this land include the burrowing owl, Florida scrub jay, Audubon crested caracara and ivory-billed woodpecker. Threatened animals include the Homosassa shrew, Sherman's fox squirrel, Eastern indigo snake, Florida pine snake, gopher tortoise and sand skink.

*"I actually applied to be a payload specialist on the 'new' space shuttle as I was finishing my Ph.D. But I never heard back from NASA; I always assumed they lost my application."*

— SCOTT ANGLE

**Q. How do you relax?**

**A.** By others' measures, I'm not that relaxed. I like nothing better than to sit at the beach and catch up on my scientific journals. When I really need to relax, I'll edit a scientific paper. I find that total immersion in someone else's work gives me 100% focus on nothing but their science.

**Q. Where's your favorite place to be?**

**A.** I've been a vagabond for a long time. As president of IFDC [International Fertilizer Development Center], I traveled across the Atlantic once a week as well as an overnight trip within Africa. I literally lived on a plane. My wife and

I just bought a house in the Duckpond area of Gainesville, and I plan to make it my favorite place to be. Specifically, I'm turning a room into my man cave/office. I'll decorate it with my various collections that only I appreciate. Since I haven't owned a TV for a decade, I plan to put a TV there so I can watch SEC football.

**Q. What's on your Netflix list?**

**A.** This week it's "The Queen's Gambit." I'm an awful chess player but enjoy the game. It's fun to learn more about the sport from the perspective of those who are actually good at the game.

**Q. What's a talent or skill that people might be surprised you have?**

**A.** I fix watches as a hobby. I do this for free for my friends and colleagues. Over the years I've learned a lot about watches, although 90% of watch fixing today simply means changing the battery.

**Q. What did you want to be when you were a child?**

**A.** Early on, an astronaut. Who didn't in the early '60s? I actually applied to be a payload specialist on the "new" space shuttle as I was finishing my Ph.D. But I never heard back from NASA; I always assumed they lost my application. But by then I realized that being a scientist allowed one to still explore and to go where no one had gone before. I still feel like an explorer.

**Q. What's been your biggest surprise?**

**A.** How little influence I had over my career. Whether it's the situation, others around me or just random chance, I look back on my career and could never





## ANGLE'S AMAZING CRAB CAKES

**1/2 cup mayonnaise**

**1 egg**

**2 slices of white bread – crust removed, broken into pieces**

**8 saltine crackers – crumbled**

**1 tsp. yellow mustard**

**1 tbsp. dry parsley (optional)**

**1 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce**

**Old Bay seasoning (about 1 tsp.) and salt to taste**

**1 lb. jumbo lump crab meat, preferably local. Drain liquid.**

- Blend together all ingredients except crab meat.
- Then, gently fold in crab meat without breaking up lumps into the mix above.
- Form into round balls, 4 to 6.
- Fry in oil, pan fry or bake. I bake by placing a pat of butter on top of each and cooking for about 20 minutes at 425 degrees.

have predicted the convoluted path I have taken. In fact, 40 years ago I would have said the things I have done were completely impossible and unrealistic.

### **Q. What or who has motivated and encouraged you during your career?**

**A.** Mentors. Never underestimate their influence. Those around you are shaping you in ways that are rarely obvious at the time. For me it was my master's adviser who showed me the joy of learning, teaching and research.

### **Q. You've been professionally involved in global food security issues. What can UF/IFAS do to address those problems?**

**A.** One seventh of the world's population goes to bed hungry every day. Many more

are malnourished. I mean this sincerely — and it's the reason why I wanted to come to UF/IFAS — there is no better organization in the world that can have such a profound impact on food, forest and fiber production. UF/IFAS is focused on problem solving, and no organization does it better. I believe in the moral obligation that our faculty and staff at UF/IFAS have to help. We can't do everything, but we can help feed our planet, promote healthier and happier families, and assure a cleaner environment. Most schools don't have the gravitas to do all of this. UF/IFAS does.

### **Q. What big changes might be ahead for Florida's farmers and ranchers?**

**A.** We can't compete in Florida with low labor costs found in other parts of the world. We don't want to. Instead, our farmers and ranchers will soon be turning to ultramodern, low-cost automation to do some of the hard labor now done by humans. Artificial intelligence has enormous potential to increase efficiency and lower costs of water and nutrients by precisely targeting what is needed ... This is not the stuff of the distant future — you'll see AI used routinely on our farms and ranches and forests in the next five years.

### **Q. Speaking of food, what's your go-to vegetable?**

**A.** Collard greens. I grew up hating all greens. But since moving to the South and finding the right way to cook them — lightly sautéed in oil and garlic, with a little vinegar — collard greens are now my favorite veggie.

### **Q. Is there a particular food you refuse to eat?**

**A.** Raw oysters. I grew up on the Chesapeake Bay surrounded by oyster eaters. While going to school in Missouri, I often bragged about the great oysters coming out of the Chesapeake Bay and how good they were. But I never really ate an oyster and certainly didn't like the idea of eating a living animal. Later, after I returned to Maryland, a Missouri friend came to Baltimore and said he wanted to try the oysters he remembered me speaking so fondly about. I was backed

into a corner and reluctantly took him to a raw bar where I was asked to show how it was done. With a dozen oysters, a little hot sauce and lemon, I slurped down my first oyster ever — which I immediately proceeded to regurgitate back up onto the bar. My stomach was having nothing to do with it. I was outed.

### **Q. What's a perfect Sunday meal?**

**A.** I make the world's best crab cakes. The recipe is from my brother's restaurant in Baltimore. The key is using fresh, local, unpasteurized jumbo lump crab meat — so, a crab cake, fries, coleslaw and sweet potato pie for dessert.

### **Q. If you could invite one person — living or dead — to dinner, who would it be?**

**A.** Charles Darwin. No one thought so far out of the box as he did at the time. It's not that I have any extraordinary interest in his theories and collected proof, but rather how he even came up with so many new ideas that went against so much contemporary dogma. What was he like as a child? Did his parents somehow instill this in him? Did his mind develop so much flexibility later in life? ... No one took more risks and did it better than Darwin.

### **Q. How does life in Gainesville compare to Athens, Georgia?**

**A.** They are very similar as both are small Southern college towns. They are diverse, creative and just a little bit avant-garde. For instance, I'm the only male in the Duckpond neighborhood my age who doesn't have a ponytail — although I'm thinking of growing one to better fit in.

### **Q. What's your favorite saying?**

**A.** I've faced a number of difficult times in my life. From this I've learned to fight to change what you can and accept with grace what you cannot. So, the saying I live by is, "It is what it is!"

### **Q. What professional or life advice would you give UF/IFAS students?**

**A.** Say yes without fear.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY UF HEALTH



# HOW A COVID SCIENTIST TAKES A BREAK FROM THE PRESSURE COOKER





## A UF COVID-19 expert shares how he relaxes when he's not battling the pandemic (it involves Hungarian paprika).

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON DAYE



John Lednicky, Ph.D., literally hasn't had a moment to spare since the pandemic hit last year. As one of the world's foremost experts on bat coronaviruses, the UF virologist has been on the frontlines of the fight against COVID-19, working seven days a week without a single break. That's dedication.

"My day starts at 5 a.m., and I am typically doing some sort of paperwork until 1 a.m.," he said in a recent interview at the Emerging Pathogens Institute (EPI). "No time for any hobbies."

But Lednicky does leave the lab at 6 p.m. every day to connect with his family. Cooking for his wife, a grants administrator at the Florida Museum of Natural History, and their children, Charles

and Isabelle, gives him the breather he needs from a 20-hour day crammed with research, meetings and TV and newspaper interviews.

"Having that little bit of family time helps," he said. "Note while dinner is cooking, I am answering emails, doing paperwork, and fielding phone calls from around the world."

Below and on the following pages, the star virologist graciously shares some of the unusual, mouthwatering dishes he whips up in his Gainesville kitchen with his family.

— BARBARA DRAKE (MFA '04)

### On the Menu:

John Lednicky takes readers on a world tour from his dinner table

*My wife and I are from multicultural backgrounds. I am Moravian and Asturian (Spanish) American and lived in the Philippines for many years; my wife is Polish, British, German and Swedish American. We spend quality time with our children eating what most Americans would consider "different food."*

LEFT TOP: Lednicky in his virology lab in UF's Department of Environmental and Global Health. And left, Lednicky and his daughter, Isabella in their kitchen.



### EASTERN EUROPEAN DISHES

#### Goulash (spiced meat and vegetables)

The traditional Hungarian version is made with beef, but the Czech versions use beef or pork. The key is to use Hungarian paprika.





## EASTERN EUROPEAN DISHES

### Moravian roast duck

You cook this on low heat, so you can start cooking early in the morning and go to work; then it is ready by dinnertime.

### Svíčková na smetaně (beef in cream sauce)

This is Czech comfort food for sure. I would eat this at least once a week if I could. It is typically made by frugal cooks with sirloin beef, but you can splurge and use tenderloin if you want.

### Vepřo knedlo zelo (roast pork)

This is one of my favorite meals. It goes best with Czech dumplings. It used to be you could buy them frozen at Publix, but no more. You need to make them from scratch now.



## FILIPINO DISHES

### Filipino pork kabobs

These are by far the best. I can eat them every day and not get tired of them. Use Filipino soy sauce and vinegar. Serve these at a party; you can never make enough of them.

### Filipino pork or chicken adobo (sliced meat cooked in soy sauce, vinegar and garlic)

Use Filipino soy sauce and sugarcane or palm vinegar.





Lednicky family dinners take place almost always around their dining room table. Clockwise from John Lednicky on the far left are their 18-year-old daughter, Isabelle, his wife, Julia, and their 15-year-old son, Charles.



### ITALIAN & OTHER EUROPEAN DISHES

#### **Spaghetti alle Vongole (spaghetti with clams)**

My daughter has prepared this dish for us. Be sure to get fresh Cedar Key clams from Dr. Andrew Kane [an environmental pathologist for EPI].

#### **Cioppino (tomato-based fish stew)**

This is great stuff, almost as good as Asturian caldereta

#### **Tafelspitz (Austrian boiled beef)**

I could easily eat this for lunch every day without tiring of it. Serve with a good horseradish sauce.



### SPANISH AND MEXICAN DISHES

#### **Paella seafood and traditional versions**

For fun, ask a Spaniard whether chorizo should be added. (The correct answer is “never,” but I do it anyway.)

#### **Asturian caldereta**

The most delicious fish stew imaginable. If you live in Gainesville, get your fish at Northwest Seafood.

#### **Fabada asturiana (fava bean and pork stew)**

It is hard to get the right beans and blood sausage for this dish, but it is definitely satisfying.

#### **Cocido madrileño (chickpea-based stew with meat and vegetables)**

This is comfort food, for sure. I serve it with a tomato sauce, which my Spanish relatives claim is “heretical.”



# PLANTING SEEDS FOR JUSTICE





# Gator attorney Greg Francis talks about winning the largest U.S. civil rights case ever, lessons he learned from farmers and why he values uphill climbs.

BY LIESL O'DELL (BSJ '92)

As an 11-year-old, Gregorio “Greg” Francis would lay in bed at night struggling to fall asleep while an incessant and irritating click, click, click, click, click came from his family’s kitchen. His older sister rarely noticed, falling asleep easily. But those clicks became etched in Francis’ memories as they continued night after night.

Almost 40 years later, Francis (BA '91, JD '94) waxes nostalgic about those clicks, as if they are part of the forces that drove him to become a renowned attorney who won the largest civil rights case in U.S. history (Black Farmers II or Pigford v. Glickman) and publish a book about it (Just Harvest), which has pre-sold thousands of copies and generated talks of a major motion picture.

But back then, growing up in Orlando’s Richmond Estates neighborhood where Francis says young boys “didn’t always go down the right path,” those clicks annoyed him and even drove him to loathe the criminal justice system that employed his stepfather, John Thompson, a corrections officer. You see, in order to qualify for a promotion and a raise, Thompson needed a college degree. But how could he earn one when he struggled to write?

Undeterred, Thompson tape recorded his lectures from evening classes at Valencia Community College. After he returned home and helped put their kids to bed, he and his wife, Annette Thompson, would sit at their kitchen table where Annette would transcribe the lessons as he clicked the buttons on the recorder: play, stop, rewind, play, stop, rewind, again and again to what seemed to young Greg an infinity of clicks.

Shortly before this time, Thompson left his 30-year Navy career that included serving in the Panama Canal Zone. That’s where he met and married Greg’s mother, Annette. Thompson brought her and Greg back to the U.S. in 1973. When Greg’s younger sister was born, Annette did her part to generate income by running a daycare in their home. After all, there were mouths to feed and futures to plan. Then there were the late-night transcribing sessions, too.

“They both earned that degree,” Francis says today. “Speaks volumes about my mother’s devotion.”

For Francis, the weight of that memory and its lesson wouldn’t hit home until seven years later when he encountered his own struggles as a freshman at UF.



TOP: Greg Francis' school photo  
ABOVE: Greg's mother and stepfather, Annette and John Thompson.



## TINY FISH, BIG POND

A self-described naïve high school football and track athlete who knew so little about college he applied to only one university, Francis struggled on every front when he became part of UF's 40,000-member student body. He quickly discovered he was a better student than athlete, but not by much. He longed to be an engineer, yet calculus and chemistry that first year dissolved that dream. A frustrated Francis turned to his mother for advice.

"After seeing those initial grades my mother told me, 'Go back [to UF] now, because if your dad sees these you won't be going back,'" Francis recalls. "That let me know the seriousness of where I was."

Relief arrived when Francis met an older engineering student on campus who invited him to library study sessions and introduced him to Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity's bright and experienced members.

"Once I joined that fraternity ... we became each other's support group," says Francis, who changed his major to criminal justice, in part because of his stepfather's work, but also because of the influence of several fraternity members who were aiming for law school. "I stay in contact with many of those guys. They are not only my peers, but my friends — professionally and socially."

Francis' academic and social about-face was so successful he was invited into UF's prestigious leadership honorary society Florida Blue Key, joined another, Savant, and served as the Honor Court chancellor.

Shortly before graduation, he decided law school would be his next challenge.

His parents couldn't afford the LSAT prep course, so he bought a prep book, looked up the LSAT testing schedule, divided the number of pages in the prep book by the number of days before the test — 40 — and began to study.

## MORE UPHILL CLIMBS

Law school, it would turn out, also did not come easy for Francis, who felt as if he were "constantly falling behind."

"I hadn't been around lawyers, didn't know any lawyers and hadn't seriously thought about law before then," Francis said. So unlike some of his classmates who grew up hearing about landmark cases and issues from family members, "all the concepts were new and unique to me."

Once again, Francis' determination, nurtured by his mentors, Professor Mike Seigel and Assistant Dean Rahim Reed, led him to eventually master his coursework. But more battles loomed. Following tradition, Francis applied for clerkships at prestigious firms. He struggled to gain footing with any of the firms to which he applied.

"Quite frankly, most minority law students were not getting internships with majority firms," Francis said.

Determined to find out why, he volunteered with the law school's career services office. There, he developed relationships with attorneys who came to UF looking for up-and-comers. He used



**The National Bar Association is among those groups that thanked Greg Francis (above, right) for his record-breaking legal case. Here, he was presented with a legends award.**

what he learned to tailor his resume. Success soon followed. He was hired as a clerk, then brought on full-time after graduation.

That was the first of only three firms he's worked with throughout his career, and he is co-owner of the third.

## CASE OF A LIFETIME

In 2008, when he worked at Morgan & Morgan, owned by Gators **John** (BA '78, JD '82) and **Ultima Morgan** (BA '77, JD '80), Francis came across a case that would, years later, become a nationwide class-action suit that Francis would lead and the National Bar Association would herald. For his extensive work Francis received the Bar's Vince Monroe Townsend Legends Award (pictured above) and named a Game Changer by Politic365. The case, officially called "Pigford v. Glickman," is better known as Black Farmers II. Looking back, Francis says the circumstances were so shocking, at first he could hardly comprehend what he heard.

Although it has been common since the Great Depression for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to offer disaster relief grants and loans to farmers who lose their crops after hurricanes, droughts or floods, Francis learned of widespread racism and corruption that left Black farmers without any of the aid their white counterparts received.

For example, after numerous delays and supposedly lost paperwork, his client, a Black farmer, was finally told by a USDA official that no check would be issued because the relief loan was





Francis' Black Farmers II legal win in 2010 brought about changes in USDA operations. Since then, our nation has experienced a 9% increase in Black-owned farms, an 88% increase in Native American farm operators and a 14% increase in Hispanic farm operators.

“too much money for a n-[racial slur] to receive.” In interview after interview with other Black farmers who filed complaints between 1983 and 1997, Francis heard the same or similar statements. Seven years of field work by Francis, his colleagues and other firms revealed a substantial case against the USDA

*Francis spent seven years documenting stories of Black farmers who were denied USDA grants. His case began with 400 people, but grew to 20,000.*

official and the larger agency. While Francis' case began with 400 Black farmers, it was later expanded to about 20,000.

“Because of their rural areas and the times — they had no internet access — each of these farmers suffered in silence,” Francis said. “They had no connectivity from town to town, state to state, to know this was happening all across the country. It was only through the farm advocacy organizations that they realized, ‘Hey, they’re doing this to us, too.’”

Francis won a \$1.25 billion settlement for the farmers, most of which has been paid thus far. The suit also brought about major

improvements to USDA operations, such as a civil rights program that over time has resulted in changes to agriculture as it pertains to minorities. Since the suit was won in 2010, the United States has seen a 9% increase in Black-owned farms, an 88% increase in Native American farm operators and a 14% increase in Hispanic farm operators.

“Many of these farmers lost their crops, their cattle ... they lost the opportunity to farm,” Francis said of his clients. “It has been both rewarding and fulfilling to be able to have a part in helping these hard-working Black farmers achieve some measure of justice from the USDA.”

#### **FARMER FRANCIS**

Today, Francis continues to devote his time to underdogs. For example, he represented a middle school girl who was assaulted by her school's resource officer, a young girl who contracted a debilitating brain infection while hospitalized for her epilepsy, a 10-year-old boy killed on his way home from school by a tractor trailer and a woman who was sexually assaulted by a hotel worker. For Francis, each case has been a reminder that human rights are threatened much too often and the world needs more defenders who understand their plight.

This is partly why he joined forces with two of his fellow UF law alumni, **Yolanda Cash Jackson** (BSJ '80, JD '90) of Miami and **Paul Perkins Jr.** (JD '91) of Orlando, who together launched





**LEFT:** Greg Francis was born in Panama, and came to the U.S. with his mother and stepfather when he was 7 years old. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Francis visits one of the 20,000 plaintiffs he represented in the record-breaking Black Farmers II class-action suit. **ABOVE:** Francis (second from left) pauses with a few Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity brothers at a UF event.

a UF scholarship for law students who earned undergraduate degrees at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

Francis says he was the first Black lawyer at both of his previous law firms. “That’s something that needs to be rectified,” he says.

Jackson had the idea for the scholarship and offered \$25K to get it going. Perkins joined in with another \$25,000.

But Francis wanted to ensure the fund would be endowed — available forever — which required a \$100,000 minimum gift. So Francis gave the remaining \$50,000 from the proceeds he earned on the Black Farmers’ case.

“The one thing I learned from that case ... is that all those farmers wanted was a chance,” Francis said. “They didn’t ask for anything extra. They just wanted to be treated — and to be given the same opportunities — as everyone else.”

Francis said those many clients made him think about the ripple effect of actions.

They “plant seeds in good ground and don’t know who they’re providing food for at that time,” Francis said. “That’s the same concept behind this scholarship for me. I don’t know who is

going to get this scholarship, but I know I want to plant seeds that will improve upon the numbers of Black lawyers in the state.”

Since Francis, Jackson and Perkins started the scholarship fund, other Gator lawyers, such as **Hugh Culverhouse** (BSBA

’71, JD ’74) of Coral Gables, have learned of their efforts and joined forces en masse, with about 50 alumni contributing \$1.2 million so far. College and alumni leaders say they’d like to grow the fund to \$2 million by 2022 so the scholarship can be offered to 10 students per year. The results of their efforts will be profound, says Francis, who wants the scholarship to spark

mentorship relationships with donors and encourage recipients, in turn, to mentor others as they advance — in other words to plant those seeds and watch them grow.

Perkins says he’s not surprised Francis jumped in with a gift to endow the scholarship.

“He is an excellent lawyer and an even better person,” Perkins said. “He is very generous with his time and treasure and extremely devoted to his community. He is a role model to

*“[Farmers] plant seeds in good ground and don’t know who they’re providing food for at that time. That’s the same concept behind this scholarship for me.”*

— GREG FRANCIS





**Greg Francis's family (from left) include his wife, Keisha, son, Gregorio "Rio," and daughter, Grier. With their support, his new Just Harvest Foundation is investing in Black families, communities and entrepreneurs throughout Florida. He created the foundation with proceeds from his landmark civil rights case.**

so many in the Orlando area in the legal community and the community at large. I feel blessed to call him my good friend."

### LOOKING AHEAD

Francis takes more time to reflect these days. He surveys his community in Orlando and sometimes wonders what Richmond Estates would be like today if all the young people had access to scholarships and been influenced by the same kind of determination and work ethic his mother and stepfather instilled in him.

"My friends here are pretty diverse. Some are businesspeople and professionals, some are incarcerated and some are dead," he said, adding that he strives to stay connected with locals, no matter their station in life, and with his Gator Nation friends and members of his fraternity and Florida Blue Key.

He holds tight to his roots and remains proud of his work: helping Morgan & Morgan build its firm by opening offices for them in Atlanta, Jackson, Mississippi, Orlando and Miami. (At the latter, he co-led the team with the late famed attorney Johnny Cochran.) However, Francis left the firm in 2018 and established Osborne & Francis with his former law clerk supervisor and fellow Gator, **Joseph Osborne** (JD '90). They have offices in Orlando and Boca Raton.

He's proud of his family: two bright children and his wife of 20 years, Keisha. He's proud of his alma mater, its No. 6 national

ranking and the strides it has made to become more inclusive and diverse. He's proud of his "investment in young people." And, he's proud to have defended the salt-of-the-earth farmers he talks about in reverent tones. In fact, his pride shows through every farming metaphor he musters.

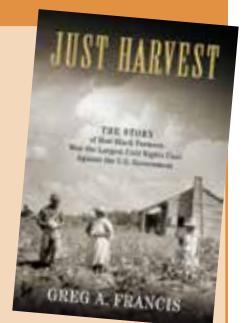
"Philanthropy means using what you have and replanting it to increase that bounty," says Francis.

As his alma mater prepares to begin issuing the scholarships he made possible to "increase the bounty" of Black lawyers in Florida and beyond, Francis offers one admonition for the young people who might benefit from it:

"Be ready to use your talents for the good of others," he urges. "That's what it's all about."

### JUST HARVEST

For his book, Francis worked with journalist and author Mark Schlabach, whose best-selling books include **What It Means to be a Gator**; **Death Row Chaplain: Unbelievable True Stories from America's Most Notorious Prison**; **Heisman: The Man Behind the Trophy**; and five Duck Commander-related stories.



# THE MARVELOUS

*As Gator Nation mourns the loss of federal judge Stephan Mickle, his daughter shares life lessons learned from her trailblazing parents*

BY LIESL O'DELL (BSJ '92)

**S**tephanie Mickle (JD '04) has never had to look far to find great role models. The political consultant in Washington, D.C., former general counsel to **Sen. Bill Nelson** (1962) and author of "Follow the Leader," who advocates for more women to get involved in public service, was born to amazing parents.

Her father, retired federal judge **Stephan Mickle** (BA '65, MEd '66, JD '70), died on Jan. 26 at age 76. He was UF's first Black undergraduate and second Black law school graduate. Among his other successes: He was the first Black judge in Alachua County, first Black federal judge and chief judge in the North Florida District and UF's first Black Distinguished Alumnus Award recipient. He also helped launch the trial advocacy program at the Levin College of Law and volunteered many years with the college's Moot Court competitions, as well as a host of advisory boards. As a young attorney, Stephan Mickle and some of his colleagues started Three Rivers Legal Services, which has grown to help low-income people in need of legal representation across 17 Florida counties.

Stephanie's mother, **Evelyn Mickle** (BSN '67), is UF's first Black nursing graduate. She spent the majority of her career as a school nurse, although she also served stints in psychiatry, pediatrics, internal medicine and health education while raising their three children and supporting her husband's civic work. All of their children, incidentally, went on to earn advanced degrees.

**Q. What does it mean to you to be a Gator?**

**A.** It's a legacy. Becoming a Gator ... is something we share. My dad spoke at my law school graduation and was the one to place my doctorate hood on me. When my mom received her pin from the nursing school, I was able to be part of that experience, as well.



PROVIDED PHOTO



# MICKLES



Stephanie Mickle, right, says her mother, Evelyn Mickle, remains her role model. Her father, Stephan Mickle, who paved the way for Black attorneys and judges in north Florida, passed away in late January as this article was being prepared.

**Q. Your parents were trailblazers. What was it like to grow up under their influences?**

**A.** My parents did not accept excuses from us. We were taught to treat all people with respect. They pushed us to try and figure things out for ourselves: how to maintain our GPA, how to resolve conflict. Their journeys at UF weren't something they talked about every day, but when they were asked about it, they were open about their experiences and the perspectives they had. For instance, in college, Dad mainly talked with the janitor because there were no other Black students on campus. In law school, most of his friends were Jewish because many of them were discriminated against, too. Dad and Mom were both achievers. She was really the wind beneath his wings — for all of their 54 years together. They looked out for one another. She was an RN when he was in law school. They often shared that they lived in married student housing while Dad was in law

Stephanie Mickle authored the book “Follow the Leader.” She advocates for more women to become involved in our nation’s legislative system.



PROVIDED PHOTOS

This portrait of Stephanie’s father, Stephan Mickle, was installed in UF’s Levin Trial Advocacy Center in October to honor his many contributions to the legal profession and UF’s law school. Among them, he helped launch UF’s trial advocacy program.

*“Dad and Mom were both achievers. She was really the wind beneath his wings — for all of their 54 years together. They looked out for one another. ... Having those kinds of examples of true partnership in life is super important to us.”*

— STEPHANIE MICKLE, POLITICAL CONSULTANT AND AUTHOR

school, and that they lived on her nursing salary. And then when the kids came along, we lived on his salary. Having those kinds of examples of true partnership in life is super important to us. Whatever the challenge was, there was a family belief that “together we can figure it out.”

**Q. Which of your dad’s qualities do you strive to emulate most?**

**A.** His spirit of excellence and his sense of fairness. How he was so thoughtful and deliberate, weighing pros and cons, doing lots of research. I’m a big-time researcher. How my dad always treated people the same, no matter who they were.



AARON DAYE

Stephan Mickle, former chief judge of the U.S. District Court's north Florida district, spoke at this UF Center for the Study of Race and Race Relations event in 2008 at the Hilton in Gainesville. At the time, the center was honoring him for having served 10 years on the federal bench.

**Q. What is it like to work in what many would consider the most hostile city in the nation?**

**A.** I love D.C. despite what we have seen lately. It keeps you on your toes. Most of the people who work in government, especially on Capitol Hill, are type-A personalities and very committed to the work they do. But, I understand why most of America thinks D.C. is detached from the realities of Main Street because it can be its own bubble of creativity and policy solutions.

When I worked for Sen. Nelson on the Hill, there was not that sense of gridlock that exists today. There was a commitment to bipartisanship, at least with many leaders. That approach has deteriorated considerably since then. Like my mom, I take the long view and believe things will swing back the other way, eventually. But it's disheartening for graduates fresh out of college who come here wanting to make a difference. One of this place's biggest casualties are the disillusioned.

As I wrote in my book, anytime you try to advance legislation, there will always be someone on the other side who thinks your idea is terrible. You have to have determination ... to get anything done. But there is a code of conduct for how to push through legislation. I think citizens have a desire to go back to the days of civil debate and bipartisanship.

**Q. What can we do to improve D.C.?**

**A.** We need to hold people accountable for their words and actions. This is starting to be imposed by our citizenry. First, it was the "Me too" movement. Then we had reactions to immigration policies. It's forcing us to look at ourselves in a mirror and say, "Is this who we want to be?" Then the situation with George Floyd happened, and the outrage that came from seeing a man's life taken in such a barbaric way. And now COVID. It's all starting to push our government back in the other direction.





PROVIDED PHOTO

At her law school graduation, Stephanie Mickle was presented with her advanced-degree hood by her father, UF law alumnus Stephan Mickle, who volunteered with UF in a plethora of capacities over the years.

**Q. How can UF and Gator Nation continue your dad's legacy of striving for true equality?**

**A.** One huge thing is being very intentional about treating people with dignity. For example, my father was pro-women early on. Many people don't know that he joined the Florida Women Lawyer's Association in Alachua County. I was very young at the time and remember asking him, "You're not a woman, why did you join?" He said, "It was the right thing to do." There were a lot of things he did without fanfare because he thought they were right.

Also, there can be very intentional prioritization of programs that celebrate multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion. Not just studies, but programs that bring in people whose background and experiences contribute different viewpoints and understanding. That is valuable in itself; it's not a niche. That elevates the dignity with which you are treating your students, staff, faculty and alumni.

UF and Gator Nation can celebrate the stories of more alumni like my dad or those who look like my dad, with paintings, pictures or statues around campus. To have students see people who look like them and have achieved so much in their careers and have given so much back to their university is hugely important. It gives them something to aspire to.

**Q. What was one of your dad's favorite sayings?**

**A.** He had lots. One of my favorites still is "seriousness of purpose." It means you have a job to do, a goal, and you understand how important it is to rise to the occasion and achieve that mission. He

*"Despite the discrimination he faced at UF, Dad still maintained an attitude of, 'What can I do today?'"*

*"There are a lot of alumni who don't know who he was — and he lived in Gainesville. He was active on many university boards for many years. It's important for people to see someone who looks like them have that level of involvement."*

— STEPHANIE MICKLE

talked a lot about how he helped integrate UF and how he had to conduct himself. The mindset and energy that is required to accomplish such a goal takes great focus and determination.

**Q. What's one of your mom's mantras?**

**A.** It's not one she said but, rather, lived. She always looks forward, not back. Mom graduated from the nursing school under harsh circumstances, with a couple of instructors who did their best to discourage her. UF had recruited her from the community college in Ocala because it wanted to integrate. After she accepted their offer over historically Black colleges and universities, some of the faculty tried to get her to quit.

For example, Mom fainted in one of her classes, and they put her on psychotropic meds because they said she was mentally ill. She wasn't mentally ill. She was exhausted because they gave her the worst patients and the worst schedules. They even cancelled commencement the year she graduated so they wouldn't have to give her the [official nurse's] pin. Yet, to my mom's credit, she doesn't harbor hostility about any of that.

When the nursing school decided to make amends, Mom became more active, serving on boards and helping the college. Dean Anna McDaniel deserves a lot of credit for making that happen. Mom could have ignored or refused her invitations to serve. But together, they've shown a lot of people how to make things better. I am appreciative of that because Mom and women like her deserve to be held up as examples.

**Q. Decades from now, what do you hope people will remember about your parents?**

**A.** Dad's tremendous quiet strength. From the top of his head to the soles of his feet, he was a judge whose every effort was rooted in fairness. He had a level of determination that was unparalleled. He was a never-quit kind of person. Mom, too. That's one of the reasons they hit it off while they were dating at UF. Despite the discrimination he faced at UF, Dad still maintained an attitude of, "What can I do today?" There are a lot of alumni who don't know who he was — and he lived in Gainesville. He was active on many university boards for many years. It's important for people to see someone who looks like them have that level of involvement.



# *The Growing Season*

As a Black woman, academic and owner of Live Organically, in Minnesota, Lakisha Witter is joyfully challenging stereotypes about farming in America. But this double Gator's greatest achievement is her personal triumph over early adversity.

BY BARBARA DRAKE (MFA '04)

AS DRY AS DUST. That's what the five-acre farm site looks like in the before photo (above) the young woman is pointing to. Pale gray, sandy soil. A couple of drab buildings and a few lines of trees. And in the bottom left, outlined in red, a flat expanse of dirt with five tiny dots casting noontime shadows – the horses that originally lived on the property just north of Minneapolis.

What person with no prior farming experience would look at this barren moonscape and think, "I'm going to grow delicious organic vegetables there?"

The expectation-defying woman giving this Zoom presentation to local farmers, that's who. Lakisha Witter (BA '09, MED '13), Ed.D., a proud double Gator, special education director and, since 2018, the owner/operator of Live Organically farm, in Oak Grove, Minnesota.

It turns out, having horses onsite offers definite advantages for an aspiring organic farmer. "They gave me a lot of good poop for fertilizing," laughs Witter, speaking to the members of the Twin Cities Metro Growers Network in October.

Ten minutes into her slideshow, she showcases the bounty of her second year of farming: about 1,000 pounds of certified organic tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, kale, squash and more. Proof that with hard work, caring guidance and some TLC, Minnesota's sandy glacial outwash can be converted into a fertile Eden.

Making things flourish despite less-than-ideal beginnings is an art Witter has perfected over her 32 years. She rose from a neglected childhood and foster care to become one of UF's Florida Opportunity Scholars, earning two degrees at UF, plus an educational specialist degree and a recent doctorate in educational leadership. And it's all due to her formidable persistence, her religious faith and the encouragement she received from mentors and fellow Gators who recognized the spark in her.







A double Gator, Lakisha Witter is one of a small, but growing, number of farmers of color in Minnesota; her trailblazing efforts have been highlighted in national news reports. Below, Witter shows off the kale she raised on her five-acre farm while maintaining a full teaching and educational consulting career. Above, left is an aerial view of her farm at the time she bought it.



PHOTO BY JENN ACKERMAN



**“Whatever hand you’re dealt in life at the start, you can’t change that. But you can change where you end up.”**

**– Lakisha Witter**

“When I look back at my life, I feel that I didn’t become a statistic because I had positive people pour into my life,” she says. “Whatever hand you’re dealt in life at the start, you can’t change that. But you can change where you end up.”

### **“You Will Not Be a Statistic”**

Witter’s story begins in 1988 when she was born to impoverished parents, one of 12 siblings. Her mother struggled with substance abuse, she says, which led to neglect and abuse of her children. Witter remembers little of those dark early years, save a lesson passed on from her biological father.

“I remember being in kindergarten and bringing home a report card, and he would give me \$5 for every good mark, every E,” she says. “I remember him telling me, ‘You are going to college one day. You will not be a statistic.’”

At around age 9, Witter was placed in foster care with a family in northern Florida. It was a godsend for the bright little girl, who became an avid reader.

“I was fortunate to be in a great home, of a Christian family that brought stability,” she says. “I’ve seen the changes in my life from having a positive environment — how it changed my self-esteem, how it changed my hope and my belief in myself.”

Growing up, Witter felt the hurt and rejection common to foster-care children over having been abandoned by their biological parents. But with the support of her foster family and various mentors — including a high school teacher who saw her academic potential —

Witter resolved not to wallow in self-pity or fall prey to substance abuse, like some in her situation.

“Early on, I said to myself, ‘I’m not going to have a sad story. I’m not going to give up on myself,’” she explains.

At age 17, Witter graduated from Union County High School, in Lake Butler, already certified as a nursing assistant (CNA). In her other hand she held the AA degree she had simultaneously earned. The dream of attending a four-year college was tantalizingly close. But how could she make it happen, with neither money nor college-educated family members to guide her?

“I didn’t have a model for going to college,” she says. “I just had hope. That’s the only way I can describe it.”

### **The Teacher Within**

That hope was fulfilled when UF offered her a full scholarship through what is now called the Machen Florida Opportunity Scholars program. Witter arrived at the Gainesville campus in August 2006, dreaming of a brighter future for herself.

The driven student initially had little time for extracurricular activities, apart from attending a few tailgates and being a member of Nu Alpha Lambda Christian Service Organization. Rather, her attention was focused on her studies, while working as a CNA and as an afternoon teacher for elementary schoolchildren.

“I was in the pre-med track because I wanted desperately to be a neurologist,” she says. “At the time I was so inspired by Ben Carson.”

Witter’s intelligence and outsized determination caught the attention of Dr. Richard Hill, an associate professor at the College of Veterinary Medicine and her assigned mentor in the University Multicultural Mentor Program. Hill ended up advising her on academic matters and broadening her horizons, with everything from trying different foods, to going to museums and the theater, to walking in Florida’s state parks.

“What stood out was that she was genuinely interested in new things and experiences,” says Hill, admiringly.

Likewise, those informal field trips and Hill’s mentorship made a big impression on Witter.

**Earning her 2009 bachelor’s in sociology fulfilled a childhood dream for Witter.**







Witter (right) paused for this photo at a home Gator football game with Richard Hill, a professor in the College of Veterinary Medicine whom Witter describes as her “most trusted advisor.” Witter is most grateful to Hill for pushing her to get “out of her comfort zone.” Hill was assigned to mentor Witter as part of UF’s Multicultural Mentor program.

### “I KNEW YOU NEEDED MORE”

In 2009, 20-year-old Witter proudly walked across the O’Connell Center stage and accepted her sociology degree. Four years later, she earned a master’s degree in special education. She had bucked the odds and not only survived, but triumphed. But as she celebrated her achievements, words from her mentor, Richard Hill, played in the back of her mind.

“He was always telling me to make time for family and relationships,” she says. “To slow down and cherish the moment.”

Over the prior years, with a therapist’s help, Witter had been working through the emotional traumas of her childhood. Now strengthened, she reached out to her biological mother, determined to keep things positive.

“One of the things my faith tells me is that I cannot be the positive light if I hold onto the darkness of unforgiveness about what someone did to me,” she says. “So, my mom, maybe she hasn’t been the best mom, but I honor and respect her because she chose to give life to me.”

During that pivotal conversation, her mother’s words caused Witter to “melt to tears,” she says.

“She said, ‘I gave you away because I knew you needed more,’” Witter remembers. “She told me, ‘On my best day, I couldn’t be the parent you needed so you could succeed. I may have looked like I didn’t love you, but I loved you enough to give you away to the foster family that would care for you.’”

That admission opened the floodgates to forgiveness and the gradual forging of new bonds between mother and daughter.

“Our relationship now, even though she wasn’t there for me originally, it is very beautiful,” she says. “We love and respect each other.”

“He gave me hope that a future was possible, a future without poverty or abuse,” she says. “So, once I saw it, I said, ‘I’m going to create that life for myself and my future kids, whatever it takes.’”

One day, Witter was walking past the Marston Science Library where she ran into an outreach group from the local Fire of God Ministries. A member she didn’t even know singled her out by name with a special message.

“The guy was like, ‘Oh, Lakisha, you are going to make a wonderful teacher,’ and I was like, ‘Dude, what are you saying? I didn’t come to college to be poor!’” she laughs.

It was a reality check, she says.

“I realized I wanted to go into medicine not because I was passionate about saving lives, but I was passionate about making money,” she says. “When I looked at my life, ever since I was a little girl, I was always teaching people. Even then, I was teaching at a daycare, teaching parents, but I never fully embraced it because I had just heard stories about poor teachers.”

After some deep soul searching, Witter changed her major to sociology and resolved to become an educator.

“I went into education because I’m passionate about changing lives and the destinies of children,” she says. “Even if I didn’t get paid millions of bucks, I knew that if I could wake up every single day knowing I changed a child’s life, I would do it for the rest of my life.”



With help from the state, Witter secured funding in her second year of farming to install a drip irrigation system. In her first year, she spent five to six hours a day watering her crops by hand — before and after teaching classes at Bethel University.

### An Adventurous Spirit

Mom “says from when I was a little girl, I was always adventurous,” says Witter. “And now she doesn’t ever want to stop me from being adventurous.”

Witter let that spirit guide her in 2015 when she pulled up roots and moved to Minnesota, more than 1,000 miles north. She was inspired by a story she read about Bernadeia Johnson, Ed.D., Minneapolis’s first Black superintendent, who was working to foster educational equity for all students.

“I thought, ‘If I could just meet her and shake her hand, that would give me the sign that I could succeed on my own path,’” she says. “And God gave me the courage to make that change.”

Witter started over again in Minneapolis, where she began working toward her doctorate in educational leadership at Minnesota State University. Soon she not only met but began collaborating on academic papers with Johnson. To support herself, she founded an educational consulting firm, overseeing the special education requirements of charter schools in the Twin Cities region, and later became an adjunct professor in Bethel University’s graduate program in special education.

That gave her the financial stability to embark on her biggest adventure yet. In 2018 — with no farming experience, training or family connection to agriculture — she bought a five-acre farm in Oak Grove, an hour from Minneapolis, and began cleaning up the property so she could grow organic vegetables.

Adding farming to an already-full plate might sound far-fetched (not to mention tiring), but Witter’s decision was grounded in practicalities.

In her early 20s, problems digesting meat had prompted her to become a vegetarian, and she knew growing her own produce would be optimal for her health, as well as for the health of her future children. Plus, she envisioned using the farm and its horses for educational purposes.

She named her farm Live Organically, joining the growing tide of Minnesota farmers who commit to sustainable practices.

Her first year of farming, Witter cultivated just a quarter acre, relying on the advice of other farmers on how to coax fresh



vegetables from the region’s famously sandy soil. Speaking in October to members of the Twin Cities Metro Growers Network, she admitted her learning curve was plenty steep.

“I measured all my beds by hand ... I didn’t know anything about watering, like a drip irrigation system,” she said. “I had to go out and water one-fourth of an acre by hand with the water hose, about five to six hours a day, before and after I got back from teaching.”

Rabbits ate her zucchini and squash, and deer kept jumping over a fence to munch on her watermelons. But Witter fought the urge to label her hungry visitors “pests” (“I prefer ‘friends,’” she says) and found humane workarounds to her setbacks.

Early on, she had an epiphany: “I told myself, ‘It’s OK that I don’t know anything. And if it fails, at least I tried it... So, that first year wasn’t what I wanted, but I was proud of myself because I had the courage to start it, and then I made a plan to get better.’”

### Art of Being Resourceful

Live Organically grew by leaps and bounds in Witter’s second year of farming. With the help of an urban agriculture grant from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, as well as assistance from local farming programs, she installed a drip irrigation system, began mulching and covering her crops, and erected a greenhouse. Interns from Bethel University lent a much-needed hand with everything from planting to harvesting.

To help raise money for seedlings and compost, she started her own community supporting agriculture (CSA) program, in which consumers “subscribe” to farmers’ future harvests.



**I cannot be a positive light if  
I hold onto the darkness of  
unforgiveness about what  
someone did to me.”**

**– Lakisha Witter**

Expanding to two acres, Witter ended up growing more than 1,000 pounds of 60 organic crops — including eggplant, tomatoes, peppers and microgreens — for 25 CSA families.

“It was a lot of pressure for me to produce for them, but we got it done,” she says with satisfaction.

By the summer of 2020, Witter was attracting attention in the Twin Cities and beyond. On many levels — as an academic, as a woman, as a person of color — she was defying stereotypes about the face of agriculture in the Land of 10,000 Lakes, where just 0.03% of farms are Black-owned or -operated, according to the latest agriculture census.

Fox News featured Witter in a story on Minnesota’s efforts to encourage more people of color to farm. (CNN and The New York Times also ran stories on Witter.)

Speaking about perceptions of farming within the Black community, Witter was quoted by Fox as saying, “I think we put a lot of emphasis on being the next NBA player or the next football player, but farming is a thing too.... It’s the future of the world we live in.”

Witter has also begun to share her experiences at events for other growers. She stresses the mindset she honed at UF — be resourceful and ask for help — and is happy to engage with both established farmers and those new to agriculture.

“It’s been an opportunity to redefine what farming looks like for a lot of people,” she says. “You know, I’m not a traditional white male, I didn’t inherit the land, so it’s those types of narratives that my being present in this domain is shaking up.”

Being part of a statewide push to make farming more inclusive is “very encouraging,” she says.

“Minnesota is becoming very open to these ideas. We are still working on redefining what farming looks like.”

### **Hatching Plans with “the Golden Girls”**

Witter has big plans for the 2021 growing season. This winter she completed a course at Oregon State in permaculture (the design of agriculture systems based on natural ecosystems) and began putting those principles to work at Live Organically in March, starting with vegetables in her greenhouse. She has expanded her farming operation to three acres and expects to produce food for between 50 and 100 CSA members, as well as for local school districts and for sale to wholesale outlets, co-ops and grocery stores.

She also hopes to provide extended learning opportunities to local schools so K-8 students can learn about sustainable farming and nutrition.

And then, there are the chickens. Specifically, the 50 hens that Witter bought as chicks to supply her with eggs come springtime.

The hens have introduced a whole new learning curve, including the surprise that she didn’t need to hook them up with a rooster just yet.

“I didn’t know that a chicken could lay an egg without a rooster; they do, the eggs are just not fertile,” she says. But Witter is “rolling with the punches” and mastering the basics of tending “the Golden Girls.”

That’s the name her young cousins have given to her brood. The chickens are regular guests on Zoom calls with family members.

“They’ve given individual names to 15 of the Golden Girls so far,” laughs Witter. “Now that the hens have started laying eggs, we’re putting name tags on their little feet.”

Like so much in Witter’s life, collecting those first eggs is her reward for years of persistence and faith that it’s possible to create a better tomorrow for one’s self and others. But that philosophy doesn’t just apply to her unique life story, she stresses. It holds true for every Gator.

“I like to tell people, we are Gators, we have strong blood, and we can change the world,” she says. “We just have to believe in ourselves.”

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**



• [LiveOrganicallyMN.com](https://LiveOrganicallyMN.com)  
• [uff.to/90km6s](https://uff.to/90km6s)  
• [https://smallfarm.ifas.ufl.edu/  
production/organic-production](https://smallfarm.ifas.ufl.edu/production/organic-production)



LiveOrganicallyMN



@MnOrganically

# WHEN YOU'RE "MOST LIKELY TO

Sarah Kaiser-Cross took this selfie in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, in 2017.

She appeared in the 2019 documentary "Most Likely to Succeed," which is available on Amazon Prime.



# SUCCEED”

## *What does success really mean?*

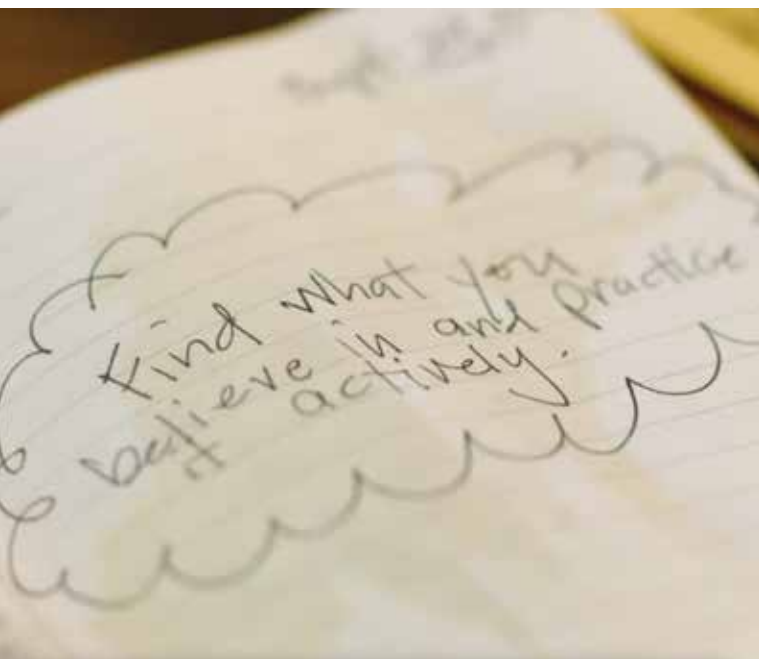
*Gator Sarah Kaiser-Cross (BA '11), who was featured in a 2019 film, reflects on how her UF journey shaped her dreams and her destinations.*

BY HEATHER GRAULICH

SARAH KAISER-CROSS, one of the subjects of the 2019 documentary film “Most Likely to Succeed” (directed by award-winning photographer Pamela Littky), practically bubbles off the screen — at first glance a typical South Florida teenager from an affluent, beachy suburb, right down to her pink tank top and designer jeans.

Her aqua bedroom walls are plastered with photos of fun times with friends and peppy motivational quotes. She and her doting parents laugh together as they pack endless piles of clothes for her move to the University of Florida.

But where the lens lingers, deeper layers are revealed. The aspirational note taped to her mirror: “First Woman President.” What she says to the camera in the early moments of the film, with confident directness: “I think it’d be nice to have a female leader in the United States, to promote peace ... for once.” The intense need to examine her own faith, and those of others, despite being the child of two Christian pastors.



IMAGES CAPTURED FROM THE FILM, "MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED"

**AT TOP:** A page from Kaiser-Cross' diary

**ABOVE:** Her view in UF's Arabic language class



**Kaiser-Cross (left) posed for this graduation photo with her friends in Ben Hill Griffin Stadium.**

"I want to understand every religion because it's such a big part of how people define themselves," she said then, at the very beginning of a life defined by challenging expectations and assumptions.

Kaiser-Cross (BA '11) is now 32 years old and working as an associate director in financial crime risk for global banking giant HSBC, a U.S.-based job she landed after first working with the company in Dubai.

She studied in Israel and Egypt over four semesters while at UF — an enlightening path she credits to mentorship in the study abroad program by **Martin McKellar** (MS '84, PhD '88), as well as insights gained from African politics instructor **Joseph Kraus** (MA '07, PhD '10).

"My first decision to study abroad was on a whim, so I went to Martin and told him I didn't know anything about anywhere, but I didn't want to do Europe. So, I ended up going to Israel, and that summer changed my life. I'll forever be grateful for his guidance."

Kaiser-Cross graduated Phi Beta Kappa from UF and earned a Fulbright Teaching Fellowship in Turkey, then dual master's degrees in Middle Eastern studies and global policy studies at the University of Texas. She speaks Arabic, Hebrew and Turkish; has journeyed to nearly 30 countries; and moved back to the States in January 2019, just before the coronavirus pandemic ended what had been a whirlwind phase of travel and exploration — both outward and inward.

She credits her parents for their unwavering encouragement of her drive to question norms, her experiences serving as one of UF's Cicerone student ambassadors and, yes, that fluke starring role in a documentary, with preparing her to take on challenges and seek spiritual and intellectual growth.

"I would absolutely do it again," Kaiser-Cross says of the film, which followed four high-achieving students with diverse





IMAGE CAPTURED FROM THE FILM "MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED"

Since graduation, Kaiser-Cross has lived on four continents. She is pictured above in a Dubai market, where she stopped to sample dried lemons and other fruit.

backgrounds and interests from 2007 to 2017. "It has been one of the most beautiful avenues for self-reflection. How many people get to watch their values and perspectives and relationships change over 10 years?

"Every year, Pam would ask, what does success mean to you? And every year from age 18 to 28, I took time to reflect on that and how it translated to happiness. It became almost a cornerstone every year to check in and say, am I being true to what I believe to be a success?"

## *A Chance Meeting, a Life-Changing Choice*

Kaiser-Cross of Naples was competing in a high school scholarship program when a substitute judge took note of her superlatives. The judge happened to be Littky's father, and he mentioned the film to Kaiser-Cross. Would she be interested in participating?

"I said, life is short, let's go for it," says Kaiser-Cross. "It was an act of fate."

"Sarah was a great subject from the outset," says Littky. "What was so incredible for me as a filmmaker was watching her blossom and grow. At 18 years old, I remember her being ambitious, motivated and curious about the world, and she is still all of that. She has matured in a really beautiful way, which was a fascinating journey to watch. I always felt like I personally learned from her thoughts and her take on life, so I felt the audience would connect with her as well."

Now, 14 years past those early moments of "Most Likely to Succeed," Kaiser-Cross is herself able to view the documentary — and her own formative years — with wider and more

*"Every year, Pam would ask,  
what does success mean to you?  
And every year from age 18  
to 28, I took time to reflect on  
that and how it translated to  
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cornerstone every year to check  
in and say, am I being true to  
what I believe to be a success?"*

— SARAH KAISER-CROSS



**"MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED"**  
(2019)

In 2007, four teenagers from disparate backgrounds are voted "Most Likely To Succeed" during their senior year of high school. Filmed over a 10-year period and directed by Pamela Littky, they each chart their own version of success and navigate the unpredictability of American life. (1 h 36 min)

Find and watch the film on  
**AMAZON PRIME.**



Kaiser-Cross at  
Mt. Sinai, Egypt, in 2009

*“It was very challenging for me to watch [in the film] how unaware I was about my own privilege. I had never traveled, and I was very insulated in my world. I hope this can be an invitation for people to reflect on their privilege and an opportunity to build more equitable and inclusive communities.”*

— SARAH KAISER-CROSS

mature vision. In the film, she and Peter are the white kids from comfortable, two-parent households while Charles and Quay, both African-American, come from less stable homes in Detroit and face significant personal and economic hurdles.

“It was very challenging for me to watch [in the film] how unaware I was about my own privilege,” says Kaiser-Cross. “I had never traveled, and I was very insulated in my world. As people are watching, especially those who are racially privileged, I hope this can be an invitation for people to reflect on their privilege and an opportunity to build more equitable and inclusive communities.”

Kaiser-Cross says travel was key in expanding her understanding of racism and marginalized populations not only in foreign lands, but especially back home.

“The discussions I had about race and politics outside of the U.S. were very informative, especially for things like Black Lives Matter — we have a very unique national history that needs to be addressed,” she says. “We all, honestly, have a moral responsibility to ask ourselves the hard questions. Are you showing up and living your values?”





PROVIDED PHOTOS

Kaiser-Cross (center) with friends in 2007 as Gator Nation celebrates UF football's national championship win.

## Back in Florida

Kaiser-Cross says though she was abroad and missed the film's premiere when the cast gathered, she has since had a Zoom meeting with Peter, Charles and Quay — the first time all four had talked. Their identities were kept secret from one another during filming.

"It's a cool bond," she says of the group. "We've all changed and grown. Everyone seems to be at peace with their choices. And maybe that's the thing — keep reevaluating your definition of success."

Next steps for Sarah? She recently moved back to Florida, continuing her work for HSBC bank from her parents' home in Naples as the pandemic continued to unfold, while planning a move to Florida's east coast. In the film, she muses on being secretary of state someday, though she says to Littky on camera, "Don't put that in there or it won't come true!"

"I think public service is a really beautiful way to be a voice for the community and to advocate for people and improve their lives," she says now. "Right now, the extremes of the political environment are troubling. I no longer think politics is the only vehicle for change, but it's still a critical cornerstone. It would be such an honor to be able to fight for a community and ensure that everybody's voices are heard."

And you can bet there will be plenty of visits back to Gainesville now that she's returned to Florida.

"I was there the year we won back-to-back national [football] championships, and everyone crowded onto the streets, the firefighters came out to celebrate and do Gator chants, people were climbing trees and had banners — it was one of the most fun moments ever in college. The Gator culture brings everyone together. And I'm still a huge football fan."

## SARAH'S TOP 5 LIFE HACKS

Sarah Kaiser-Cross says her time at UF and experiences since graduation have given her tried-and-true guideposts for a fulfilling life:

- 1. Travel (or live) in a country where English is not the first language** — and go it alone sometimes. The more I expanded my understanding of the world, the better I could understand perspectives vastly different from my own. And when I traveled alone, I learned my likes, dislikes, impulses and fears more deeply than I ever dreamed.
- 2. Continually re-examine your personal definition of success.** The more honest I am with what makes me happy and feel "successful," the better able I am to pivot my life to reflect that new picture.
- 3. Do things that scare you.** Working through fear made me grow. I had serious doubts when I was getting ready to jump off a cliff in Zambia, but I jumped.
- 4. Don't take anyone's advice too seriously.** Honestly, none of us knows what we're doing. We are just trying to do our best and trying to do a little better each day. Find your gut, your guide, your truth and don't doubt that voice.
- 5. Travel with self-warming eye masks.** Really! I never hop on a long distance flight without self-heating lavender eye masks. They have a way of lulling me right to sleep, and smell wonderful.



Kaiser-Cross as she climbs a waterfall in Vietnam in 2015



BRENT WARREN THOMPSON



DIANE PONCE THOMPSON



LYNDA PONCE SMITH



DOUGLAS ELSWORTH SMITH



RONALD ELSWORTH SMITH



ASHLYN MARIE WENINGER



ANDREA MINOZZI THOMPSON



CRAIG PETER THOMPSON



WARREN THOMPSON



SHERA SMITH WENINGER



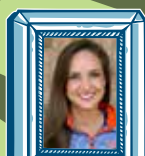
BRENNA FISHER CUBA



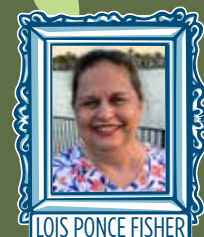
DAVID LEE FISHER



REGAN THOMPSON OLSSON



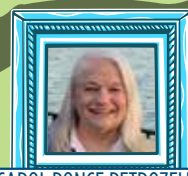
GEORGIA BUCKHALTER THOMPSON



LOIS PONCE FISHER



PHILIP W. PETROZELLA



CAROL PONCE PETROZELLA



DANIEL AMAT



RYAN GARRISS FISHER



MILTON GARRISS FISHER



LINDSAY AMAT



ALICE PONCE AMAT



ELIZABETH AMAT



INGRID HAMANN PONCE



DANNY PONCE



SCOTT PONCE



SERGIO PONCE



SERGIO PONCE & OLGA GONZALEZ PONCE

# Ponce - Gonzalez

## FAMILY TREE





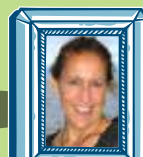
ERIN SHAY WALL



DAVID ALAN MACINNES, SR



DONALD A. MACINNES, JR



ELLEN MACINNES HACKETT



DENNIS MICHAEL MACINNES



LYNNE FERRI EVANS



CHRISTOPHER ANDREW FENNEL



DONALD A. MACINNES, SR



ESTHER GONZALEZ MACINNES



GENE FERRI, III



HANK ALFRED MACINNES



RYAN MACINNES



NATHAN WADE MACINNES



JUSTIN DIAMOND



GLORIA GONZALEZ TYSON



ALAN TYSON



ROB ROY MACCINES, JR



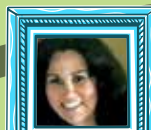
ROB ROY MACCINES, SR



LISA MENDOZA BEAURY



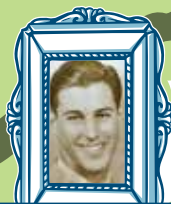
JOSEPH ALAN MENDOZA



NILDA FERNANDEZ DE CORDOVA



SEAN CONNOR MACINNES



CELIDO GONZALEZ DE MENDOZA, JR

## 53 GATORS & COUNTING

Florida Gator salutes the Ponce-Gonzalez family for its enormous number of UF alumni, represented above. It all started when Sergio Ponce and his wife's cousin, Celido Gonzalez de Mendoza Jr., enrolled at UF in different semesters during 1941. Now, 80 years later, more than 50 Ponce and Gonzalez descendants across four generations are proud to call themselves Gators. Learn more on page 72.

Special thanks to **Nancy Ponce** and **Angelique Smith**, both Gators by choice, for their roles in gathering details.

At press time, two more family members were granted admission. The entire Ponce-Gonzalez family is awaiting their decision to accept.

How big is your Gator family tree?  
[FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu](mailto:FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu).



# GREAT GATORS

WITH GREAT NEWS



## TRUE GRIT

**Lily Norenberg** (BSISE '20, MSM '20) completed her bachelor's and master's degrees during the pandemic. She also completed her chemotherapy treatment program at UF Health, which helped her fight back against her stage 4 brain cancer (medulloblastoma). Despite her diagnosis and treatments, Norenberg managed to maintain straight As, she says in part due to the amazing team at UF Health's pediatric oncology unit.



## IN THE NEWS

**Suzanne Cala** (BSAdv '02) is director of major platforms for CNN in Atlanta. She is responsible for evaluating and optimizing CNN presence on off-platforms including social, video and news aggregators.

## SHOOTING STAR

**Martha Paz-Soldan** (BSPR '20) is one of the 2020 PRNEWS People of the Year and received the PRNEWS Outstanding Student of the Year award. She served as a 2019 LAGRANT Fellow, was chosen by PR Department faculty as the college's top PR graduate, and was selected for the Dean's Cup as one of the college's two top graduates. She was also president of the UF Hispanic Public Relations Student Association (HPRSA), the first university chapter of HPRSA. Today, she is an account coordinator at Hunter, a strategic and creative communication agency in New York City.







## BRAND BUILDER

**Roy Broderick Jr.** (BSTel '12) is president and CEO of Authentique Agency in Atlanta, a full-service marketing and consulting firm specializing in brand campaigns that genuinely reflect multicultural and LGBTQ life, voices and viewpoints. Clients have included AT&T, Instagram, the Dallas Mavericks and the National Museum of African American Music.

## TO SERVE & PROTECT

**Brett Dunckel** (BSFES '19) is a fire prevention officer for the Broward Sheriff Fire Rescue & Emergency Services in Fort Lauderdale, who was selected as Florida's 2020 Fire Inspector of the Year by the Florida Fire Marshals and Inspectors Association. He is credited for developing upgrades to fire suppression systems that protect fuel tanks and megaships in ports and for implementing a new documenting software system to replace former handwritten reports. Beyond his career accolades, he advocates for LGBTQ+ people through his website [YouCanBeAnything.org](http://YouCanBeAnything.org) and through his participation in the book, "American Heroes Coming Out from Behind the Badge."





*"I knew I was taking a gamble, but I also understood that the opportunities for growth at a startup were exponential."*

— **HEATHER SHERLOCK**

(BSISE '07), who joined Uber in its infancy and is now head of Global Logistics and Distribution for Uber Technologies, Inc. Her work centers on international trade law and moving supplies around the globe, all while remaining cost efficient. "One of my very first mentors told me that the three things you are looking to gain at the start of your career are experience, exposure and opportunity. If you chase the experience, the success will eventually follow. To be able to look at the entire system and know how to divide it up to make it manageable for my team, so that we can still meet deadlines, is a very important skillset that I learned while I was at UF," said Sherlock.



*"I believe that society constrains people to choose between either corporate America or entrepreneurship, but I love both worlds and I want to show others that it is possible."*

— HAWKINS

The first company Hawkins created is called Little Miss Turban, which creates handmade, pre-sewn stylish turbans for babies and adults.

## A HEAD FOR BUSINESS

When **Altrese Hawkins** (8BA) and four others became some of the masses of people laid off due to the pandemic's economic impact, they used their time off to develop a device that cleans PPE and other items with UV-C light. "We saw an opportunity where we could make a difference in the world," Hawkins said. The device, called Purivy, was chosen by NextEra Energy for its 35 Mules program, which offers accepted companies dedicated workspace in Florida Power & Light's headquarters, access to experts in energy sectors, free executive coaching and a grant of at least \$50,000 to scale their businesses.

In addition to her entrepreneurial endeavors, Hawkins is an operations program manager for Microsoft's Protection Services team. She is also a student in the UF MBA Online program and will graduate this spring.

But adding an MBA to her three bachelor's degrees and a master's degree in biomedical sciences won't take away from her passion in entrepreneurship.



## LEADING LAWYERS

**Yaniv Adar** (BA '05) is a partner at the Mark Migdal & Hayden law firm in the Brickell section of

Miami. He is also president of the Federal Bar Association's South Florida Chapter.



## YOU AUTO MEET STEVE

**Steven Gibson** (BSJ '81) of Indialantic is president of Dealer Risk

Services, a Florida-based risk management firm specializing in automotive industry insurance.





## FOUR-STAR LEADERSHIP

**Maj. Robert Dobbins** (BA '10) and **Gen. Ken Wilsbach** (BS '85) completed a sortie in this new U.S. Air Force tanker, the KC-46 Pegasus, while they were stationed on the Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. Dobbins is a KC-46 aircraft commander. Wilsbach, supported by his wife, **Cindy Wilsbach** (BSBR '85), is commander of Pacific Air Forces, one of the major U.S. Air Force commands; Air Component Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command; and Executive Director, Pacific Air Combat Operations Staff, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. He is responsible for more than 46,000 airmen serving principally in Japan, South Korea, Hawaii, Alaska and Guam. Photo and information courtesy of **Tony Wickman** (BSPR '96), director of Pacific Air Forces public affairs, who believes Wilsbach could be the first Air Force UF ROTC graduate to attain the rank of a four-star general.



## SCIENTIFIC BUSINESS

**Leandro Neves** (PhD '13) is chief scientific officer of Rapid Genomics in Gainesville, which offers genotyping and data analysis for commercial and research agriculture companies, veterinary pharma and evolutionary biology operations.

This work improves germplasm and breeding stock for bioenergy, food and fiber production. His company was named to the Gator100 list of the fastest-growing Gator-owned or -led companies in 2017.

## BUILT TO LAST

**Ekta Prakash Desai** (BDES '08) is partner and design lead at the SchenkelShultz Architecture firm, which has offices in Orlando, Sarasota, Naples and Fort Myers.



## JUST THE FACTS, MA'AM

**Erika Engstrom** (PhD '91) is director of the University of Kentucky School of Journalism and Media. She had been a professor of Communication Studies at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.



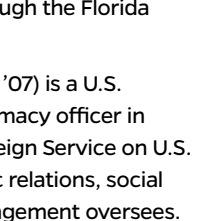
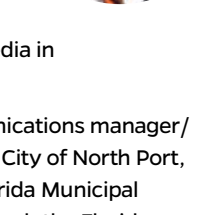
## ARENAS & STADIUMS GALORE

**Jonathan Mallie** (BDES '96) leads the New York City

office of Populous, a global architectural design firm specializing in creating environments and venues that draw communities and people together. Mallie also is a member of the firm's Global Holdings Board. His current projects include a new state-of-the-art headquarters and training facility for the Carolina Panthers and FC Cincinnati's new West End Stadium.

## STORYTELLING SUCCESS

- **Michael Monahan** (BSPR '96) is the new president and CEO of Moxē, an integrated marketing agency and subsidiary of Massey Services, in Orlando.
- **Scott Rubens** (BSTel '86) is a television producer and director for the U.S. Agency for Global Media in Washington, D.C.
- **Josh Taylor** (BSJ '02) is communications manager/public information officer for the City of North Port, FL. He is also president of the Florida Municipal Communicators Association through the Florida League of Cities.
- **Kate Wilkinson Bartlett** (BSPR '07) is a U.S. Department of State public diplomacy officer in Washington, D.C., working in Foreign Service on U.S. embassy communications, public relations, social media and foreign audience engagement overseas.





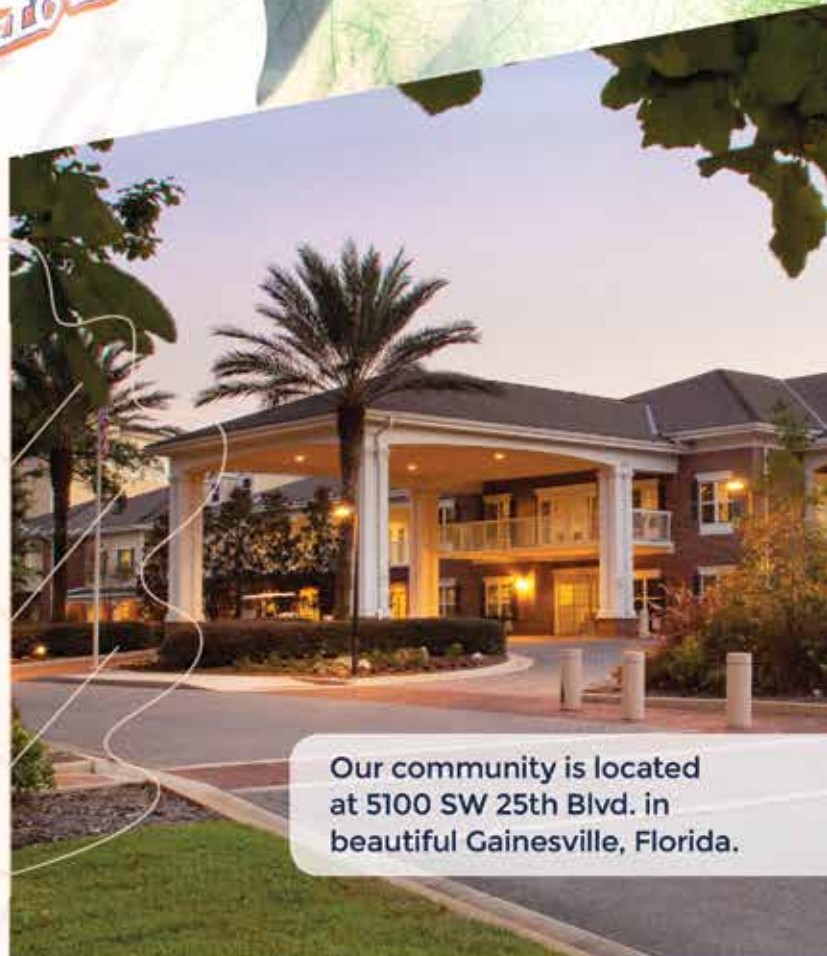
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## PINCH OF THIS, DASH OF THAT



**Luis Martinez** (BS '05, MS '07) is a food scientist whose work at Coca-Cola Co., Global Juice Innovation Center and now Darifair Foods helped develop McCafe Smoothies, Dunkin Donuts coffee and Subway frappes, among other foods. While earning his master's degree, he invented a novel coffee processing technology to enhance the flavor and aroma of coffee which later was licensed by Coffee Primero. He is director of research and innovation at Darifair. He received a UF Outstanding Gator Alumnus award in 2015.



[HTTP://BLOGS.IFAS.UFL.EDU/CALS/2019/11/15/QA-WITH-FOOD-SCIENTIST-AND-CALS-ALUM-LUIS-MARTINEZ](http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/cals/2019/11/15/QA-WITH-FOOD-SCIENTIST-AND-CALS-ALUM-LUIS-MARTINEZ)

## BIG KUDOS

**Alisha Katz** (BSPR '12) has been named one of the National Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development's six 2020 Rising Stars. The honor recognizes health care strategy professionals under the age of 40 who have demonstrated outstanding promise in their respective fields.

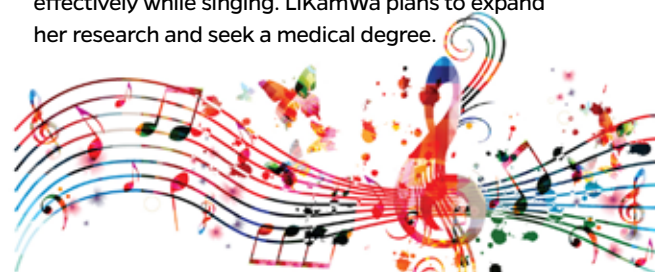


## TOP WATCHDOG

**Yvette Miley** (BSBR '85), a 2000 College of Journalism and Communications Hall of Fame inductee and UF Distinguished Alumna, is the new senior vice president for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for NBC News, MSNBC and CNBC in New York City.

## OF ART & MUSIC

**Amy LiKamWa** (BSBio '20) of Orlando was just 8 when she began playing the violin. At UF, she joined the University Orchestra and became so fascinated with her freshman course that explored how music can alleviate pain, she decided to conduct her own research that has now gained international attention through the Arts and Health international journal that published her findings. Conducted with the UF Center for Arts in Medicine, LiKamWa found that her 40 adult subjects could endure pain more effectively while singing. LiKamWa plans to expand her research and seek a medical degree.



SCOTT AUDETTE



Brinkley designed these large garage murals around Amalie Arena's projector wall on Ford Thunder Alley, featuring fierce hockey players.

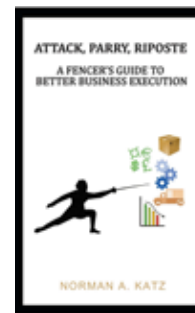
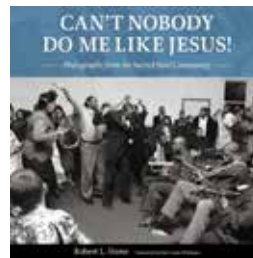
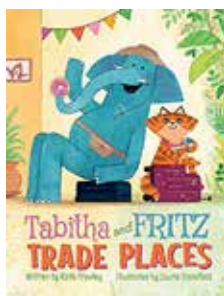
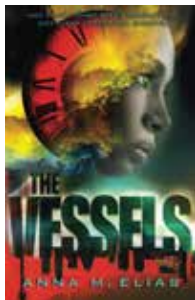
*"As I look through the pictures, I have to remind myself that, wow, this really happened."*

— **CAROLINA BRINKLEY**, (BFA '11) of St. Petersburg, graphic designer for Stanley Cup Champions Tampa Bay Lightning

[UFF.TO/CAD8MM](http://uff.to/cad8mm)



CAROLINA BERMUDEZ



## GOOD GATOR READS & LISTENS

### DEBUT NOVEL

**Anna Elias** (BSTel '86) published her first novel "The Vessels." She is a screenwriter who has worked on TV series and studio feature films including "Miami Vice," "A Time to Kill," "12 Monkeys" and "Practical Magic."

### TIME TO GET WELL

Fitness expert and race announcer **Fitz Koehler** (MSSM '98) published "My Noisy Cancer Comeback: Running at the Mouth While Running for my Life" about her 16-month battle. She is the announcer for the Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Big Sur marathons, as well as the DC Wonder Woman Run Series. She has also inspired millions of kids to get active with her school running/walking program called The Morning Mile. She lives in Gainesville with her husband and two children.

### JUST FOR KIDS

**Kathleen "Katie" (Rush) Frawley** (BAEng '07) of Fort Lauderdale published a children's picture book, "Tabitha and Fritz Trade Places." The former middle and high English teacher says her writing efforts were, in part, inspired by her freshman UF children's literature class taught by John Cech.

### GAINESVILLE ORIGINAL

**Jay Gilbert** (BSBA '81) wrote "The Florida Motel," which was inspired by his family's ownership of the actual Florida Motel in Gainesville in the mid-1970s, where he worked as a maid, pool boy, lawn mower and front desk clerk. "The motel has been demolished, but thankfully the City of Gainesville saved the iconic road sign," he said. The book received a Silver medal from the Florida Writers Association.

### OF MUSIC, MEANINGS

Folklorist **Robert Stone** (BSME '67) published a book of photos that illustrate the use of electric steel guitars in African American churches. Entitled "Can't Nobody Do Me Like Jesus!" Stone's book explores the meanings and traditions around this instrument and its use. Stone published an album of the music for the Florida Folklife Program, as well.

### HELP FOR BUSINESSES

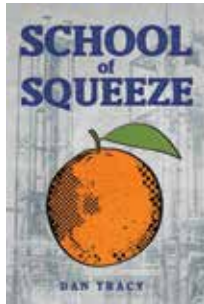
**Norman A. Katz** (BSBA '85) published his third business book "Attack, Parry, Riposte: A Fencer's Guide To Better Business Execution." A fencing coach and supply chain technologies and operations professional, Katz uses his sport's strategies and tactics to highlight real-world business performance problems.



**"SO MANY MEMBERS OF OUR GENERATION HAVE UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOOD, AND QUARANTINE HAS REALLY COMPOUNDED THE STRESS WE ALL DEAL WITH."**

— **Isabel Sanchez** (BSBA '19, MIB '20) of Tallahassee who published a cookbook with her friend, **Grace Ubben** (BSADV '20). Titled "Quarantine Cuisine," the pair aims to help people get through the COVID19 quarantine while enjoying delicious home-cooked meals, including those with dairy-free, vegetarian, gluten-free, and vegan variations. "We want this cookbook to help reframe negative food associations and use cooking as soul therapy during this time of isolation," Sanchez said.





## SUCCESS STORY

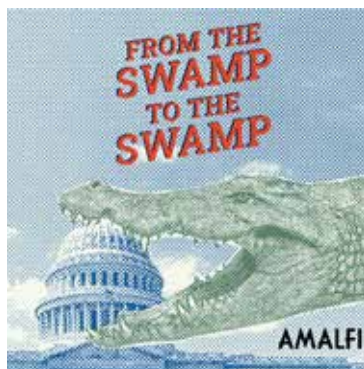
**Dan Tracy** (2017) published “School of Squeeze,” the story of Jerry “Gator” Brown (BSA ’77) and his brother **Tom Brown** (JD ’65) who inherited a tired, old business, tapped new lines of produce while leveraging international partnerships and ultimately sold it for a substantial profit.

## LABORS OF LOVE

**Maritza Moulite** (BA ’13) of Miami is a first-year doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania. She wrote two novels “Dear Haiti, Love Alaine” and “One of the Good Ones” with her older sister. Their first book was named one of NPR’s favorite books of 2019, a Parents Choice Foundation award winner and one of the TODAY show’s 12 best new books for fall 2019.

## LEGAL EAGLE

**James Bailey** (BAPoliSci ’05, BSBA ’05) co-authored “Construction Issues in Bankruptcy” to help those who operate construction companies as well as bankruptcy professionals who represent them. Bailey is a partner in Bradley’s Bankruptcy and Creditors’ Rights Practice Group in Birmingham, AL.



## LISTEN UP

**Matthew DeSantis** (BA ’07) started a non-partisan political podcast called “From the Swamp to the Swamp” where he pays homage to his UF roots and analyzes the political turmoil in our nation’s capital. The former political science professor and current George Mason University executive director for institutional effectiveness, wanted to have an outlet to continue talking about politics since leaving the classroom. This year, his podcast will feature UF professors and some UF alumni.

 [UFF.TO/E8KXZZ](http://UFF.TO/E8KXZZ)

“My entire family is creating digital content: my dad and I have separate podcasts, my stepmom has a YouTube cooking show, and my sister is in the process of developing a financial independence podcast in 2021. My brother coordinates and promotes our content through [www.amalfimedia.com](http://www.amalfimedia.com). It’s been great fun and a way of keeping the family together during the pandemic despite all of us living in different places.”

## IN MEMORIAM

UF American history professor emeritus and U.S. Army veteran **David Chalmers** died in October in his Gainesville home surrounded by his family. He was 93. He prided himself on being a 39-year teacher at UF. However, he was best known nationally as a scholar of American social and intellectual history.

A leading authority on the Ku Klux Klan, his book “Hooded Americanism: A History of the Ku Klux Klan” has remained in print continuously since 1965. His numerous other books explore similar topics, such as how the Klan fueled the Civil Rights movement, social change struggles in the 1960s, President Theodore Roosevelt’s decision to regulate railroads, muckrakers and a history of Americans that he wrote for Japanese students of American history.

The U.S. Army veteran who served in Europe at the close of WWII went to jail in St. Augustine in 1964 as part of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s efforts to desegregate local businesses and combat Klan and police violence there. Chalmers’ wife, Jean, was set to join him several weeks later, but Congress intervened and passed its landmark Civil Rights Act.

# GATORS HIRING GATORS

If you yelled, “2 BITS!”  
at work, would your coworkers  
know what to yell back?

Do your office parties always  
include ORANGE-AND-  
BLUE DECORATIONS?

Is it understood that  
happy hours must take  
place at a restaurant that  
BROADCASTS  
GATOR GAMES?

Florida Gator celebrates  
companies that purposely  
strive to hire UF alumni,  
including these:  
Proctor & Gamble,  
Texas Instruments and Oracle.



**PROCTOR & GAMBLE, CINCINNATI, OH**

a 183-year-old company focused on developing products  
for homes and families

## **COUNT 'EM UP:**

P&G's Florida branches boast more than 200 Gators

## **WHY UF?**

“There’s no question that my University of Florida education and experience was essential in preparing me for the many challenges and opportunities I’ve faced during my P&G career. It was at UF that I learned the importance of following my passion, setting high goals and always being open to learning something new. I’m also proud that as P&G continues its ongoing commitment to a diverse workforce, UF serves as a critical source of highly qualified candidates representing an array of different backgrounds and experiences.”

— **LEIGH RADFORD** (BSAdv '86), senior vice president and general manager of P&G Ventures, the division that identifies, creates and manages startups inside and outside the company

## **WE ARE THE BOYS:**



UF alumni and P&G staff participate in a Standout Emerging Leaders camp



P&G arranged for UF alumni on staff to attend this canoeing activity.



P&G recruiters paused for this photo at the 2018 UF Career Fair in UF's Exactech Arena.





Dallas, TX

American technology company that designs and makes semiconductors and various integrated circuits



#### GATORS GALORE:

TI boasts more than 200 Gators among its ranks throughout the U.S.

#### BRINGIN' THE GATOR LOVE:

Each year, TI hosts a UF Gator Day in Dallas and sends a team of recruiters to UF's job fair in Gainesville.

#### TI GATORS SAY:



"It is clear the Gator Nation is well represented at TI. Walking down the hallways I can always see a flag or a fellow alum saying, 'Go Gators!' Also, the number of Gator license plates in the parking lot is amazing."

— **ROB TAYLOR** (BSEE '02, MS '04), manager of TI's Power Design Services, Industrial and Personal Electronics, and a volunteer UF Alumni Association board member

#### ORANGE AND BLUE IN THE LONESTAR STATE:

Gator pride isn't hard to find, even in the TI headquarters in Dallas. Check out Rob Taylor's office, complete with UF border and athletics posters.



#### WHY UF?



"We like hiring UF graduates because of their diversity of thought, critical thinking skills and problem-solving capabilities. Those skills are assets at TI and reflect our company's culture. We are building semiconductors for a rapidly changing world, and our ability to continue developing innovative solutions will define our future success. Together with Gators, we are redefining what is possible."

— **STEVE LAMBOUSES**, vice president and general manager of the High Voltage Power Business Unit

## ORACLE

REDWOOD CITY, CA

a multinational computer technology corporation

#### CONGREGATION OF GATORS:

95 Gators have been working at Oracle since 2019

#### WHY UF?



"As a senior director ... I've experienced a lot of college grads from all over the country, and UF alumni continue to be atop of that list each year," said Ben Grant-Roy, a senior director of sales. "We take on a lot of students who are consistently going the

extra mile during their four years ... it's not a surprise some of our top talent in an organization of 800+ come from UF."

#### ORACLE GATORS SAY:

■ "The greatest part about working here is the people," said **CHRIS CRUANYAS** (BSBA '18), a cloud technology representative, who moved across the country a year ago for this job.



■ "I love the energetic, collaborative culture and the opportunity to work alongside the best," said **KELSIE HEASLIP** (BSAdv '19), a business development consultant.



■ Working with Oracle "has been one of the best decisions I made," said **ELIAS GONZALEZ** (BSBA '19), core technology consultant, who serves on the company's Latino alliance. "It's allowed me to develop my leadership and networking skills."



■ "I appreciate the diverse range of people who've come together to support such an innovative tech-driven cause. Working here has taught me something new every day," said **ANTHONY VERNAVA** (BSBA '18, MS '19), solution engineer.



# GATORS AROUND THE WORLD

Since most people are stuck sheltering at home, enjoy these recently submitted reader photos from past and present adventures.



**Jack Beal** (MS '79, DVM '82) and his wife, Becky, of Bradenton, sported these special college shirts while exploring the Great Allegheny Passage in Pennsylvania via bicycle.



**Bob Dowd** (BSBA '81), a UF track and field athlete from 1977-79, paused for this photo after he participated in a foot race with other tourists at the ancient Olympia stadium during his vacation to Greece.



**Damian Eker** (DNP '11) said when he traveled to Paris with his wife, Amy, and five of their children, they received many "Go Gators" greetings throughout the day.



**Ronald Lee McGeehen** shared this photo from the 2018 Florida vs. Michigan game when he held **Tim Tebow's** (BSA '09) helmet. He is a produce delivery driver and lives in Cumming, GA.



**Ivan Shorter** (BSMB '98) took his Gator flag on a family tour of Switzerland, where he paused atop Mount Rigi Kulm, the highest point near Lake Lucern. He is an anesthesiologist at UPMC Hospital in Lititz, Pennsylvania.

**Scott D'Antoni** (BSCE '91) of Marietta, GA, said he's glad he wore his Gator shirt while mowing his lawn recently, because it gave him the opportunity to give this big chomp for the Google maps street view camera car that passed him twice. When he's not doing yard work, the former lieutenant colonel is a United Airlines pilot.

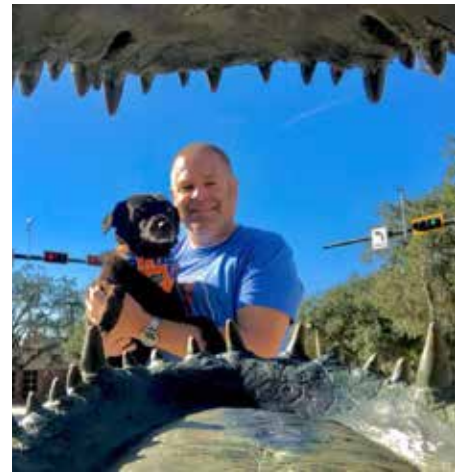


Send your photos and captions to: [FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu](mailto:FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu)





**Ann Regan** (BA '70) of Pensacola and her sister **Alison Regan** (BA '87) of Los Angeles were photobombed by iguanas at Punta Espinosa in the Galapagos Islands. Ann is retired from a Chicago investment management firm, and Alison is a deputy city attorney for the City of West Hollywood.



Avid traveler and former commercial real estate exec **Adam Vosding** (BA '01) says he loves doing the Gator chomp whenever he can and has hundreds of photos — some with celebrities and athletes — to prove it. He also takes photos of interesting Gator license plates he encounters on his travels (GatorAdam on Instagram). Vosding, who splits his time between the Rocky Mountain and Tampa Gator Clubs, says his dog, Holland, also has her own Instagram, HollandThePup, through which she shows her Gator pride. The pair's current mission is to visit each NHL arena, MLB stadium and SEC stadium.



San Diego Gator Club members **Richard Weiss** (MED '73) and partner Ellen Sherif kept their heads warm with their Gator gear at Canyon Overlook in Zion National Park. Ellen runs engineering experiments for the U.S. Navy while Richard is retired from the Navy, working for a private company as a program manager and test engineer on Department of Defense cyber security systems.



**Christopher Vallandingham** (JD '00), UF legal research professor and Legal Information Center head of collections, and his wife, Hale Toklu, of Gainesville, took their family to the Hagia Sophia church-turned-mosque-turned-museum in Istanbul, Turkey. From left are agricultural and life sciences freshman Amaya Vallandingham, Zeynep Toklu and Doruk Toklu.



**Nisha Desai Waranch** (BA '97) and her son, Zack, enjoyed this memorable trip to India in January 2020 before the pandemic. Nisha is a lawyer in Orlando.



Florida Gator magazine wants to publish photos of your unique tags.



Send photos with your name,

town, degree year and occupation to:

**FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu**

For those with plain-Jane tags, GO GATOR! Proceeds from UF's specialty license plates support student scholarships and alumni programs.

Put UF and our Gators on top by purchasing a UF license plate the next time you renew your tag.

WHEREVER YOU GO



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**UFPLATES.COM**

## DO YOU HAVE A CREATIVE WAY OF



**Phillip** (DVM '87) and **Jamie Lanzi** (BA '86) live in Wilmington, NC, where Phillip owns and operates College Road and Carolina Beach Animal Hospitals, and Jamie is an accounts receivable administrator.



**Jeff Greenstein** (BStel '97) of Leawood, KS, is a former technical director who worked at CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, KCBS/KCAL. He is now a title insurance professional.



**David Homza** (BSEnvEng '79) of Springfield, VA, says he's had this tag for about 10 years. He's a director at the US Patent & Trademark Office.



**Lance Ford** (BSAC '81) works in commercial real estate in the Washington, D.C., metro area.



**Brent Walrath** (BSBA '82), owner of Walrath Insurance Agency in Cadiz, Ohio, said his recognizable tag is the result of "a couple of meetings with the Buckeyes a few years back."



**Don Wilkins** of Merritt Island says he loves this UF tag because "it says a lot about how I feel about the Gators." He retired from his work as an orthodontist after 35 years.



**Charley Tucker** (BA '07) shared this license plate from when he lived in Illinois. Today, he's a professional fiduciary and partner at Prime Fiduciary Services in Los Altos, CA. He lives in Mountain View, CA.



**Ronald Perdue** (BSBA '95) and his son, **Steven Perdue** (BS '18), shared this tag from Ron's Harley Davidson motorcycle. Ron lives in Micanopy and is general manager of Office Depot in Gainesville.



**John Miller** (BSBA '89) is a banker in Honolulu, where he enjoys hiking.



**Lisa Spurlock Brouwer** (PhD '96) shared these tags from her vehicles. She lives in Indianapolis.



**Cassandra Kuhn** (BS '21) of Roanoke, VA, chose this tag because of her love for hiking in the Appalachian Mountains.



Clinical pharmacist **Hayley Ball** (DPh '09) shows her Gator pride all the way up in Newtown, CT.



Ret. Marines Maj. **Alan Crouch** (BS '89) of Saint Johns is proud of this tag and his daughter, Katie, who is a UF nursing senior. Crouch is a JROTC senior military instructor at Jean Ribault Senior High School in Jacksonville.



**Wayne Oberfield** (BSP '92) shared several special Gator-themed tags he's had over the years. His first plate, this one from Pennsylvania, was signed by famous UF golfer **Chris DiMarco** (BA '90). He also shared tags from Texas (GATORX) and Arizona (GATORRX and GATORX). Oberfield, a pharmacist, lives in Scottsdale, AZ.



**Richard Duncan** (BA '78), a retired U.S. Army Major commissioned through UF's Army ROTC program, shared his license plate. He retired last summer as assistant general manager of public safety and security at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. Today, he operates RL Duncan Consulting and lives in Douglasville, GA.



**Eric Larsen** (BSADV '84, MAMC '93) of Los Angeles, who specializes in strategic account management in the media and entertainment industry, said he's had this California tag since the mid-1990s and was surprised it was available at the time. "My wife thinks it's cheesy and wants me to let it go, but I said 'Sorry honey, that's just not gonna happen.' Go Gators!"



# SHOWING YOUR GATOR PRIDE ON THE ROAD?



**Nathan Sheppard** (BSAdv '00) of Tampa has four UF tags that reflect his son's initials (above), his degree (BSAdv), his insurance consulting company (PAGRP) and (TTEBO) "the man ... the legend."



**Robert Norris** (PhD '97) of Woodbridge, VA, is a chief strategy officer for the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency.



**Brad Tester** shows his Gator pride up in Knoxville, TN, where he produces radio broadcasts.



**Joan** (BSJ '73) and **Bobby Stark** (BSR '69) live on "Gator Way" in Ellsworth, Maine, where she is a retired teacher, and he is a retired educational administrator.



**Scott Joa** (BS '06) supports UF with his Gator license plate in Brooksville, where he owns and operates an air conditioning repair company, Air Joa, and is a Lear jet captain for Jet ICU.



**Andrew Alabiso** (BSAdv '87) shows his Gator pride in Canton, GA, just outside of Atlanta, where he works for Coca-Cola Co.



**Mike Dame** (BSJ '90) got this tag when he moved to Roanoke. It represents when he left Florida; the name of Tom Petty's music publishing company; and Petty's home recording studios. Dame is a vice president at Carilion Clinic.



**Gisela Then Laurent** (BSBA '97, JD '03) is a 9th Judicial Circuit judge in Orlando who likes to share her Gator pride with this license plate.



**Ivan Iturrino** (BS '00) and **Robin Burgess** (BA '01) in Bellevue, KY, have this and a "GO UF" Kentucky tag. She is a Cincinnati environmental lawyer, and he is a bar auditor. They got the Ohio tag when Robin attended law school there.



**Mark Peltz** (BA '76) of Sharon, MA, says his family is one of only 50 lucky people in the U.S. to have this plate that they acquired in 1992. He is a regional claim specialist for A.I.M. Mutual Insurance.



**Chip Derrick** (BSBC '70) and **Georganna Bonebrake Derrick** (BA '70) of Anchorage, make sure their fellow Alaskans know they are proud Gators. Chip is a retired engineer and project manager, while Georganna is a retired library assistant.



**Ramon Martinez** (BSPR '92, MA '94, MBA '02) of Tampa is a senior product manager with NCR whose tag reflects the three degrees he earned from UF. Martinez says his son is a UF sophomore majoring in biology.



**Robert Hiday** (JD '80) of Jacksonville is a retired attorney with this and "R12 GTR" tags on his motorcycles. This way, everyone in his adventure bike clubs (ADV Riders; Iron Butt rides) knows where his allegiance lies.



**John Hampton** (BSPhysics '63) of Crofton, MD, is retired after 57 years with US Army and defense analysis. He says he's used this 1984 plate on his car, while his wife's tag is a play on the former Gator chant.



**David Silvestain** (BSBA '97) of Cincinnati, OH, is a P&G national sales director and leads sales recruiting at UF. Wife Cori Silvestain (BA '98) sports "UF G8TRS" on her car and volunteers with the T-1 diabetes nonprofit JDRF.



**Gene Yi** (BBA '03, MBA '14) of Perrysburg, OH, says, "Unfortunately, there's no official Gator plate offered here," so he came up with this alternative. Yi is a global IT leader at Owens Corning.



**Tom Bowen** (BSBA '74) of Laurel Springs, NJ, says his 16-year-old tag may be beat up, but it's proudly displayed. He is an environmental compliance manager for a large beverage manufacturer and distributor.



**Melanie Hoerner** (BSN '97) from O'Fallon, IL, is a NICU charge nurse at St. Mary's Hospital in St. Louis.



**Michael DiMarco** (BSCISE '81) said 1981 was a special year for him, as that's when he graduated from UF and entered the Air Force. Now he's a retired airline captain who lives in Orlando.



**Eric Bender** (BSBA '79) and **Sue Rosen Bender** (BA '81) shared three tags (above, 4G8RS and UF G8RS). They retired to Oak Park, CA. His career was in telecom and commercial real estate. Hers was in nonprofits and philanthropy. They met at UF and have been married for 39 years.

## ALL IN THE FAMILY

**Judi Aronson Patrick** (BSR '83) of Burke, VA, said her dad, **Dr. David Aronson** (BSA '52) of Pensacola, started a family tradition of supporting UF through its license plate program. She kept it up after she met her husband, **Berry Patrick** (BSR '82), at UF, and they sent all of their four sons to UF. These photos are from their Gator fleet: RV, Jeep, van and car. They also included their tag from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in 1996. Judi and Berry have been working for the Department of Defense for over 30 years, through 20 moves in four countries. Their family includes 10 Gators who prove that Gator Nation is truly everywhere!



# SHOW YOUR GATOR PRIDE



[herff.ly/uf](https://herff.ly/uf)

HERFF  JONES.

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## TRAIN FOR THE JOB you WANT

“The UF DBA program teaches you how to think like a scientist and an academic. I’m learning how to read and critique studies, design and run experiments, and—most exciting for me—how to crunch the numbers and gain statistical insights. Not only will I be able to immediately apply these skills to my business and industry, but I now have the opportunity to become a professor.”

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

#### MORE INFORMATION

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

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**DOCTOR OF BUSINESS  
ADMINISTRATION**

**WARRINGTON** COLLEGE of BUSINESS





# UFAA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## MEET FELLOW GATOR **PRINEET SHARMA**

**"I BLEED ORANGE AND BLUE.** Being a Gator is part of who I am. The alumni association keeps me connected to UF, gives me the opportunity to pay it forward and is one way I can express being a proud member of the Gator Nation!"

— **Prineet Sharma** (BSBA '94) is an attorney who owns Sharma Eminent Domain Lawyers. He represents property and business owners whose land, homes or other property are under threat of being taken by governments or private utilities.

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# 24,614

OF YOUR **FELLOW GATORS** ARE **LIFE**  
**MEMBERS** OF THE UF ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

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Membership dues support alumni programs, student scholarships and UF's ranking as a top public university. Your UF Alumni Association is proud to keep Gators connected to campus and to each other. **JOIN TODAY** by visiting [ufalumni.ufl.edu](http://ufalumni.ufl.edu) or calling 352-392-1905.



## BLACK ALUMNI REUNION: TOGETHER, YET APART



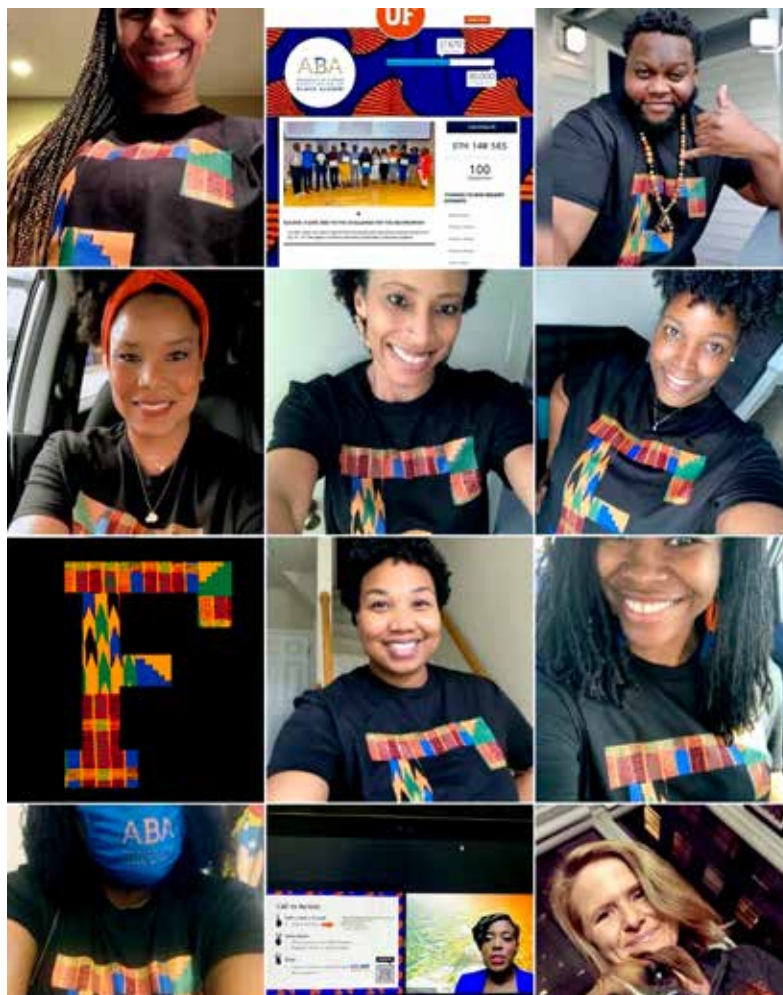
DJ Kid Capri

Not even a pandemic could stop the 2020 Black Alumni Reunion (BAR) Weekend event in late October. In its first-ever virtual form, about 350 attendees nationwide spent two days reconnecting

with fellow alumni, fostering solidarity during the pandemic and learning more about the Association of Black Alumni.

In the process, the group generated 100 more new UF Alumni Association members and raised \$30,000 for ABA scholarships. Highlights included a scholarship award ceremony and music by the University Gospel Choir and celebrity rapper and DJ Kid Capri, who is known for his longtime DJ role on “Def Comedy Jam” and his Sirius XM FLY block party show each weekend.

Guest speakers included David Canton, UF’s newly appointed director of the African American Studies program and President Fuchs. The latter spoke about the state of “Black UF” in an era when topics related to social justice and systemic racism are being vetted, discussed and acted upon to help grow UF’s connections with Black students.



The 350 Black Alumni Reunion (BAR) attendees didn’t let this year’s virtual event dampen their Gator enthusiasm. For details about the Association of Black Alumni or the next BAR Weekend event, visit [UFBlackAlumni.com](http://UFBlackAlumni.com)

## GATOR100 HONORS BUSINESSES AROUND THE WORLD

On April 23, the UF Alumni Association will celebrate the 2021 Gator100, the world’s 100 fastest-growing Gator businesses.

In addition to recognizing the companies, these two Gators will receive the S. Clark Butler Pinnacle Award for demonstrating sustained excellence and leadership in their respective industries: **Jane Sun** (BSAC ’92) of Shanghai, China, and **Keith Koenig** (BSBA ’73, MBA ’75) of Tamarac.



Jane Sun

Sun is CEO of Trip.com Group and a member of its board. She joined the company as its CFO in 2005. She’s helped it grow from a small tech company into a one-stop shop for travel services sought by 400

million users worldwide. The company’s mission is to bring the best travel experience.

Sun is the only female CEO in China’s high-tech industry.



Keith Koenig

Koenig is CEO and owner of City Furniture, which he co-founded with his late brother. Today, their enterprise includes 19 City Furniture and 14 Ashley Furniture HomeStores in South and Central Florida, a distribution facility and headquarters in Tamarac, as well as a subsidiary, Kevin Charles Fine Upholstery, in New Albany, Mississippi.

Find out who made this year’s list at [Gator100.ufl.edu](http://Gator100.ufl.edu).





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WHAT'S GOOD WEEKLY EVENT GUIDE**



Knapaha Botanical Gardens



Carson Springs Wildlife



Springs & Rivers



The Butterfly Rainforest at the  
Florida Museum of Natural History



Sweetwater Wetlands Park



**WHAT'S  
GOOD.**

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# 3 MINUTES WITH DANNY PONCE

**Danny Ponce** (BSBA '70, JD '73), pictured below with his wife, Nancy Ponce, is a UF trustee emeritus whose family — over the last four generations — has grown to include 53 Gators. His father, **Sergio Ponce** (1941), and mother's cousin, **Celido Gonzalez de Mendoza Jr.**, followed by his mother's two sisters, were the first generation to attend UF. Then Danny, his four sisters and several cousins followed, making the second generation. Counting those in the third and fourth generations, as well as spouses (many of whom they met at UF), the family has collectively earned degrees from 10 different colleges.



This spring, Danny Ponce took time to answer the following questions about his family's remarkable connection to and devotion toward Florida's flagship university.

## What does it mean to you to come from such a large Gator family?

**UF IS HOME.** It's a warm fuzzy feeling for all of us. When we had a 2011 family reunion in Gainesville at Thanksgiving, we all went to the Florida-Florida State football game, took campus tours, met with UF's historian, the works. Even though we were born and raised in Miami, Gainesville is our home, too.

## What about UF makes you proud?

**NO. 6!** I can remember when Marshall Criser was president, and UF had just become a member of the American Association of Universities, and it was just us and Vanderbilt. That was our proudest national accomplishment back then. When you look at the five public universities ahead of us and the private universities, it's just amazing ... as is the national and international impact of this university.

## Give an example, please.

**I TOOK A TRIP TO NICARAGUA** and met with a man who was trying to establish the largest cattle operation in the world. So I asked a UF/IFAS grass expert and a livestock expert to make the trip. How can one human know that much about grass? Those experts were extremely helpful. There's no human alive who knows everything about UF, not even the president. UF's breadth and depth and collection of experts is simply unparalleled.



### Who in the family is the biggest Gator fan?

**WITHOUT A DOUBT, OUR LATE UNCLE DON MACINNES.** He had a great saying, “If you go to Florida, we’ll pay for it.” At his house, if you ever said a bad word about the Gators, he’d throw you out. If not for him, a great many of us would not have applied to UF. He was our inspiration. He died this year at age 92. We will always miss him.

### Which UF faculty or staff member influenced you most?

**STEPHEN C. O’CONNELL** because we maintained a relationship when I was a student, and then as an alum. He was always a mentor to me. When I needed to talk with someone about what I should do, I could call him. He was a mentor to my son, Scott, too.

### What’s your favorite pre-COVID UF tradition?

**GETTING READY FOR FOOTBALL SEASON.** Then, at the first game of the season when the stadium is full, seeing friends you haven’t seen for months and sharing stories with each other — sharing the Gator bond.

### Are UF commencements in the same category as major holidays for your family?

**WELL, LET’S PUT IT THIS WAY:** Academic achievement is a priority for our family, and our family gatherings often include commencement ceremonies. But one was especially poignant. In 2008, my father died in Miami and we were planning his funeral. We were all grief-stricken. However, we wanted to support my nephew, Craig Thompson, who was graduating from UF. So my sisters and I rallied 15 or 20 of us, and we drove up together to celebrate his special day. We drove back to Miami the next morning. We know Dad would have approved.

### Are there other ways your family incorporates Gator spirit into events?

**WE EMBRACE THE GATOR SPIRIT IN ALL FAMILY GATHERINGS.** Weddings are never to be scheduled on football game days. We sing “We Are the Boys” at receptions. Gator spirit is part of our lives. Whether there are 10 or 50 of us together, we are Gators, we are family. It’s our common bond.

### Favorite Gator cheer or song?

**“WE ARE THE BOYS FROM OLD FLORIDA.”** But I also love the new tradition: Tom Petty’s “Won’t Back Down” at the end of the third quarter. I love seeing “Mr. Orange and Blue” **Richard Johnston** (BSBA ’79, JD ’81) leading the crowd in the pregame orange-and-blue cheer.

### Why has your family contributed more than \$1M to UF?

**IT’S HELPING THE NEXT GENERATIONS EXCEED WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED.** My dad was the first in our family to attend college. My twin sister and I both received alumni association academic scholarships (\$250) for one year. Tuition was \$125 per semester, and you could take however many classes you wanted. What a bargain! Giving back is what Gators do. I remember Al Warrington getting upset when his colleagues and fellow Gators wouldn’t write a check. I’ve helped raise \$10M for UF over the years. For example, a group of us got Urban Meyer to agree to throwback jerseys for the Alabama game. We later used them to raise \$6.1M for UF at the ’06 Gator Gala. I helped sell the original stadium sky boxes. We’ve definitely raised more money than we’ve given. But it’s about our devotion to UF, helping our alma mater continue to do its phenomenal work.

## THEIR FAMILY INCLUDES:

# 5

Blue Key members  
(2 were presidents)

# 3

OF EACH

Homecoming Pageant participants  
Student Government senators  
Hall of Fame inductees  
Bull Gators

# 2

Honors Program alumni

# 1

OF EACH

Homecoming general chairman  
Homecoming marketing director  
Interfraternity Council president  
Student Nursing Association president  
Gator Dazzler  
Phi Beta Kappa  
UF trustee  
Air Force ROTC distinguished graduate  
UF Alumni Association president  
Gator Boosters board member  
UF Health Shands Hospital Board of Directors member  
Miss University of Florida participant  
UF Student Government parliamentarian  
J. Wayne Reitz Scholar

# FINISH LINE: DANIELLE COLLINS

AS A GATOR-TURNED-TENNIS PRO PREPARED FOR THIS WINTER'S AUSTRALIAN OPEN, SHE ANSWERED A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT TRAVEL, TOURNAMENT LIFE AND HER RETURN TO UF.

BY LIESL O'DELL (BSJ '92)



Perhaps the greatest force in professional tennis player Danielle Collins' short-but-jam-packed, 27-year journey is timing — good and bad.

Each moment and milestone — winning an international match at 16; being recruited by her dream school, UF; getting bumped from the court by NCAA championship-winning juniors and seniors; transferring to the University of Virginia to win her own NCAA titles; going pro; being diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis; and enduring extensive tournament COVID-19 precautions — altered the direction of her life.

Those course changes eventually brought her back — full circle — to UF. Collins is working now on a UF certificate in sports management and plans to pursue a master's in the same field, thanks to a partnership between UF and the Women's Tennis Association. Collins, No. 45 in the WTA's rankings, hopes the educational opportunity will provide skills for whatever follows her pro career. She's already testing the waters by launching a jewelry business and fashion partnerships. She also believes she could become a travel adviser thanks to her extensive personal experiences. But for now, Collins will continue to work the pro tennis circuit.

## WHAT MADE YOU COME BACK TO UF?

**A.** When the pandemic started and everything came to a halt in terms of traveling, I found myself with a lot of time to think about the future. This WTA partnership gives me a chance to come back to UF — the school I've loved since I was a little girl — and have a different experience than when I was here as an undergrad.

## WHY SPORTS MANAGEMENT?

**A.** It's a good fit for me because I'd like to work in pro or collegiate sports. I've worked with a lot of agents and managers and tournament organizers and officials in the WTA, and I'd like to educate myself on the day-to-day operations and what takes place. I also think the sports management field needs more women.

## HOW HARD IT IS TO JUGGLE A PRO TENNIS CAREER AND YOUR STUDIES?

**A.** I usually don't have a lot of free time. Now with all the [pandemic] safety protocols during tournaments, we're confined to our hotel rooms when we're not

on the courts. So, for instance, during the French Open and some of the Grand Slams, sometimes I was watching lectures and doing discussion boards and texting with my class partner about what I needed to do for a project. I tried to focus on my schoolwork during the week so I wouldn't have a crunch at the end of the week. Being a college athlete taught me time management.

## WHAT ARE YOUR BIGGEST PET PEEVES?

**A.** Since I've been an athlete, I realize how much judgement there is. It can be good at times, but sometimes it can be unfortunate when people are hyper-critical of others. We all make mistakes. I try to be non-judgmental.

## WHAT WAS IT LIKE BEING DIAGNOSED WITH RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS AT AGE 26?

**A.** As humans we learn to adapt. I've learned what triggers these episodes. I realized that there were some things within my control, such as my diet. So I've spent more time in the kitchen learning to prepare meals for myself. It's been transformative for me.

## DESCRIBE WHAT YOU FELT BEFORE YOU WERE DIAGNOSED.

**A.** A lot of joint pain throughout my body that started in my neck, chronic neck pain. Then I started having more pain in my hands and feet, with some spells lasting five to 12 days ... It was a three-month process of seeing doctors before I had a diagnosis and a plan. When I started limiting specific foods out of my diet — gluten and dairy — that's when I really started to improve. But everyone is different.

## WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE GATOR SPORT BESIDES TENNIS?

**A.** Gymnastics was my favorite sport to attend at UF. [2016 telecommunications graduate] Bridget Sloan was on the team when I was there. She was a silver medalist at the Olympics. It was phenomenal to think that I could go to a collegiate match and see Olympic athletes.

## WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE TENNIS MATCH OF YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

**A.** The first time I beat [five-time Wimbledon champion] Venus Williams. That was a turning point in my transition



from college to the pros. Plus, it was getting that win in Florida at the Miami Open, where my family had come down from St. Pete to watch me. Playing on that big stadium court was amazing. And Venus was my childhood idol.

**YOUR CAREER HAS TAKEN YOU AROUND THE WORLD. WHAT'S BEEN YOUR BEST STOP/CITY SO FAR?**

**A.** I love Australia. My boyfriend is an Aussie. The people there are so warm and friendly and positive. I like playing in Europe as well. How about I choose a favorite city on different continents?

■ Australia: Melbourne.

■ Europe: Would have to be Paris because it has so much amazing art and architecture.

■ United States: It's hard to choose. I love Indian Wells, California, and Miami. Any tennis fan should try to attend the stadiums there at some point. But everything about both cities are wonderful — the atmosphere, scenery, weather.

■ Asia: Tokyo.

**BEST GADGET FOR BIG-TIME TRAVELERS?**

**A.** If you can get an iPad instead of a laptop, it's so much better to travel with because the battery doesn't die as fast as computers, they're lighter and they fit in your purse easily.

**ANY ADVICE FOR YOUNG ATHLETES?**

**A.** When you find something you're passionate about, you've got to stick with it. We all have bad days. We may have periods when we don't love it as much and things can be challenging. But the love will come back. Create goals that will get you where you want to go. With tennis, for example, you don't have to be a pro — you can be a coach, official, work for tournaments, etc. If later on you find out that you want to steer in a little bit different direction, you can use the tools you learned along the way to adjust.

**WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?**

**A.** I want to play tennis as long as possible, but I would love to help people and make a difference in my community. I would like to help underprivileged children in public schools who most of the time aren't athletes and need a positive figure in their life. I have applied to be a mentor at the school I attended, Northeast High in St. Pete.

When not on the court, Danielle Collins designs jewelry, travels and works with fashion designers. She also represents sports apparel company New Balance, Babolat tennis gear, ROKit telecommunications and Oracle Cloud Solutions.





### ONE OF THESE DAYS.

Right? One of these days soon we're going to be able to put this all behind us. Visit friends and family. Go places. It doesn't really matter where as long as we can ... just go.

And when we do we'll take our Gator pride with us. Your UF license plate tells everyone on the road — and at the concerts, festivals, restaurants and other places where we plan to come together again — which school has your heart. And what's really sweet? Proceeds generated support millions in scholarships, which means you keep the good going.

**WHEREVER YOU GO - GO GATOR!**



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