Science Alliance
New Scripps Biomedical Research partnership creates opportunities for discovery.
Page 24
Dianne B. Snedaker and Mitchell and Elissa Habib say they formed many of their ideas about the values of journalism at the College of Journalism and Communications and wanted to do something to address the crisis of trust in media. They took action by supporting the Consortium on Trust in Media and Technology. With a $2 million endowment, the Dianne B. Snedaker Chair in Media Trust will fund a research director for the consortium. The new chair will set an agenda for groundbreaking work on trust and the role of artificial intelligence in journalism and communication. “Many of the sensibilities that I hold about journalism were formed at the university,” said Snedaker, BS ’70, CJC Hall of Fame 1991, who endowed the chair. Snedaker, now retired, is former executive vice president and chief marketing officer of First Republic Bank in San Francisco and former president of Ketchum Advertising.

UF alumni Mitchell and Elissa Habib donated $500,000 to the consortium to create and support an advisory board, which was named in February. “The erosion of confidence in our nation’s press brings great sadness to Elissa and me and presents a danger to our society,” said Habib, BS ’82, CJC Hall of Fame 2011.

The Consortium on Trust in Media and Technology, established in 2019 with a $1.25 million grant from UF, is focused on investigating how to restore and advance trust in media and technology as a vital part of civic life and the democratic process. The consortium is a cross-disciplinary initiative designed to both understand the trust crisis and to develop interventions for citizens and institutions.

DAVID AND NAN RICH

David (BA ’60) and Nan (BA ’61) Rich are naming a professorship in honor of David’s father, Harry, who arrived in the United States from Poland in 1923 and whose five sisters were among those killed in the Holocaust. The Harry Rich Professorship in Holocaust Studies will be held by renowned scholar Natalia Aleksiun, a specialist in Polish Jewish history and the Holocaust in Eastern Europe who holds PhDs from the University of Warsaw and from New York University. The chair will be housed in the Center for Jewish Studies and will make UF a world leader in researching and teaching the Holocaust in Eastern Europe who holds PhDs from the University of Warsaw and from New York University. The chair will be housed in the Center for Jewish Studies and will make UF a world leader in researching and teaching one of history’s darkest moments. Nan, a former state legislator and current Broward County commissioner, was named to the board of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1999. Center Director Norman J.W. Goda called Aleksiun’s hire “transformational” and said it makes UF a national leader in Holocaust research. “When UF alumni ask me whether I think the Holocaust will be taught in 50 years, they expect an answer of yes,” Goda said. “But in truth there is no guarantee that what is taught today will be taught tomorrow. An endowment on this level reflects a commitment to the subject regardless of political winds.”

This story appeared in the fall 2021 issue of Ytori magazine. Read more at uff.to/chx087

ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION

UF’s College of the Arts will partner with Gainesville’s historically black neighborhoods as part of a $750,000 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Humanities in Place grant. Sparked by the work of Gainesville native Terri Bailey and other local arts leaders, the Racial Equity in Community-Engaged Research project will include a shared data collection and storytelling process, a summer apprenticeship for young adult artmakers, a conversation series and an installation of community art projects. Dionne Champion, research assistant professor at the UF Center for Arts in Medicine, says Gainesville is bustling with artists, creatives and culture bearers from historically black communities. As the principal investigator on the grant, Champion will strive to build a new equitable relationship and research exchange between the community and the university. The Racial Equity in Community-Engaged Research grant activities mark the first set of programming for the SPARC352 initiative, a Space for People, Arts, Research, and Creative Collaboration and Community—with 352 signifying Gainesville’s area code.

ABOVE: SPARC352 partners gather at a Partnership for Reimagining Gainesville event. From left to right: Terri Bailey, Turbado Marabou, Andrew Telles, Dionne Champion, Alana Jackson and Oșubi Craig.
The integration of UF Health and Scripps — now UF Scripps — creates a science powerhouse and opens new avenues for collaboration.

A champion from 1996 returns to the Swamp as Legacy Linebacker, Legacy Coach.

The University of Florida, Tim Tebow returned to Ben Hill Griffin Stadium this spring, this time wearing commencement regalia instead of a football uniform and inspiring with his words rather than his running and passing. Thirteen years after he earned his own degree from the University of Florida, Tebow was the commencement speaker at our university wide ceremony April 27 where we celebrated the accomplishments and conferred the degrees of thousands of spring graduates of the Class of 2022.

Because of COVID, it was the first such university wide ceremony in the stadium since 2019 — and the signature ceremony in a joyous commencement weekend that featured, in addition, 18 college ceremonies and a doctoral ceremony where graduates were individually recognized.

The ceremony started at 7 p.m. with an announcer presenting the dean and graduates of each college as they entered the stadium, where an estimated 20,000 parents, family members and friends waved and cheered from the stands.

A Good Bad Guy

Actor and UF alum Juan Javier Cardenas is switching gears, from zombies to dads. He’s good at both, and credits his adaptability to his days in UF’s theater program.

Kappa Klass

UF’s first black fraternity celebrated a tradition of achievement and brotherhood at its 50th anniversary gala.

A Growing Family

New names appeared on campus during the Go Greater campus as UF’s family of benefactors grew.

Legacy Linebacker, Legacy Coach

A champion from 1996 returns to the Swamp as Mike Peterson joins Billy Napier’s staff.

A Partnership of Possibilities

The integration of UF Health and Scripps Florida — now UF Scripps — creates a science powerhouse and opens new avenues for collaboration.

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The integration of UF Health and Scripps Florida — now UF Scripps — creates a science powerhouse and opens new avenues for collaboration.
The 28th annual Dance Marathon at the University of Florida shimmied its way back onto the floor at the O’Connell Center this year after a hybrid dance last year. The dancers raised $2,334,217.21 for Children’s Miracle Network, which supports health care for patients at UF Shands Children’s Hospital. About 1,400 dancers participated in the 26.2-hour event March 26-27. Photo courtesy of DM at UF.
EVENTS IN UKRAINE SPUR GATORS TO ACTION

BY JULIA BAUER (BSJ '23) AND JENNY ROGERS (BSPR '23)

WHEN RUSSIA INVADED UKRAINE ON Feb. 24, the threads that connect Gators with Ukraine began to emerge. Immediately, the campus turned to its European studies scholars to help make sense of the news, with the Graham Center for Public Service putting together a panel of scholars that drew an in-person audience of 80 and more than 400 via Zoom. Two students draped in the Ukrainian flag attended the panel, The War in Ukraine: Why, How, and What Happens Next.

In some places, orange gave way to yellow as a companion to Gator blue, and fundraisers sprang up, including one by four alumni and students whose lives have been affected by the war in Ukraine.

Only on rare occasions does Century Tower not proudly shine orange and blue. Tonight, in solidarity, it was blue over yellow.

— TWEET BY UF PRESIDENT KENT FUCHS ON MARCH 2

The Scholar

Kasia Wiech (BS '20) went to the University of Warsaw in Poland in October as a Fulbright Scholar to present her research on a physics project to investigate images of cancer. When Russia invaded Ukraine, she found a new mission: working with refugees.

Wiech volunteers at Warsaw Central Train Station, handing out everything from toothpaste to baby formula to the toiletries tent. She is the first member of her Polish family to be born in America and says she is happy to give back to the Polish community.

"Poland has really taken it upon itself to help out," said Wiech, 24, who also holds a certificate in east-central European studies. "I think part of that is because of our history with Russia. Poles feel like it’s important for them to be there for Ukrainians."

To provide shelter for refugees, Wiech has invited friends to stay with her, so their apartments can be used for displaced Ukrainians, who also volunteer.

"I hope that while they’re here, they’re welcomed and they’re safe, and they feel loved, cared for and respected."

The Artist

When the war in Ukraine broke out, Iryna Kanishcheva (MBA '20) was far from her hometown of Lviv. With most of her family and friends still in Ukraine, Kanishcheva says a pit formed in her stomach.

"Once it’s a war," she said, "there are no rules anymore. You have a weapon; you have permission to kill people and you can do whatever you want. It’s really, really terrifying."

Kanishcheva started 352walls, a public art initiative, in 2016, and turned to art to spread an anti-war message.

"I hope that while they’re here, they’re welcomed and they’re safe, and they feel loved, cared for and respected."

The Lieutenant

As an air battle manager for the NATO Allied Air Command team, U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Alex Baer (BA '13) can spot activity in the skies over Ukraine from an AWACS aircraft based out of Gellenkirchen Air Force Base in Germany.

"Russia’s invasion of Ukraine put NATO countries on alert and required flight teams to fly days, nights and weekends. When his team is not in the air, Baer said he is mission planning or working in the tactical office for NATO’s flying squadron.

"If we were any weaker or slower to respond, it’s possible that Russia could take advantage of that weakness," said Baer, 31. "We are providing a continuous, 24/7 defense and readiness posture."

"We’re taking measures to not only provide surveillance support for what’s happening in Ukraine but also to assure the NATO allies that we will protect and defend their airspace."

Baer’s base also collects canned food, clothing, bedsheets, pillows and children’s toys and books to send to Poland.

The Athlete

When UF diver Anton Svirskyi plunges into the pool for diving practice, the water washes away his worries for a moment. The 20-year-old biomedical engineering major moved from Ukraine to the U.S. with his father, mother and sister in 2015, but for the rest of his family and friends remain in the war-torn country.

"Everybody else," he said, "like my friends, my cousins and my uncles, they’re all fighting.

Some of Svirskyi’s aunt’s found shelter in Poland and Italy but his grandparents remain in Ukraine, with his grandfather in the hospital and his grandmother taking shelter in their basement.

Before the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Svirskyi never imagined a life anywhere else.

"I saw myself spending my whole life there, living there, getting married there..."

Prior to joining the UF team, Svirskyi won 38 gold medals, 12 silver medals and 4 bronze medals for the Ukrainian national diving team at the Junior European Olympic Games in 2015. Here on campus, Svirskyi said UF has supported his fundraiser for Ukraine, allowing individuals to drop off items at the Otis Hawkins Center.
SEARCH COMMITTEE’S TASK: FIND UF’S 13TH PRESIDENT

The search for the University of Florida’s next president is on. A search committee appointed in March is working with an executive search firm in identifying and selecting candidates to fill the role being vacated by President Kent Fuchs, who will move into a faculty position after the first of the year.

The committee will be chaired by UF Board of Trustees member Rahul Patel (BA ’94, JD ’97), who is serving his second term on the board and is the chair of the Committee on Academic, Faculty & Student Success, Public Relations & Strategic Communications. Joining Patel on the committee are:

- Mr. Doug Band, UF Foundation National Board
- Dr. David Bloom, UF Faculty Representative, Faculty Senate Chair and Professor, Department of Molecular Genetics & Microbiology
- Mr. David Duda, UF Alumnus
- Mr. Manny Fernandez, UF Alumnus
- Ms. Lauren Lemasters, UF Student and Student Body President-Elect
- Mr. Charles Lydecker, Florida Board of Governors
- Dr. Lisa Lundy, UF Faculty Representative, Professor and Undergraduate Coordinator, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication
- Dr. Duane Mitchell, UF Faculty Representative, Professor, Department of Neurosurgery
- Ms. Marsha Powers, UF Trustee
- Mr. Fred Ridley, UF Trustee
- Ms. Laura Rosenbury, Dean, UF Levin College of Law
- Mr. Bob Stilley, UF Alumnus
- Ms. Lynda Tealer, Executive Associate Athletics Director, University Athletics Association
- Ms. Anita Zucker, UF Trustee
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The committee will recommend a small number of candidates to the UF Board of Trustees, which will interview the finalists and select the next president, with the Board of Governors of the State University System ratifying. The committee will be assisted by SP&A Executive Search. The charge to the Search Committee and brief biographies of Committee members can be found at presidentssearch.ufl.edu.

THURSDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

Football Coach Billy Napier’s decision to move the Orange & Blue Game to a Thursday night gave the Gators the undivided attention of about 300 football recruits who attended the spring scrimmage at Sperner Field at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium. About 45,000 fans turned out for the breezy game, a change of pace from the usual Saturday daytime scrimmage. New men’s basketball Coach Todd Golden captained the Blue team, while women’s basketball Coach Kelly Rae Finley captained the Orange team. A neutral Napier wore white as he scrutinized the action. The Blue team, led by quarterback Anthony Richardson, won 34-0.

‘TWEETS’ DRAWS CROWDS TO CAMPUS WOODS

One of the rarest birds on the East Coast has decided the University of Florida’s Natural Area Teaching Laboratory might be a good place to call home.

The yellow cardinal — dubbed Tweets — was spotted in the spring and drew crowds of birdwatchers to campus. Although red cardinals along the East Coast number around 15 million, experts say there could be just 10 or 15 yellow cardinals in the region.

“This is the first yellow cardinal I have seen,” said Andy Kratter, ornithology collections manager at the Florida Museum of Natural History. North American cardinals are brown or grayish when born and develop color upon leaving their nests.

“The color comes from carotenoid pigments derived from the foods cardinals eat,” said Mark Hostetler, a professor in the Department of Wildlife Ecology & Conservation at the UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

Seeds, grains and fruit give a cardinal a yellow pigment, and a specific enzyme later turns yellow to red. If the enzyme is missing, the cardinal remains yellow.

“It’s probably a rare genetic mutation, affecting fewer than one in a million,” Hostetler said.

Kratter believes Tweets was born among the cardinal babies that hatched near the Natural Area Teaching Laboratory at the end of 2021, and if he stays healthy, he could have a lifespan of about three years.

Tweets has become a celebrity, with birdwatchers sharing sightings and packing the paths in the usually quiet, 60-acre lab on the southwest corner of campus.

“It’s a showstopper,” Kratter said.

The handheld testing apparatus can be constructed for less than $50, unlike expensive PCR tests.

NEW TEST ANSWERS COVID QUESTION IN 30 SECONDS

Researchers at the University of Florida have helped develop a COVID-19 testing device that can detect coronavirus infection in as little as 30 seconds as sensitively and accurately as a PCR, or polymerase chain reaction test, the gold standard of testing.

The device, developed with scientists at National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University in Taiwan, could transform public health officials’ ability to quickly detect and respond to the coronavirus — or the next pandemic.

UF has entered into a licensing agreement with Houndstoothe Analytics in hopes of ultimately manufacturing and selling the device, which is 90% accurate, not just to medical professionals but also to consumers.
How Todd Golden - Literally - Got His Orange and Blue On

Thanks to Gator Nation Networking, the New Coach Rocked a Jordan Polo in His First Florida Interview

By Cindy Spence

On March 19, a day after he was named the UF men’s basketball coach and a day before he was scheduled to go on ESPN to talk about his new gig, Todd Golden found himself stuck in San Francisco without a key piece of professional attire: an orange and blue shirt.

Back in Gainesville at Gator Boosters, Ryan Schulman quickly realized there was no time to FedEx Gator gear from the mother lode on hand in Gainesville. But he had been texting with Jeff Lau (BSBA ’93), a booster in San Francisco, and got an idea.

“He asked me if I had any extra Gator gear laying around,” Lau recalls. “I said ‘f you should ask.’

Lau had just purchased a brand-new Jordan-branded, Gator logo blue striped shirt, and it was hanging in his closet, just waiting for the 2022 football season and a trip back to Gainesville to spend time with his Beta Theta Pi fraternity brothers. Would he part with it? Schulman asked. Of course. Would he deliver it? No problem.

“I became the best option to get the coach some Gator gear before the interview the next morning on ESPN during our NIT game against Xavier,” Lau says.

Lau drove across the Golden Gate Bridge from his home in Marin to Golden’s home in the city.

“He came bouncing out of the house and seemed thrilled he wouldn’t have to wear his white Nike shirt,” Lau says. “The hiring seemed like a whirlwind for alumni, but I imagine for him, it was a lode on hand in Gainesville. But he had been texting with Jeff Lau (BSBA ’93), a booster in San Francisco, and got an idea.

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They chatted about recruiting, and Lau says Golden seemed excited about the resources at Florida. Lau’s wife Tresa was on hand and took a few photos, then they drove back home to watch excited about the resources at Florida. Lau’s wife Tresa was on hand and took a few photos, then they drove back home to watch basketball.

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excited about the resources at Florida. Lau’s wife Tresa was on hand and took a few photos, then they drove back home to watch basketball.

“We flipped on the game, and there he was, wearing my polo,” Lau says.

Lau also donated a long-sleeve Gator quarter-zip, which Golden wore the next day on his first trip to Gainesville.

“In the pictures of him getting off the plane, he’s giving the Gator chomp in my quarter-zip, so he made use of everything,” Lau says.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the world’s largest general scientific society and publisher of the Science family of journals, has elected seven faculty from the University of Florida to the newest class of AAAS Fellows, among the most distinct honors within the scientific community.

The 2021 class of AAAS Fellows includes 564 scientists, engineers, and innovators spanning 24 scientific disciplines who are being recognized for their scientifically and socially distinguished achievements.

“Selection as AAAS Fellows is an important recognition of the outstanding research these seven faculty members are undertaking,” said David Norton, UF’s vice president for research.

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AAAS HONORS UF FACULTY

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WHY WE LOVE WORDLE, ACCORDING TO SCIENCE

BY ALISSON CLARK (BSJ ’98, MAMC ’16)

S
ocial psychologist Matt Baldwin wakes up thinking about the yellow and green boxes of Wordle, the free, once-a-day word game that has gained millions of fans since its public launch in October and purchase in January by the New York Times. Unlike most players, though, he understands why our brains crave it.

Baldwin, a University of Florida professor, points to several psychological concepts that may explain our infatuation with the simple but sharable game.

IT DELIVERS AN ‘AHA’ MOMENT (EVEN IF YOU LOSE)

The moment at the end of the puzzle when the answer is revealed delivers what psychologists call a sudden influx of fluency — something we’re hard-wired to pursue, Baldwin explains. "Even when you don’t get it, and the answer is revealed, finding that solution feels good," he said. "That feeling of fluency is something that we seek out not only in games, but also when we’re trying to solve a problem in our work or in our relationships."

IT SUITS OUR PANDEMIC-ADDLED MINDS

Entering year three of the pandemic, "we’re overwhelmed. Things can’t hold our attention because we’re so bombarded with COVID stuff," Baldwin said.

Wordle can be an ideal way to create flow, the pleasurable immersion we feel when tackling an activity with the right combination of meaning and challenge. "It’s not too easy or too hard, and it doesn’t demand too much attention. It’s also sort of purposeful: It feels like you’re training your brain, not just stacking blocks or launching a bird," he said. "It captures meaning and attention at that optimal level. I think that’s what makes it really special."

IT’S SHARED

Ever like a band that no one seems to know about, then get excited when you meet someone who loves them too? That’s the essence of shared reality theory — our subjective preferences feel validated when someone else shares them. With its built-in sharing function, Wordle provides just such an experience, Baldwin said.

"We like to tune our internal states to the internal states of others. I may think Wordle is fun, but when I see that everyone else on Twitter thinks it’s fun, then it’s like it becomes an objective fact," he said.

IT’S BINGEPROOF

Because Wordle is only offered once a day, "it’s possible that it keeps the feeling from becoming too basic or too familiar," Baldwin said. "The scarcity of this insightful moment may be something that keeps it interesting."

IT SATISFIES OUR URGE TO FIT IN WITH PEERS

If your Twitter network is into Wordle, you’ve likely seen someone tweet that they’ve ‘given in’ and started playing. That’s peer pressure, but peer pressure isn’t inherently bad, Baldwin said. The concept of in-group identity can help us bond with others.

"Norms give us the ability to tune our attitudes, beliefs and identities to that of other people in our group. It gives us something to coalesce around and helps form a collective identity," he said. For Baldwin, that’s a distributed community of scholars who happen to be very into Wordle right now. If you opt out, you feel less connected to the group.

"If I don’t play Wordle at this point, what kind of academic am I?" he joked. "Sharing it on Twitter is a way of saying like, ‘look at me, I’m also doing Wordle just like everyone else.’ That makes me a good group member."

IT SHOWS HOW WE STACK UP

Sharing your daily Wordle score doesn’t just signify you’re part of the group, it shows how you performed, which offers an opportunity for social comparison. For better or worse, Baldwin said, we love social comparison.

"Comparison can be detrimental to self-esteem if you’re always comparing upward to people who are unattainable. But I can learn something about myself by the way I stack up against others, and it doesn’t always have to be a negative feeling. Maybe people just like the information they get from looking at what other people are doing and getting a sense of where they stand."

Stack these concepts on top of each other, and Wordle’s exponential growth begins to make sense. It’s about more than passing a five-letter word.

"Shared experiences give a lot of meaning to life. They help us orient toward what’s good, what’s meaningful and what’s worthwhile," Baldwin said. "It’s not too easy or too hard, and it doesn’t demand too much attention. It’s also sort of purposeful: It feels like you’re training your brain, not just stacking blocks or launching a bird," he said. “It captures meaning and attention at that optimal level. I think that’s what makes it really special.”

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There’s Gator pride, too, so what has been your favorite thing about joining the Gator Nation?
I learned quickly: Gator Nation is loud, and Gator Nation is proud. The Gator network is super fast, too. My friends and colleagues who were a part of Gator Nation knew about my finalist interview via the incredible communication network on campus. I was getting emails and calls left and right. I looked at my husband, and I said, “You don’t play with Gator Nation because they have the support of the universe, coast to coast, top to bottom, side to side.” It’s no wonder the annual giving from alumni and the capital campaigns are so successful. There’s a lot of pride at UF. I felt the vibe. We’ve caught the spirit.

“Gator Nation is loud, and Gator Nation is proud… I felt the vibe.”
— DR. MARSHA McGriff, UF’s NEW CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER

We love to hear it. My freshman year, I had a small Gator pin on my backpack in the Los Angeles airport and across the airport, I hear “go Gators,” miles and miles from home. Have you found a spot yet that you really love in the community?
Satch Squared. They have the most delicious waffles. Uppercrust is right another spot we love. My husband and I went to Paris in 2019, right before the pandemic, and we had the best French pastries. Uppercrust is pretty close. There’s another thing about moving to Florida…
... everybody wants to come visit!
Oh yes, no getting away from family and friends. We’ve had at least six family members and friends visit us in just a few short months. Who in the world would have thought they would all want to come visit us right before the pandemic?
You went to Tuskegee University, an HBCU. Did attending an HBCU affect the way you tackle diversity issues at a PWI (predominantly white institution)?
Absolutely. The first time I realized my experience at an HBCU could impact my work was at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, IUPUI, when I directed a program for single parents, individuals who were raised in foster care at some point or who were disabled. The scholarship was a full ride with extra money for day care, for computers, professional development, you name it. The goal was to mitigate obstacles to success and keep them at the university. I thought about my HBCU experience and what it took for me to be retained and to graduate. It was really my professors and administrators who I knew genuinely cared about me, who would challenge me, who met me where I was and did not judge me that enabled me to succeed. I had great friends, a community of support as well. So I built my first model for retention that way, with the goal to engage students personally, academically, socially and professionally.
There was a video you did in Indiana, about your personal experience.
Yes, so I did a video, talking about my son going to college. My husband and I had similar fears, and we were worried about how he would be treated. He actually ended up attending Indiana University, the very campus where I worked. Despite his proximity, at the end of the day I realized, I’m just a mom who has a black son, who I know has experienced so many microaggressions and straight out aggressions in his life. Without the advocacy, love and support from me and his step-dad, he could have taken a different path in life. Can you imagine if a kid doesn’t have that? My son doesn’t have my last name, so people didn’t know they were dealing with Dr. McGriff’s son on campus. Even with that anonymity, they treated him with respect and kindness, and he flourished.
Can we do that here at UF?
Absolutely. I really love that you have a student-first approach. I was raised in South Florida, a much more diverse area than UF, and my freshman year I was getting calls three times a day from my mother asking if I was OK.
You’ve been quoted saying gathering feedback for feedback’s sake is a great exercise. But what you do with that information is what’s important. How do you plan on applying that philosophy at UF?
My first question was what do we already know? Part of the Building Inclusive Excellence at UF three-year strategy that I

**ABOUT THE REPORTER**

Sophie Jean-Michel is a spring graduate in public relations. When asked to interview McGriff, she jumped at the chance: “It is no secret that the Black population at UF has been steadily decreasing, and although I am leaving, I have friends and mentees that will still be here. I wanted to know someone was looking out for them.” Jean-Michel has been active in SISTUHS Inc., Zeta Phi Beta sorority and the Black Student Union. Her experience at the College of Journalism and Communications prompted her interest in storytelling “Everyone has a story to tell, and I wanted a hand in helping people tell theirs.” After graduation, she will be taking a position with Google in Chicago, where she will trade in the “sun 24/7” of home in South Florida for midwestern weather. As a former midwesterner, McGriff reassured her Chicago wasn’t always “buckets of snow”
people with intricate diversity stories, it will help to break down some of the unfortunate stigmas that have developed around the concept of diversity. People experience their stories based upon what we call the iceberg of identity. There is what is visible on the surface, our phenotypical diversity. But the vast majority of our humanity and who we are lies below the water line. And if we’re reading people’s stories based only on what we can see, we’re doing a complete disservice to their humanity. There may be more that connects us than what we think separates us when we know the whole story. It’s about education, helping our allies to see and know themselves both within our story and as a part of their own story, you know? And that breaks down the “us” and “them” syndrome.

If you could go back in time, what would you tell college-aged Marsha?

I would tell her: You were right. Despite all the storms, you were right. What I mean by that is we doubt ourselves so much. We use hype music, you know, theme music. I play in my head when I walk into a new space or before a big meeting. I think that I would just tell myself the Marsha you thought you could be, she was always there. She was always there.

What advice would you give to underrepresented undergraduates right now at UF?

A new day is dawning. The demographics of the United States is changing. It is predicted that we will be majority minority. I think by 2045 according to the Brookings Institution. In the meantime, keep holding people accountable for your experiences. Educate members of the community and be open to growing and learning as well. I see diversity as a core leadership competency. Finally, keep the faith. There are so many administrators, so many faculty, so many people who genuinely, even at the highest levels of the university — presidents, trustees — who really care about you. I got to see that when my son went to college; they weren’t just talking about diversity, they were really living it. I know it’s hard to see sometimes when things get difficult, but please know that some of us think about you every single day.

Thank you so much.

— DR. MARSHA MCGRIFF, UF’s NEW CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER

UF filmaker’s American Muslim rom com is tops

From top left: Maria Coady Bedard, Kathleen Colverson and Joel Correia. From bottom left: Gregory MacDonald, Fiona McLaughlin and Heidi Powell

FOURTH IN FULBRIGHTS

The University of Florida is ranked fourth on a list of U.S. colleges and universities that produced the largest number of 2021-2022 Fulbright U.S. Scholars. Each year the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs announces the top-producing institutions for the Fulbright Program, the U.S. government’s flagship international educational exchange program.

Seven UF scholars earned Fulbright awards for 2021-2022, ranking the university fourth among its peers, up from seventh last year. Although seven were named, one scholar declined the award. The Fulbright program aims to increase mutual understanding between the people of the U.S. and the people of more than 150 participating countries.

UF’s 2021-2022 U.S. Fulbright Scholar awardees are:

- MARIA COADY BEDARD, School of Teaching and Learning, College of Education, Poland
- KATHLEEN COLVERSON, UF/IFAS Food Systems Institute, Ecuador
- JOEL CORREIA, Center for Latin American Studies, Paraguay
- GREGORY MACDONALD, Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants Archive, Guyana
- FIONA MCLAUGHLIN, Department of Linguistics, Algeria
- HEIDI POWELL, Art Education Program and Center for Latin American Studies, Dominican Republic

“Given the challenges the whole world has faced in the pandemic, the Fulbright mission of promoting international cooperation and exchange is more relevant than ever, and the UF International Center and the Office of the Provost are happy to support faculty interested in exploring international possibilities through the Fulbright program,” said Leonardo Villalón, dean of the International Center and associate provost.

Fulbright alumni have included 40 heads of state or government, 61 Nobel Laureates, 89 Pulitzer Prize winners and 76 MacArthur Fellows. Fulbright is active in more than 150 countries.

“Americanish” Wins at Amelia Island and Sedona International Film Festivals

Iman Zawahry, a University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications lecturer and an award-winning filmmaker, keeps winning acclaim for her film “Americanish.”

The film is the first American Muslim romantic comedy made by American Muslim women and is Zawahry’s first feature-length film. “Americanish” received the Grand Prize and Best Narrative Feature Award at the 15th annual Amelia Island Film Festival, and the Director’s Choice Best Feature Comedy Award from the 29th annual Sedona International Film Festival. Both festivals were in February.

“Americanish” has been honored by national and international film festivals including the 30th Heartland International Film Festival Narrative Feature Grand Prize and Audience Awards from the 2021 New York Asian Film Festival, the CAAMFest 2021 in San Francisco and the Asian CineVision Asian American International Film Festival.
Legacy Linebacker, Legacy Coach

ALL AMERICAN MIKE PETERSON IS JUST THE SECOND PLAYER FROM THE STEVE SPURRIER ERA TO BE HIRED AS A FULL-TIME ASSISTANT COACH

By Chris Harry, Floridagators.com

The hallways inside the Florida football coaches’ office are lined with photographs recognizing championships and achievement, including trios of All Americans by their respective positions.

One day this spring, Gators linebackers coach Mike Peterson (BA ’13) was walking that hallway with redshirt sophomore Anuwan Powell-Ryland Jr., when Powell-Ryland glanced at the wall of fame, did a double-take and hit Peterson with a question.

“Coach, is that you?” Powell-Ryland asked, pointing to a photo of Peterson alongside Wilber Marshall, arguably the greatest defensive player in UF history, and two-time national champion Brandon Spikes.

The coach smiled.

“Yeah,” Peterson shot back, without breaking stride. “That used to be me.”

Peterson is one of the most respected players of the Steve Spurrier era, a member of the 1996 national championship team, voted Most Valuable Player by his teammates following the championship team, voted Most Valuable Player by his teammates.

In January, UF coach Billy Napier brought Peterson back into the Florida fold as linebackers coach, making the man known as “Mike Pete,” now 45 and an inductee in the UF Athletic Hall of Fame, just the second player from those glorious championship-laden Spurrier teams to return as a full-time position coach.

The offer was as easy for Napier to extend as it was for Peterson to accept.

“For me, it was easy,” Peterson said. “I knew I could do it. I knew I could do it. I’ve been between the lines in ‘The Swamp,’ a University of Florida graduate and had a long career in professional football — you do that,” Napier said. “We could not have hired anyone better.”

Peterson will also serve as the “Alumni Liaison,” charged with reaching out to former players, getting them reconnected with the program and forging a welcoming bridge from the past to the present.

“I think it’s part of my job to work with coaches to help get a better sense of the tradition and the history at a place. Learn the alma mater. Learn ‘We Are the Boys.’ I think those things are important.”

Napier agreed practically verbatim.

“I think it’s part of my job to work to understand the history and tradition here; when it was done the right way and they experienced great success,” Napier said. “What led to that? What contributed to that? Those are questions I can ask Mike because he was a part of it.”

Like Napier, Peterson’s message transcends football.

“First, every kid I have — and I’m 100 percent with this now — is going to get his degree,” he said. “No, though they’re coming in as boys, I’m going to turn them into men. They’ll learn how to tie a tie, save some money and talk to girls the right way. And No. 3, I will teach them the game of football. How to play it and how to have fun with it. Those are the three things I will stand on and...we’ll have fun with it all.”

For a longer version of this story, visit FLORIDA GATOR | 19
Caryl Van Ness may have been the only fifth-grader ever summoned to the principal’s office for spending too much time in the library. Spurning the traditional boys’ afterschool role of safety patrol officer, he instead rooted himself among shelves of history books, much to the concern of the school librarian, Ms. Cox. Van Ness didn’t know it at the time, but he had embarked on a path that would continually lead to his favorite destination — getting lost in the stacks.

In 1984, he joined the University of Florida’s library staff, later becoming the university archivist. Today, his official title is Florida political papers archivist, but he is better known as the university historian, an honorary designation first bestowed on his longtime mentor Samuel Proctor, a UF historian who wrote several books about the university.

Jacksonville-born Van Ness is the most qualified person on UF’s campus to explain who “Alice” of Lake Alice fame was; why UF’s Special and Area Studies Collections include a biscuit; how Black Thursday was a pivotal moment in Black students’ quest for equity and representation; and the intricacies of UF’s evolution from two buildings in a backwater to the state’s preeminent university and a top public institution in the country.

Van Ness will retire this June after 38 years of service.

“This was all serendipitous”

Despite his lifelong penchant for books, Van Ness hadn’t planned on becoming a librarian. His wife’s entry into the UF Levin College of Law in the 1980s landed him in Gainesville where, following a brief stint as a history graduate student, he found his true calling when the library hired him to

Although he’s retired as of June, UF historian Carl Van Ness says he’ll still take Gator history questions

BY NATALIE VAN HOOSE (BA ’06)
We’re the only public university in Florida that has records going back to the 1800s. This is an older institution with a lot of depth and one of the most diverse curriculums in the nation.

— CARL VAN NESS

curate a collection of materials about the Cuban sugar industry. “I just enjoyed the work so much, it changed my life plan. This was all serendipitous,” Van Ness said. “I love discovery. That’s how I curated the collection.”

He has discovered a few buried treasures in the archives along with an entrance to the Plaza of the Americas. “Some people don’t necessarily know the history of Florida, and that’s where the archives come in.”

Van Ness said he will miss working with the library’s collections, UF EPHEMERA

The university’s libraries also double as a museum. Among the items in the collection:

1. A biscuit mailed to someone in Georgia in 1913 as an example of how inedible campus food was.

2. Rat caps worn by early freshmen.

3. A delicate shot glass commemorating the 1904 football game between Florida State College and the University of Florida. Florida State won, but the shot glass ended up at UF.

What’s next for one of UF’s most dedicated bibliophiles? “I’ve already told people that they can still call me with questions after I retire. I’ll continue to serve the university in some capacity.”

Van Ness said he will miss working with the library’s collections, UF EPHEMERA

Information provided by Carl Van Ness

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The Old Gold & Blue

UF’s original school colors likely were not blue and orange, but blue and gold. An old, alma mater-style song speaks of the blue and gold.

A delicate shot glass commemorating the 1904 football game between Florida State College and the University of Florida. Florida State won, but the shot glass ended up at UF.

The Other UF

The University of Florida was not always located in Gainesville. Prior to the passage of the Buckman Act, the university was located in Lake City. Florida is the only state in modern history to move its university from one location to another.

LOOKING TO THE PAST TO UNDERSTAND THE PRESENT

Few universities have an official historian, but the role’s value goes far beyond being quizzable in university trivia and capable of unearthing a box of freshmen “rat caps,” wooden beadies generations of UF students were required to wear for the duration of their first year. Knowing our history helps us understand where we are now, Van Ness said.

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TWO OF THE NATION’S MOST RESPECTED RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS HAVE INTEGRATED, and scientists say the likely beneficiaries will be patients who struggle with some of the world’s most challenging diseases.

Effective April 2, the Florida campus of Scripps Research became a part of the University of Florida’s academic health center as UF Scripps Biomedical Research.

The integration creates an opportunity to accelerate the pace of biomedical discoveries, said David Nelson, senior vice president for health affairs at UF and president of UF Health.

“Together, UF Health and UF Scripps Biomedical Research can more effectively fight disease threats, address lingering medical challenges and create new science education opportunities,” Nelson said.

“For patients and scientists alike, this is a momentous day. When basic scientific discoveries move rapidly from the laboratory to the patient’s bedside, all of humanity sees a benefit.”

Scripps Florida’s reputation for biomedical research paired with UF Health’s clinical and biomedical research expertise will create a synergy for drug discovery and other treatments that can improve outcomes for patients in Florida and around the world.

Scripps Florida researchers have been responsible for pioneering discoveries that have led to hundreds of patents and numerous spinoff companies. Among the discoveries at Scripps is a novel antibody drug combination now in clinical trials for use against aggressive cancers. Other potential treatments for HIV, Parkinson’s, ALS and a form of muscular dystrophy are in the clinical trial pipeline.
Wertheim continued

Wertheim, who studied engineering at UF as an undergraduate, is still looking for more ways to set UF apart from its peers. His latest move was to recruit the Florida branch of Scripps Research to the university. Wertheim is a member of the Scripps Research Board of Directors.

“We are exceptionally grateful for the efforts of Herbert Wertheim, who helped bring this tremendous opportunity to Scripps and the university,” said Morit Hooseini, UF Board of Trustees chair. Wertheim is founder and CEO of Brain Power Inc., the CEO of Scripps and the university.

Wertheim continued

Scripps Research in La Jolla, California, is unaffected by the transition.

“With his leadership, Scripps has grown into a large, internationally recognized medical research institute that is a magnet for up-and-coming scientists who dream of potential cures,” said Louis Scampavia, senior scientific director of the molecular screening program at Scripps Research.

The new UF Scripps scientist aims to chart the unknown of the cell

BY STACEY S. DELOYE

New maps have opened some of history’s most consequential transformations. Magellan charted a western route to the Pacific Spice Islands and opened an epoch of global seafaring conquest. Three centuries later, Lewis and Clark mapped the North American West, thereby opening the American frontier to settlement. In biomedical research, the charting of the human genome has no less historic. Having a map of human DNA was a critical first step in understanding the origins of disease. But beyond the genome, vast unknown territory remains. To truly cure cancer or hereditary diseases, the mapping must continue.

The newest faculty member to join UF Scripps Biomedical Research, Ciaran Seath, Ph.D., invents new methods and technologies to chart this terra incognita.

“I developed a new method for taking a snapshot of which proteins are touching and talking to each other in the cell,” explains Seath, who completed his postdoctoral research with Nobel Laureate Professor Dave MacMillan of Princeton University.

“My theory is if we can find out what these proteins are interacting with, who they are talking to, we can understand what leads to disease, and maybe we can disrupt them or promote positive connections to treat disease.” Seath grew up in a small fishing village on the coast of Scotland. Influenced by a great teacher, he chose to study chemistry as an undergraduate. An internship at a pharmaceutical firm in the United States made him want to solve problems of human health, and so he went back to Scotland to pursue his Ph.D. in organic chemistry at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. His second postdoctoral research posting, in the MacMillan group at Princeton University in New Jersey, led Seath to delve into the world of photochemical biology, or employing light as a tool to manipulate biology.

“It’s no accident that Seath chose UF Scripps Biomedical Research to launch his cellular expeditions. UF Scripps possesses technologies, assets and expertise that are, in many ways, unique to academia, he notes. They include robots that conduct hundreds of thousands of experiments a day, and vast collections of biologically active molecules that make it possible to probe and study the mysteries within cells in new ways. They also include chemists who are pushing the boundaries of what’s known about RNA, the cellular tools that build proteins from DNA. The potential for high-impact collaborations is exciting, he adds.”

“UF Scripps is really the perfect place for doing research like this,” Seath says. “Everyone at UF Scripps really loves to collaborate.”

Robot Helpers SOUTEPHORED TOOL CAN CUT YEARS OFF TESTS FOR NEW DRUG COMPOUNDS

In the search for new medicines, drug discovery and clinical trials go hand in hand. That’s one of the reasons the integration of UF Health and Scripps Florida is such a landmark moment for both institutions, says Patrick Griffin, scientific director and profes sor of molecular medicine for UF Scripps Biomedical Research.

“Our new connection with the clinical and scientific expertise at UF Health provides an exceptional opportunity to accelerate scientific discoveries for the benefit of people who need them,” Griffin says.

The multimillion-dollar robots and drug-like compounds that comprise the High-Throughput Molecular Screening Center at UF Scripps Biomedical Research offer opportunities for precision medicine. The robots can pipe tiny quantities of compounds onto cell targets — brain cancer cells from a particular patient, for instance — and read the results using fluorescent dyes or other technologies.

One cartridge of cells can hold 1,536 tiny test tubes, which the robot can test with every known cancer drug provided by the National Cancer Institute. Such sophisticated, industrial-type drug discovery tools in a university setting are rare, but it’s the heart of what makes UF Scripps Biomedical Research a magnet for up-and-coming scientists who dream of seeing their discoveries lead to potential cures.

“If a scientist tried to do this by hand, it would take them years,” said Louis Scampavia, senior scientific director of the molecular screening program at UF Scripps Biomedical Research.
New names join a long Gator history of investing in the future of the state, nation and world.

Generations of Gators have lived with names like Buckman and Murphee, Tigert and Turlington, names so familiar they are almost like family.

And in the University of Florida’s most recent campaign, that family grew yet again.

We welcomed Wertheim and Rosen. We checked in by webcam as Malachowsky Hall rose along Museum Road. On the Atlantic Coast, the name Condron meant a second chance at life for endangered sea turtles. At UF Health, the name Fixel became synonymous with brain research.

The Hitchcock name resonated with hungry Gators who packed grocery bags at the campus food pantry. Gratitude (and young love) led to the name Gadsby, affixed to the Reitz Union social steps. We welcomed new-era spaces for learning, with names like Goodrum and Sheridan. The Florida Museum added McGurn to its walls, in anticipation of a major expansion. The Powells, already fixtures across campus, turned the mid-century president’s house into a place for Gators to gather.

These names and more will live on at the University of Florida, as an eight-year campaign closes this fall. When we started, we had no idea how contagious the Gator Good could be. The new names on the new spaces are a sign of success, not only for a campaign that exceeded its $3 billion target, but for a university Going Greater.

Here’s a look at some of the new names and spaces the campaign brought to the university:
Alan and Cathy Hitchcock Field & Fork Pantry
OPENED: 2015
LOCATION: Union Lawn near McCarty Hall
DONORS: Cathy and Alan Hitchcock

No Gator need ever go hungry. That’s the goal of the Alan and Cathy Hitchcock Field and Fork Pantry, established in 2015 and renovated with a 1,194-square-foot expansion in 2019 thanks to a gift from Alan (BSA ’74) and Cathy Hitchcock, founders of Hitchcock’s Markets. The pantry assists members of the UF community who experience food insecurity, which is the limited or uncertain access to nutritious food. With the expansion, the pantry gained a dedicated area for storage and processing of food donations, a teaching and demonstration area, and more space for non-perishable food items and fresh produce from the Field & Fork Farm and Gardens.

Malachowsky Hall for Data Science & Information Technology
OPENING: 2023
LOCATION: Museum Road across from the Reitz Union
DONOR: Chris Malachowsky

With AI taking center stage in the curriculum across all colleges, it is only fitting that AI take center stage on campus as well. AI and other technologies will have a home in the heart of campus starting in 2023 when Malachowsky Hall for Data Science & Information Technology opens. The 263,000-square-foot building, anchored by a gift from Chris Malachowsky (BS ’80) and his company, NVIDIA, will create a hub for advances in computing, communications and cyber-technologies with the potential for profound societal impact. The building provides space for researchers and students in medicine, engineering, pharmacy, informatics and others to collaborate across disciplines. In making the gift, Malachowsky noted the possibility for AI and data sciences to be “life-changing” for students and scientists.

CENTER: Chris Malachowsky and his wife Melody tour the construction site.
Above: The Sea Turtle Hospital opened in 2015 to provide rehabilitation, education and research for sea turtle conservation. At right: Nancy Condron is a hands-on volunteer at the Whitney Lab, folding towels, scrubbing tanks and releasing sea turtles.

UF Health’s Norman Fixel Institute for Neurological Diseases

Opened: 2019
Location: Williston Road, south of main campus
Donors: Lee and Lauren Fixel

Just south of UF’s main Gainesville campus, Gator doctors and scientists are delivering new hope to millions of people the world over with Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s disease, dementia and other neurological conditions. Since opening in 2019, UF Health’s Norman Fixel Institute for Neurological Diseases has grown into one of the nation’s leading centers of its kind. There, cutting-edge treatments like deep brain stimulation and gene therapy are changing patient care. Other discoveries are revolutionizing the science of the brain. The institute is named for alumnus and UF Health patient Norman Fixel (BSBA ’75) in honor of donor Lee Fixel’s father. Lee and Lauren (BSJ ’07) Fixel gave the lead gift to help UF “develop groundbreaking treatments.”

Nancy Condron Family Sea Turtle Research Center And Hospital

Opened: 2015
Location: Whitney Laboratory for Marine Bioscience, St. Augustine
Donors: Nancy and Gary Condron

Up on Florida’s First Coast, in the state’s upper right corner, is UF’s Whitney Laboratory for Marine Bioscience — home to the Nancy Condron Family Sea Turtle Research Center and Hospital. It’s a high-tech, hands-on approach to conservation and discovery designed to protect and care for one of the world’s oldest, and most endangered, creatures: the sea turtle. Condron (MBA ’86, JD ’86), a longtime conservationist from nearby Ponte Vedra, led the initial effort to create the facility with the intent to help weak hatchlings that are washed back onto the beach and sick turtles. The hospital, named in Condron’s honor, opened in 2015. It now has an emergency room, nursery for hatchlings and offers community education programs.
Ken and Linda McGurn Exhibition Hall
NAMED: 2021
LOCATION: Florida Museum
DONORS: Ken and Linda McGurn
UF’s Florida Museum, most Gators would agree, is a campus treasure—a place where science and imagination collide. There are dinosaur bones and butterflies, replicas of a northwest Florida cave and Calusa Indian huts, displays of fossils and a kid-friendly Discovery Zone. The Ken and Linda McGurn Exhibition Hall honors the longtime supporters, alumni and environmentalists who’ve had a large role in the life of the museum. A new wing there—spearheaded with their philanthropic outreach—will house UF’s Thompson Earth Systems Institute. Ken (BSBA ’72, MBA ’73, PHD ’81) and Linda (BSBA ’73, JD ’78) McGurn made the donation as a capstone to their time as co-chairs of UF’s Go Greater campaign in 2019, which focused that year on climate change and other environmental issues.

Adam Michael Rosen Neuro-Oncology Laboratories
OPENED: 2021
LOCATION: Basic Science Building
DONOR: The Harris Rosen Foundation
After eight years at the McKnight Brain Institute, Dr. Duane Mitchell’s Brain Tumor Immunotherapy program had outgrown its campus facility. To foster breakthroughs, Orlando hotelier Harris Rosen and his foundation gave $12 million to create an expansive, state-of-the-art laboratory in UF’s Basic Science Building. The 13,120-square-foot facility is named in memory of Rosen’s son Adam, who received care at UF Health and died in 2018 after a prolonged fight against brain cancer. Adam Rosen was an animal lover and fitness enthusiast who frequently joined his family at charitable events, notably Runway to Hope, a Central Florida nonprofit that supports families fighting pediatric cancer.
Herbert Wertheim Laboratory for Engineering Excellence
OPENED: 2021
LOCATION: North of the Reitz Student Union
DONORS: Dr. Herbert and Nicole Wertheim Family Foundation (and others)

Dr. Herbie Wertheim and his wife, Nicole, have been driving engineering innovation at UF for years. Their gift in 2015 sparked the largest transformation in the history of the engineering college. The following year, the college broke ground on the Herbert Wertheim Laboratory for Engineering Excellence, on the Reitz Union north lawn. Big enough to contain two football fields, the five-story steel-and-glass structure encompasses labs for biotech, robotics and computers, 3D printer labs, teaching studios, conference rooms and graduate “bullpens.” Known for his iconic red hat, Wertheim encourages others to follow the beat of their own drums. “Be eccentric now,” he once said. “Don’t wait for old age to express yourself.”

Dr. Howard and Brenda Sheridan Auditorium
OPENED: 2017
LOCATION: Scott Family Chemistry Building
DONORS: Howard and Brenda Sheridan

When the UF announced plans to build a new chemistry building in the 2000s, longtime supporters Dr. Howard (BS ’65) and Brenda Sheridan (BS ’65) were among the first to answer the call for donations. The second-floor auditorium named for them in the Scott Family Chemistry Building has all the cutting-edge tools needed for 21st century learning, plus a spectacular bonus adorning its walls: 17 large photographs of wildlife – from bison and leopards, to whales and mountain goats. The photos were taken by Sheridan, who began devoting himself to wildlife photography after retiring in 2004. His award-winning images have been published in National Geographic and Nature’s Best Photography, among other publications. The Sheridans hope the photographs inspire students to care for the natural world.
Grateful Gadsby Gathering Steps

OPENED: 2018
LOCATION: Reitz Union
DONORS: James and Elizabeth Gadsby

James (BSBA ’91) and Elizabeth Gadsby (BS ’92) met at a student talent show at the Orange and Brew in the Reitz Union in 1989 and have been inseparable since. After long careers, both changed direction, with James becoming the COO of former UF quarterback Danny Wuerffel’s Desire Street Ministries, and Elizabeth becoming a biotech entrepreneur consultant. The Gadsbys give back to their community and the Gator Nation, supporting the Gadsby Fund for Student Leadership and receiving the Young Philanthropists Award at the annual Academy of Golden Gators.

The Reitz Union’s Social Stairs are named the Grateful Gadsby Gathering Steps in memory of their first meeting in 1989.

Earl and Christy Powell University House

OPENED: 1953, 2015
LOCATION: Junction of University Avenue and Southwest Second Avenue, near Gale Lemerand Drive
DONORS: Earl and Christy Powell

When UF opened a new presidential home near the law school in 2015 it freed up the old stately president’s home just north of the Stephen C. O’Connell Center. The vintage 1953 building became the Earl and Christy Powell University House. With the presidents safely ensconced elsewhere, the home became a campus retreat of sorts: receptions, holiday parties, meetings, conferences, academic ceremonies, athletics events and more keep the Earl and Christy Powell University House brimming with Gators. Earl Powell (BA ’60), a Coral Gables businessman, and Christy Powell (BS ’71) have supported numerous other ventures on campus, but the gracious Earl and Christy Powell University House is an iconic spot nearly all Gators have passed on their way to or from campus.
Dan & Margaret Goodrum Auditorium

OPENED: 2018
LOCATION: Gerson Hall, Warrington College of Business
DONORS: William and Catherine Goodrum

Hundreds of students have taken classes in this auditorium, but few know the UF history associated with it. Daniel Goodrum (BSBA ’49) and his wife, Margaret Swanson Goodrum, were raised in South Florida and graduated from Palm Beach High School. Margaret Goodrum’s grandmother, Sally Swanson, was the first UF house mother when the university was in Lake City. When the Gainesville campus was built in 1905, the Swansons (including Margaret’s father) moved into Buckman Hall, occupying its entire first floor for a year. All the Swanson boys eventually attended UF; most famously, Robert (Margaret’s uncle), a Gator bandleader credited as having co-written the UF anthem, “We Are the Boys of Old Florida” in 1919. William Goodrum (BSBA ’79) and his wife, Catherine, continued the family’s UF legacy with a gift to name the Goodrum Auditorium for his parents.

Otis P. Hawkins Center for Academic and Personal Excellence

OPENED: 2016
LOCATION: Farrior Hall
DONOR: Anonymous

Deep in the heart of campus — a view of Ben Griffin Stadium to the east, historic dormitories to the north, and classroom buildings to the west and south — is the Otis P. Hawkins Center for Academic and Personal Excellence at Farrior Hall. It’s a strategic spot for a center conceived to be a seamless blending of academics and athletics. The 82,613-square-foot facility, specifically for student-athletes, includes study rooms and computer labs, tutoring and academic advising, a nutritional wing and sports medicine area, job placement services, mental health counseling and more. Its renovation completed in 2016, the center is named in recognition of alumnus and original Gator Booster Otis Hawkins (UF ’39), who believed student-athletes should be supported in both academic and athletic pursuits.
Actor Juan Javier Cardenas says the bulk of the knowledge he uses as an actor came from his time at UF.

As a kid, I always dabbled in something. My mother was a graphic artist, and I was a huge comic book fan when I was younger, and I would invent superheroes. My dream was to be a comics illustrator. I knew I wanted to be involved in the creative or entertainment fields, but I wasn’t sure what. I figured UF was a great school; let me take a bunch of classes in all kinds of disciplines and see where I could adapt. In this industry, and in life in the arts, things don’t always follow a straight path.

Juan Javier Cardenas as Nicaraguan contra soldier and CIA agent Alejandro Usteves in “Snowfall” (2017)

No. When I was in my teens, I did quite a bit of comedy, and at UF I performed with Theatre Strike Force comedy improv. I was known for being an elastic, goofy kind of character actor. Then something happened when I was in graduate school [FSU]. One day my girlfriend, Mishka, who is now my wife, she looks at me and goes, “I see you being a very good villain. There’s something about you.”

Why do you think you started getting cast in dramatic roles, rather than comedic ones?

As actors get a little bit older, they mature — not necessarily in personality, but their bodies and in how they carry themselves. When that happens, audiences can respond to you differently. It’s important to be in tune with that and adapt. In this industry, and in life in the arts, things don’t always follow a straight path.

What was it like to go from portraying zombies and serial killers to playing a devoted father in “The Gordita Chronicles?”

It was an interesting and challenging new task portraying a character who is an incredibly positive representation of a Hispanic immigrant father. Latino families are notoriously close-knit, and Victor lives for his wife and children. I saw my own parents dedicate every ounce of their time to give a life to me and my siblings that was better than theirs.

This show is very specific and authentic to the Latin American experience in South Florida. I grew up in Orlando, and a lot of my extended family lived in Miami, so I have great memories of going down there. Plus, I’m really proud to be from Florida, and I love it when Florida is represented in the media in a positive light because we have a lot of good stories to tell here.

Your mother is Puerto Rican, your father is Cuban, and they came to Florida in the 1980s, right?

Yes, my father was an ophthalmologist. My mother studied architecture at the University of Puerto Rico. I was the first member of my immediate family to be born in the United States.

Did you dream of becoming an actor when you were young?

As a kid, I always dabbled in something artistic, but I was a jack of all trades, master of none. I did music, I did theater. In high school, I played electric double bass in jazz band. I loved pen and ink, and graphic art and design. I was a huge comic book fan when I was younger, and I would invent superheroes. My dream was to be a comics illustrator.

That’s intrigueing given that “The Walking Dead” began as a comic. With your varied interests, what made you choose the University of Florida?

I knew I wanted to be involved in the creative or entertainment fields, but I wasn’t sure what. I figured UF was a great school; let me take a bunch of classes in all kinds of disciplines and see where I could fit. That’s what I did.

How did you finally settle on acting and theatre as a major?

It was the only discipline I did that never lost its luster, that special feeling I had when I did it, no matter how hard the training. The feedback I got from my professors and the graduate students was so positive, it really percolated in me the idea that, ‘Yeah, I think I can do this.’ It was at the University of Florida that I determined to make acting and the entertainment industry my life.

They say you’re not a New York actor unless you’ve killed somebody or been killed on a ‘Law & Order’ episode.

— JUAN JAVIER CARDENAS, 2005 ALUM, COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

“Angry ‘Walking Dead’ fans may still be arguing about Dante’s shocking betrayal of his friend Siddiq. But, as it turns out, in real life Cardenas — the happily married father of two young girls — is nothing like the baddies he embodies onscreen. Thoughtful and life Cardenas — the happily married father of two young girls — is nothing like the baddies he embodies onscreen. Thoughtful and..."
As a Cuban revolutionary, Manny, with me and then for several years I had a budding regional theatre career, where all the innovation is. I worked a bit doing off-off-Broadway, City, the center of the theatre industry in the United States. That's student there, too. When I was around 25, I moved to New York Actor Training in Sarasota. That's where I met Mishka; she was a there.

What did you do after you graduated from UF?

Is there anything specific from your UF acting studies that has helped you professionally?

Wait. Let me show you something. [Cardenas reaches behind and holds up a copy of “A Practical Handbook for the Actor.”] This was the book we [acting students] were given to read in our first year. It details the ins and outs of what it means to be an actor: your responsibilities, to take direction, how lighting works, stage terminology — the lingua franca of theatre, as in what does “downstage” mean?

I've always appreciated this book because, in my own acting process, I think like a tradesman. At UF, I was given the very nuts and bolts of what it means to be an actor: your responsibilities, how to analyze and interpret scripts, how to find the emotional “beats,” how to take what's on the written page and transfer it into a performance. The bulk of the knowledge that I use as an actor I gained at the University of Florida. What did you do after you graduated from UF?

I first got an MFA in acting from FSU’s Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training in Saratoga. That’s where I met Mishka; she was a student there, too. When I was around 25, I moved to New York, City, the center of the theatre industry in the United States. That's where all the innovation is. I worked a bit doing off-off-Broadway, and then for several years I had a budding regional theatre career, doing premieres in Boston and Dallas and Florida.

How did you transition from theatre to TV and film?

Around 2010, I started acting in student films for Columbia and NYU students. That began a reeducation for me. I was not an experienced camera actor, so I took whatever opportunities I could find. And I pushed my agent to get me more work in front of the camera. Of course, there were always the “Law & Orders.” They say you’re not a New York actor unless you’ve killed somebody or been killed on a “Law & Order” episode. So, I starting picking up gigs, working on those television productions, “Blood Blues,” “The Good Wife,” “Law & Order SVU [Special Victims Unit].”

So, television work must have brought you to L.A.

No, actually, it was theatre. So, I was 29, and I was doing this play in San Diego — I had never been to the West Coast before, it was so exciting — and I fell in love with the place. One afternoon, Mishka — she had gone to school at UC San Diego — she met me out there and took me to the bluffs overlooking this black sand beach. The sun was setting, and I couldn't believe how absolutely beautiful it was. I remember looking at her and going, “I’m staying. This is where I’m staying.” Mishka and I got married right away, and we started building a life together. That was 2013.

You had a memorable role on “The Walking Dead.” What was that audition process like?

Like going for a job at the Pentagon. “The Walking Dead” holds a certain place in the industry — they’re called fandom shows, like “Star Trek” or “Star Wars” or the Marvel Universe. The audiences are so fervent and passionate that the shows have to be very protective . . . so nothing leaks before it airs. So, with “The Walking Dead,” you had to wait until the last minute to get the audition material, and I had to go by instinct to decipher it.

How many times did you audition for the role?

Only once, which was unusual. It was only after I was offered the role that I found out the character I was playing was Dante, who is in the original comic books, which I had read when I was younger. He’s one of the sincerely good people in the community of survivors. So that’s what I prepared for in the weeks leading up to traveling to Georgia, where the show is filmed. When did you learn Dante was going to be a villain?

Within five minutes of walking on set that first day. The director [Greg Nicotero] comes up to me, and he’s like, “Yeah, I don’t think anybody’s really told you what you’re here for. Dante is a mole. He’s a spy for this murderous cult of psychopaths that live in the woods who are trying to disrupt the community of the survivors. This whole thing is a ruse, your identity as the village doctor, you developing such strong friendships with people. You’re actually the betrayer in the situation. Nothing you say should be taken at face value. Everything your character does have an ulterior motive.”

Ten minutes later, the director’s like, “Hey, everybody, let’s go for take one.”

That must have been extremely challenging.

Yeah, I had to do mental gymnastics and reconfigure all of the character’s motivations I had done in my script analysis, the kind of analysis that had been my training at the University of Florida. I had to rework all that in 10 minutes.

Best piece of advice you ever received?

I have to give respect and props to Professor Tony Mata [head of musical theatre at UF]. When I was starting out, I asked him if I should change my name — because it’s long and, obviously, Spanish, and there was a general debate about actors changing their names then — and he told me: “Be proud of your name, don't change it. Say your full name as it should be pronounced. Let people know who you are.” To hear that from someone I respected, someone older, a teacher, it really confirmed what I felt.

Any wisdom to share with fellow Gators?

Be your own advocate in life. No one will work as hard as you to achieve the goals you want to achieve, professionally and personally. You are the director of your own life movie.

Last question. If there were a zombie outbreak at UF, where would you hide?

One of the black box theatres at the School of Theatre + Dance. They’re walled in, they’re only accessible through multiple interior doors that you can barricade, and they don’t have any pesky large windows that you have to worry about the zombie horde overtaking.

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In 2018, Jay Davis pledged Kappa Alpha Psi, UF's first Black fraternity, with a small group of young men. Weeks later, he was diagnosed with lymphoma, and his college life changed overnight. Thinking he had no reason to stay in Gainesville, he made plans to go home to Tampa. Then the young men who had been brothers only a few weeks stepped in, and they did what brothers do. "They opened their arms. They helped me," said Davis, a fourth year psychology major. "If I hadn't joined Kappa, I would have left Gainesville. Thanks to them, I had a support system. I could stay with my brothers. I was sheltered, and I could feel that love."

The great thing about Davis' story, says Leonard Spearman (BA '75), is that it's not unusual. It's the realization of a dream. "That's what we wanted for the future," says Spearman, one of the founders of Kappa Alpha Psi, UF's first Black fraternity, a half century old this year. "We wanted that brotherhood on this campus."

BORN OF CONTROVERSY
In the early 1970s, young Black men found themselves in the midst of unsettled times at UF as the university struggled to come to grips with change. On a less than welcoming campus, the men needed community, and if UF would not offer it, they would create it. On March 2, 1972, they formed the Zeta Phi chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi. It was an instant home for the brothers and their friends. Later brothers even rented a house near Krispy Kreme and put their Greek letters on the front, making it a de facto frat house. The brotherhood made it possible to persevere just a year after 123 Black students – one third of the Black student population – withdrew in the wake of protests and a sit-in known as Black Thursday. Some of the brothers in that first pledge class, or line, known as Hell in High Water 23 Deep, had witnessed students being kicked out of UF President Stephen C. O'Connell's office, with some even arrested. Bernard Cohen (BA '74), the inaugural president, recalls few social outlets other than basement parties in the dorms prior to forming the fraternity. Afterward, says Spearman, the Interfraternity Council, which governs Greek life, got requests to form other black fraternities and asked the brothers of Kappa Alpha Psi if they wanted the IFC to delay the charters to give Kappa more time to become established. Spearman said there was no question about Kappa's response. "We wanted them all, with no hesitation," said Spearman, a former UF Alumni Association president and proud father of two Gator grads. "We wanted everyone to have what we had."

CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENT
UF's Kappa men celebrated their history and brotherhood in March at a 50th anniversary gala in Gainesville. The ballroom of the Hilton sparkled in the trademark Kappa crimson and cream.
The youngest Kappa Alpha Psi brothers performed a step routine in Turlington Plaza for the 50th anniversary.

“We had a story, too, and we were part of the campus fabric. They saw that the love we had for the university was the same as theirs.”

— MICHAEL KILLINGS (BA ’98), ABOUT THE 1998 KAPPA STEP ROUTINE AT GATOR GROWL

with touches of gold, thanks to decorations by Christie Odou Sabir (BSBA ’77), a former Kappa sweetheart. Of the original 23 men in Hell in High Water 23 Deep, 13 attended, and emcee Yolanda Cash Jackson (BS ’80, JD ’90), also a Kappa sweetheart, Sabir introduced them as they walked to the front to the strains of "Shining Star" by Earth, Wind & Fire for their 50-year pins.

Jamal Sowell (BA ’05) and Chuck Tolliver (BS ’93), the brother charged with organizing the celebration (my brothers seem to forget I have a job!), said the Kappa network was evident in the high turnout, a visible representation of the now hundreds of undergraduate brothers in hopes that they, in turn, support the brothers after them. That support, Tolliver says, extends beyond graduation.

“We are listed as a campus organization, but this isn’t a collegiate experience,” Tolliver said. “This is something we do for life.”

A PRESIDENTIAL TRIBUTE

When UF President Kent Fuchs spoke at the gala, the experience for the men of Hell in High Water 25 Deep was bittersweet. A little more than a half century ago, a UF president had kicked some of their classmates out of his office. Now, a UF president was celebrating them.

“Many of us were first generation, or our parents never really knew I have a job," said Desruisseaux, a criminology major who plans to take a gap year then go to law school. He said a brother, a trainer, "helped me when I graduated.”

Kappa Alpha Psi endowed a scholarship in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences during the 50th anniversary in March. From left, Cedric Washington, CLAS Dean David Richardson, UF President Kent Fuchs and Michael Killings.

Kappa Alpha Psi endowed a scholarship in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences during the 50th anniversary in March. From left, Cedric Washington, CLAS Dean David Richardson, UF President Kent Fuchs and Michael Killings.

“With deep, profound gratitude, thank you brothers.”

Davis and Desruisseaux wanted to say thank you, too. The young men dressed up to attend the formal gala and were eager, they said, to spend a Friday night with the older men, some of them 50 years their senior but brothers nevertheless.

“I’m grateful,” Davis said, “that 23 men 50 years agochartered this fraternity. I’m here talking to brothers who are 50, 60 or older, and we’re having a great time. We’re Kappas.”

Killings knows the feeling: “I never say I was in Kappa Alpha Psi,” Killings said. “I am Kappa Alpha Psi, till the day I reach the golden shores.”

To support the Kappa Alpha Psi endowment in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, go to ufgive.to/y11b5j
ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT MUST HAVE BEEN IN THE WATER IN 2006 on the University of Florida campus. That year spawned nine companies that rank among the 100 fastest growing Gator businesses, and at the Gator100 award ceremony in April, they seemed to have their own cheering section. For the complete list of 2022 honorees, visit gator100.ufl.edu

The UF Alumni Association recognizes the 100 fastest-growing Gator businesses each year, with generous support from presenting sponsor Wells Fargo. Applications for the 2023 Gator100 open Aug. 29.
NASA ENGINEER John Giles (BSME ’85, BSEE ’87) is surrounded by the highest-tech gear that powers the space program. But one of the most impressive feats of engineering he’s ever seen is a relic from 1964 that has been ferrying rockets to the launch pad for half a century.

The crawlers look like space age industrial equipment from a galactic outpost in Star Wars, but they are vintage Apollo, a pair of leftovers from the first Moon missions. They have been on the job ever since, for Skylab, space shuttles and now, Artemis, which aims to return astronauts to the Moon.

Giles’ job at Kennedy Space Center is to oversee operations for the crawlers and keep these decidedly analog vehicles working in an age when there’s an app for everything. It’s no small task. Each vehicle is 6.65 million pounds, lifts 18 million pounds, and the top is big enough that the 30 people it takes to operate it could play a baseball game. Driving it requires a license you can’t get at the DMV. And when the crawler is in motion, Giles is keeping an eye on things, either in a control room or on a catwalk that runs the perimeter of the machine.

“In the time since the crawler was designed, the launch vehicles, the mobile launch tower, the launch pad, the rockets — they’re all new,” Giles says. “But they roll to the launch pad on equipment built in 1964.”

The ride from the Vehicle Assembly Building to the launch pad can take all day, starting at 0.05 mph and topping out at the rip-roaring speed of 0.82 mph. A gust of wind can be a reason to pause or slow down, a “pothole” on the crawlerway can shift the course a crucial few inches. Going slow, it turns out, is not so easy.

“Things in this world that carry a lot of weight don’t carry it fast,” Giles says. “Going 0.05 mph is a very slow speed to achieve.”

Where do degrees in mechanical engineering and electrical engineering come in? The diesel engines are connected to generators with AC current distributed to the crawler and mobile launcher and DC current distributed to 16 motors that turn tread belts. The gear box achieves a massive gear reduction of 168 to 1, making the slow speed possible.

“Going slow gives you the opportunity to stay in touch with everything,” Giles says. “If you’re driving 80 mph on the interstate and you pass a sign, you don’t have time to read it all. But at half a mile an hour, we have time to make adjustments.”

When things need attention, the crawler crew springs into action, like a NASCAR pit crew without the racecar.

“All three of Giles’ children — Aaron (BSME ’18, BSAE ’18, MSME ’19), Vittoria (BSAC ’20, MACC ’20), and Connor (BSCS ’21) — are UF graduates, with Aaron also at NASA working on SpaceX Falcon vehicles. Aaron says he didn’t realize what a big influence NASA was on his life until he got to college and was drawn to aerospace engineering. During college, he participated in Gatorloop, UF’s entry for a SpaceX competition, and met his wife during an intramural softball game.

Giles says his children became Gators by osmosis.
The ballots are in, and here are the winners of the first Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Leadership Awards. These 16 leaders — alumni, faculty, staff and students — have had substantial impact on DEI, belonging and justice efforts. Stay tuned for coverage of the celebration of these leaders in the fall Florida Gator. More at uff.to/xymp07

INAUGURAL AWARDS
HONOR LEADERSHIP
IN DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION

FLORIDA CICERONES
Founded in 1966, the Florida Cicerones serve as the official student ambassador to UF and as the governing body of Students Today, Alumni Tomorrow.

TONYA CORNILEUS
Cornileus is the vice president of development, inclusion and wellness at ESPN, where she is a key member of the human resources leadership.

ADANIA FLEMMING
Flemming is a UF biology PhD student with a joint appointment in the museum and is a research assistent with iDigBio, an NSF-funded project to digitize collections.

ADRIENNE WIDENER
Widener is a doctoral candidate in the J. Crayton Pruitt Family Department of Biomedical Engineering and served as co-president of the IDEA committee on DEI.

JESSICA ANDERSON
Anderson serves as the general manager of global diversity, equity and inclusion for Delta Air Lines. She is an active member of the Florida and Georgia Bars.

ROY BRODERICK, JR.
Broderick is a multicultural marketing expert and inspirational speaker, and in 2016, launched The Intuition Consulting Firm working with brands like AT&T.

CAREER CONNECTIONS CENTER
The center serves more than 57,000 students and thousands of alumni representing all majors and degree levels.

MAHOGANI CHERY
Chery is the lead of business transformation and engagement within Bacardi North America, advancing DEI in the workplace.

AYSEGUL GUNDUZ
Gunduz, a researcher in the J. Crayton Pruitt Family Department of Biomedical Engineering, won the Graduate Education Diversity Champion Award in 2019.

DELPHINE E. JACKSON
Jackson is a retired high school guidance counselor. She was the first black female president of the University of Florida Alumni Association in 2001.

YOLANDA CASH JACKSON
Jackson is a lobbyist and shareholder with the Becker & Polidoff law firm. She’s spent the past 30 influencing the laws that govern every Florida citizen.

MADELINE JOSEPH, M.D.
Joseph is a professor of emergency medicine and pediatrics and the associate dean-UF College of Medicine Jacksonville for Inclusion and Equity.

JONATHAN D. LOVITZ
Lovitz is a nationally recognized small business and public policy advocate. He is responsible for more than 20 laws that assist minority-owned businesses.

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An Immigrant’s Journey

Uwem Akpan’s “New York, My Village” follows Nigerian editor Ekon Udosoro as he immigrates to Manhattan for a fellowship granted for his expertise on the Biafran War. Ekon is determined to reveal the beauty in humanity, while navigating the complexities of white-dominant office culture, learning about African American and immigrant experiences, and dealing with a bedbug-infested apartment. Over 5,000 miles from home, patience and hope are all he can cling to. With its delicate observation of the tribalism in both countries, the novel offers readers a glimpse into the clash of ignorance and empathy found throughout the world. Celeste Ng, author of “Little Fires Everywhere,” calls “New York, My Village” a “rare thing: a funnyhouse mirror that reflects back the truth.” Read a Q&A with the professor at uf.ly/we3w23.

THE SECRET LIFE OF CONVERSOS


“Freedom’s Light” is set in 1785, when enforcers of the Spanish Inquisition are hunting down and torturing conversos—Jews who outwardly converted to Christianity, but who practiced Judaism in secret. When 19-year-old converso Anica Arnsen refuses a cut of pork in Valencia’s marketplace, she and her husband Efen come under suspicion as secret Jews, endangering their lives and that of their infant daughter. Accompanied by Anica’s beloved friend and servant, Mariana, they set sail for Charleston, South Carolina, where Efen’s uncle, Philip, owns a rice plantation. As they form unexpected bonds with the young house slave Ruth and her mother Lindy, Anica and Efen are forced to confront family secrets and the horrors of slavery.

THE SECRET LIFE OF AN ARTIFACT

The Key Marco Cat was excavated from a waterlogged archaeological site on Florida shores by legendary anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing in 1866. Today, it is an icon of heritage, history and local identity. “The Nine Lives of Florida’s Famous Key Marco Cat,” by Austin Bell, BA ’07 MA ’12, takes readers into the deep past of the artifact and the Native American society in which it was created. Bell explores nine periods in the life of the six-inch-high wooden carving, beginning with how it was sculpted with shell and shark-tooth tools and what it may have represented to the ancient Calusa—a perhaps a human-panther god. Preserved in the muck for centuries on Marco Island and discovered in pristine condition due to its oxygen-free environment, the Cat has since traveled more than 12,000 miles and has been viewed by millions of people. It is one of the Smithsonian Institution’s most irreplaceable items. Bell, curator of collections for the Marco Island Historical Society and consulting scholar at the Penn Museum, traces the clues to the Cat’s origins. He is the author of “Marco Island.”

SHOW YOUR GATOR PRIDE

TO HAVE YOUR BOOK CONSIDERED, please send a short synopsis of your book along with the title, the publisher, your name, year of graduation and degree, your location and any other line of work, and a link to the book on the web or an image of the cover to FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu. No self-published books.

NINE LIVES OF AN ARTIFACT

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A BORSCHT BELT BOYHOOD

Published in January, “He Lost It in the Catskills,” is the coming-of-age story of author Jerry Greenfield, BA ’67 MA ’68, in the final years of the so-called Borscht Belt in the mountains just north of New York City. For generations, it was a haven of Jewish summer resorts and a region that launched the careers of many famous comedians and singers. As a child, Greenfield spent his summers at the bungalow adjoining Rebuk’s Mansion, the hotel once owned by his mother’s family. This story is based on his experiences, the friends he found, and the innocence he lost coming of age in this legendary region.

Leadership is about mindset

Maybe you put the concept of leadership on some pedestal that you admire from afar when, in fact, you have dozens, if not hundreds, of opportunities each day to demonstrate leadership.

In “Everyday Leadership,” Brian Uwem, BA ’97 MBA/MHA ’07, provides stories and ideas that bring leadership down to ground level for you to use as a parent, teacher, (little league) coach, a member of the clergy, a doctor, patient or business executive. Unell shares concepts that allow you to become a better leader by improving your communication and approaching each situation with the appropriate mindset.

AMERICA’S BIRD

Jack E. Davis, history professor and the Rothman Family Chair in the Humanities, follows up his Pulitzer Prize-winning book on the Gulf of Mexico with “The Bald Eagle: The Improbable Journey of America’s Bird,” released in March.

The bald eagle is regal but fearless, a bird you’re not inclined to argue with. For centuries, Americans have celebrated it as “majestic” and “noble,” yet savaged the animal world’s finest parents — “The Bald Eagle” is a much-beloved book on the Gulf of Mexico with a link to the book on the web or an image of the cover to

THE SECRET LIFE OF AN ARTIFACT

The Key Marco Cat was excavated from a waterlogged archaeological site on Florida shores by legendary anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing in 1866. Today, it is an icon of heritage, history and local identity. “The Nine Lives of Florida’s Famous Key Marco Cat,” by Austin Bell, BA ’07 MA ’12, takes readers into the deep past of the artifact and the Native American society in which it was created. Bell explores nine periods in the life of the six-inch-high wooden carving, beginning with how it was sculpted with shell and shark-tooth tools and what it may have represented to the ancient Calusa—a perhaps a human-panther god. Preserved in the muck for centuries on Marco Island and discovered in pristine condition due to its oxygen-free environment, the Cat has since traveled more than 12,000 miles and has been viewed by millions of people. It is one of the Smithsonian Institution’s most irreplaceable items. Bell, curator of collections for the Marco Island Historical Society and consulting scholar at the Penn Museum, traces the clues to the Cat’s origins. He is the author of “Marco Island.”

SHOW YOUR GATOR PRIDE

TO HAVE YOUR BOOK CONSIDERED, please send a short synopsis of your book along with the title, the publisher, your name, year of graduation and degree, your location and any other line of work, and a link to the book on the web or an image of the cover to FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu. No self-published books.

AMERICA’S BIRD

Jack E. Davis, history professor and the Rothman Family Chair in the Humanities, follows up his Pulitzer Prize-winning book on the Gulf of Mexico with “The Bald Eagle: The Improbable Journey of America’s Bird,” released in March.

The bald eagle is regal but fearless, a bird you’re not inclined to argue with. For centuries, Americans have celebrated it as “majestic” and “noble,” yet savaged the animal world’s finest parents — “The Bald Eagle” is a much-beloved book on the Gulf of Mexico with a link to the book on the web or an image of the cover to

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CALLING ALL FUR FANS

Cats have nearly broken the internet with memes, galleries, Pinterest pages, their own Twitter accounts and TikTok channels. So where are all the cats of Gator Nation? Here at Florida Gator, we’ve noticed a conspicuous absence of feline representation lately. Surely other furry, feathery fans — birds? rabbits? — have Gator spirit, too. For now, it’s a dog show (and these are beauties). But we’re pretty sure cats like orange and blue, too. Send your photos to FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu. Include your name, occupation, town and your pet’s name, along with a sentence or two about your pet.

Or, share online @ufalumni #gatorpets

GATORS AREN’T THE ONLY ONES WHO CHEER FOR FLORIDA. MANY OF THEIR BEST FRIENDS ALSO ROOT FOR THE OLD ORANGE AND BLUE. MEET THESE FURRY AND LOVABLE FANS.

Princess Lexi stays cozy in her Gator sweater and is ready for the next football season, says Marjore “Ann” Brocksmith, of Defuniak Springs.

Cassidy is a tripod who does a great job representing the Gators in the midst of the Dawg fans near her Atlanta home. Cassidy’s owner is Michael Foy, BS/MS ’95.

Teddy likes his Gator gear and his Gator pillow and belongs to Lucas Fleming, BA ’84, of Fleming Law Group PA in St. Petersburg.

Lil P

Bill Langdon, BALAS ’82, JD ’85, and his wife, Tristan, of Anamosa, Iowa, took care of Lil P (P stands for Princess) for several months after she was born because his wife’s brother was too busy with farm duties. Langdon, a retired FBI agent, and his wife bottle fed the calf until she matured. In the photo, Lil P is 2 months old.

Lucy & Sawyer

Lucy, in the dress, and Sawyer, wearing a jersey, belong to Debbie Gorey, BAE ’91 and MED ’92, and live in Danbury, Connecticut, where Gorey is a teacher.

Lucy & Sawyer

Bentley Bentley is a 5-year-old rescue mutt — Yorkie, Maltese, Shih Tzu and Poodle — in Quincy, Massachusetts. His mom, Diana Rose, BSJ ’90, works for Boston Scientific but is planning to become a snowbird part-time.

Tyson Tyson is a Havenese who loves watching all Gator sports on TV from his home in Toronto. Thomas Michael, BCN ’86, president of Capex Management Inc., shares Tyson with wife Maria and daughters Anastasia and Zoe.

Darcie Darcie is a morkie Abril says was born to be a Gator fan. Abril is engagement and client services manager for the Miami-Dade County Department of Communications.

Princess Lexi

Princess Lexi

Gigi Gigi a morkie Abril says was born to be a Gator fan. Abril is engagement and client services manager for the Miami-Dade County Department of Communications.

Cooper Cooper the cow is named after Gator wide receiver Riley Cooper. Cooper and his owner, Howard Shapiro, BA ’74, make their home in Destin. Shapiro’s son’s dog is named Riley.

Gigi
Aconcagua, Argentina
Patrick Mims (BA ’16 MIB ’18), and his dad Tom (BA ’85), tackled Aconcagua, which is one of the Seven Summits, the tallest peaks on seven continents. Patrick says his dad couldn’t make it to the summit but insisted that Patrick carry the UF logo all the way to the top: 22,837 feet. New heights for the Warrington College of Business.

Antarctica
Sean (BA ’90) and Adriana Callejas (BS ’91) Schwinghammer, of Miami Lakes, represented Gator Nation in Antarctica on Viking Cruise line’s inaugural trip to the frozen continent. Sean is a health care executive and Adriana, formerly a stay-at-home mom, is now pursuing another degree.

The penguins got a dose of Gator spirit when Charles McBurney (BA ’79, JD ’82), carried the Gator Nation banner to Antarctica. McBurney is a former state representative from Jacksonville and practices business law with his own firm in Jacksonville.

Great Geyser, Iceland
Mary Carhart (BABA ’01), Lauren Scirotto Garwick, Marissa Ray (BAE ’01 MED ’02), and Amy Acosta (BAE ’01 MED ’02), became friends at UF in the late 1990s. The former roommates traveled to Iceland to celebrate 40th birthdays, two decades of friendship and life itself. Here, they show off their Gator gear at the Great Geysir along the Golden Circle of highly active springs and geysers near Reykjavik.

Madeira, Portugal
Sharon Stern (BA ’90, M ED & ED S ’97) right, and her college roommate Terri Schilling Leonard have started traveling together again now that their children are off at college. Here, they’re on the island of Madeira, Portugal.

Crab Island, Destin
Howard D. Shapiro (BSBA ’74), Kendall Shapiro and Wade Brandt enjoy a sunny day on the way to Crab Island in Destin.

Antarctica
The penguins got a dose of Gator spirit when Charles McBurney (BA ’79, JD ’82), carried the Gator Nation banner to Antarctica. McBurney is a former state representative from Jacksonville and practices business law with his own firm in Jacksonville.

Reader-submitted photos from past and present adventures
GATOR NATION IS EVERYWHERE
Please send your photos and captions to FloridaGator@ufalumni.ufl.edu.
Include names left to right, degree and year, hometown, and a few words about what is going on in your photograph.
Or, share online @ufalumni #gatortravels

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YOUNG ALUMNI WHO’VE MADE THEIR MARK

Attendees on Spurrier Field at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium.

Here are a few of this year’s honorees.

**THE ADVOCATE**

Erin Collins
(BA ‘05, BS TEL ‘05)

Erin Collins is on a mission to put a stop to human trafficking, once and for all. To do it, she’s taken on the job of executive director of the Florida Alliance to End Human Trafficking. The Florida Legislature-created alliance funds and supports a statewide effort to deal with the criminal activity. Collins is a good fit for the role.

She’s been external affairs manager for the Agency for State Technology, overseeing legislative affairs and communications efforts, and has held various positions with Florida TaxWatch.

How do you unwind from work?
I love everything music. I grew up playing the piano and taking voice lessons, so attending live concerts is one of my favorite things to do.

Who would you like to meet?
I would most like to catch up and spend time with my late paternal grandmother. Papa. She passed away in September 2021, at the age of 96 and lived a full, beautiful life. She started college in 1941 in Hawaii (at a time when few women attended higher education institutions) but had to pause her studies due to the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Hidden skill or talent?
It’s not that secret, but I really enjoy cleaning and organizing. It’s therapeutic. Pressure washing would be included in that list.

**THE ENTREPRENEUR**

Cameron MacMillan
(BSAC ‘07, MS ‘09)

Cameron MacMillan has a knack for business. Before he’d even finished graduate school he’d started contemplating his next move. In 2009, that move became the social-awareness game app Raise the Village, co-founded with UF classmate Josef Sazav. (BSBA ‘07, MS ‘09). The fantasy sports website RotoGrinders.com — which later sold for $60 million in 2021 — followed. Nowadays, MacMillan is a “great angel investor,” supporting charities like Pi Win Global and the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation.

Proudest achievement?
After selling our company, now being able to take time off work in my late 30s to fully focus on family and kids before getting back to work. I won’t take this opportunity for granted.

Favorite UF class?
“Creativity in Entrepreneurship” in the entrepreneurship master’s program. As the first class we took, it really set the tone for being an innovative program for pragmatic leaders.

What would you do with $1 million?
Increase my current donations to Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer and Pi Win Global, then re-focus efforts on Africa and globalization progress along with some community benefit drives to promote local education.

**THE PROTECTOR**

Charli N. Goodman
(BA ‘04)

Veteran Salt Lake City police officer Charli Goodman is passionate about community policing, a proactive strategy that develops relations between law enforcement and community members. Her expertise in the practice earned her an invite to the White House in 2015 to speak with President Obama and then-Vice President Biden. She served on the United Nations Task Force in 2009 and has been an undercover vice detective and a narcotics sergeant. In her spare time, she helps develop young women’s leadership skills at Camp Fury Utah and works with the Refugee Center of Salt Lake to educate refugees on gang activities and police encounters.

Hidden skill?
I entered a Rubik’s Cube competition — the 2017 Utah SpeedCube Speed — and I was one of the oldest competitors. My single best solve was 1 minute, 20 seconds, and my average of five solves was 1 minute, 25 seconds. I came in 87 out of 87. But I’m also world-ranked, and I’m number 135,167 in the world.

Who would you like to meet?
I met him! I spent an hour and a half over two days with the Dalai Lama. He was in Salt Lake City for a speech, and I was his graveyard shift security. He exited his room every morning at around 4 a.m., and we chatted. Very surreal experience. I have photos for proof!
GAIL SEYMOUR HALVORSEN

In the early days of the Cold War in the aftermath of World War II, memories of devastation from the air still haunted West German citizens. The Berlin Airlift changed that, and US Air Force pilot Gail Halvorsen played a big role.

As he flew aid into West Berlin, Halvorsen and his crew dropped sweets — candy, chocolate and chewing gum — wrapped in tiny parachutes. The gesture earned him the nickname Candy Bomber, and as other pilots joined in, they all became Candy Bombers.

Halvorsen got his candy drop idea at Tempelhof airfield in 1948, when he handed a few sticks of Doublemint gum to children lined up along a fence and saw their faces light up. He promised them candy on his flight the next day from Frankfurt to Berlin.

In all, the airmen dropped about 46,000 pounds of goodies. The airlift was designed to break the Soviet blockade of West Berlin, which was allied territory but surrounded by Soviet-backed troops. By the time it ended, Allied pilots had flown more than 277,000 missions to supply West Berlin with 2,334,374 million pounds of food, medicine, coal and construction equipment.

Halvorsen flew 127 of those missions. "It was hope, not flour, that gave the West Berliners the strength to carry on," he wrote. Even chocolate, he wrote, meant hope.

Halvorsen played a big role. "Bill was one of those wonderful people who not only did great science but also served the department, the university and the scientific community selflessly," said Lisa McEwcr-White, Crow Professor and chair of the Department of Chemistry. "He set an example of collegiality and collaboration that still remains in the department culture. He will be missed."

William (Bill) M. Jones

Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Chemistry William (Bill) M. Jones, whose impact in the classroom, leadership across the campus, and contributions to the field of organic chemistry earned him the University of Florida’s highest faculty honor, died Jan. 15, 2022. He was 92.

As a faculty member for 40 years, Jones is remembered for his innovative research in organic chemistry and his dedication to teaching. During his career, Jones graduated more than 40 Ph.D. students. He also served as chair of the Department of Chemistry from 1966-1973. Jones was devoted to nurturing educational relationships, and in 1989, he was recognized as UF’s Teacher/Scholar of the Year — the university’s oldest and most prestigious faculty award.

Jones also fought for equitable opportunities for women athletes and was instrumental in developing women’s sports programs at UF during his service on the Title IX committee throughout the 80s and 90s.

The W.M. Jones Award for Originality and Creativity(opens in new tab), endowed by Jones himself, has recognized an exceptional graduate student in the Department of Chemistry annually since 1996.

While many across campus can share personal stories from Jones’ long career in academia, others across the state know him as the owner of the Flounder Inn in Cedar Key. A talented woodcarver, Jones built the inn and its furniture(opens in new tab) with his own hands, hoping to share the joys of fishing and maritime exploration with others.

Jones is survived by his wife of 66 years, Elizabeth N. Jones, and his three children, Kevin Jones, Sigrid Owyang and Kimberly Krajina. Kevin Jones continues his father’s legacy of teaching excellence at UF as a distinguished professor and holds the Frederick N. Rhines Chair in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering. In 2017-18, he joined his father in the ranks of UF Teacher-Scholars of the Year, receiving the prestigious award at the same age his father was when he won 28 years earlier.

JERRY UELSMANN

The makings of an image did not end with the click of a shutter for photography pioneer Jerry Uelsmann, a University of Florida graduate research professor who died April 4, 2022.

Before the days of Adobe Photoshop, photomontages were painstaking artistic endeavors, and perhaps no artist is better known for such images than Uelsmann, who taught at UF from 1960 to 1998.

Uelsmann’s work was collected and exhibited widely, including a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. He was influenced by teachers like Minor White and friends like Ansel Adams. All three men are known for their black and white photography.

In a statement, Elizabeth Ross, director of the School of Art + Art History, noted the loss: "Jerry is renowned for photography that uses compositing to create surrealist images, a process that anticipated the effects of Photoshop by decades. The work is iconic, and so was Jerry. He taught at UF for 38 years, helping to establish the creative photography program, one of the first fine art photography programs in the U.S. He transformed photography. He transformed the school, and he transformed us. He will be greatly missed."

The College of the Arts started the Jerry Uelsmann Studio Art Scholarship Fund in 2012. ufgive.to/bvLy10c

For a complete obituary, please see @uff.to/2Q4vx4

For a 2017 College of the Arts profile of Uelsmann, visit @uff.to/3kyfw3
There are 77 active Gator Clubs® around the world. Membership is open to all alumni, parents, friends and students of the University of Florida. Alumni Association members are automatically members! There are no additional dues to pay.

Find a club near you! Scan the QR code or go to  uff.to/k28n8w

Just as the Gator Nation is everywhere, Gator Clubs and affiliate groups dot the country.

But once a year, the Alumni Volunteer Leadership Conference brings members back to Gainesville to connect, collaborate and celebrate the spirit of the Gator Nation. (And, for some, to collect a coveted Clubbie award!) Among the attendees at this spring’s three-day conference: officers from almost 50 Gator Clubs and affiliate groups. These groups do amazing things — members mentor students, raise money for scholarships and support the University of Florida and its mission.

But they also have a lot of fun, and each club is as unique as its geographic location.

We caught up with a few attendees to ask …

Your Gator Club?

1. The Atlanta Gator Club — motto: Deep in Enemy Territory — heads to the range once a year for Clay Day, with an aim of raising money for scholarships. Representing Atlanta: Viet Thaison Nguyen (front), 2022’s Clubbie winner for Young Alumni Leader of the Year, and Kamesya Hinson and Cavrine Harris.

2. Gina Wanser of the Sacramento Gator Club and Ali Gaffey of the Music City Gator Club may be separated by over 2,000 miles, but the former R.A.s reconnected at the conference. Sacramento, one of the newest clubs, formed in 2017, and members are planning ski trips and wine tastings. Gaffey looks for Gator Clubs wherever she goes. Music City is her third.

3. Linda Clarkson of the Savannah Gator Club says there’s probably no other club serving fish and grits at the annual dinner. “We have some great food,” she says.

4. Muhammad Ali of the Windy City Gator Club says “hosting really amazing parties” is a Chicago specialty. (How amazing? Capacity overloads have required a fire marshal’s involvement.)

5. The Rocky Mountain Gator Club turns a downtown bar into the Mile-high Swamp for game days. Loree Hoag, a member for 18 years, says a zipline Gator shoots from the ceiling to an “end zone” to celebrate touchdowns.

6. Krystin Enos (2022 Clubbie Leader of the Year) says the Broward County Gator Club regularly takes advantage of what makes South Florida unique, with outdoor activities like paddle boarding and beach cleanups.

7. Only three words needed from the Gator Club of Jacksonville: Florida-Georgia Game. “It’s a national holiday in Jacksonville!” says Tracy O’Sullivan.

8. West Coast Gators stick together, with SoCal joining Seattle, Sacramento and other clubs for virtual events, such as trivia nights and book clubs. Brian Habing of the Southern California Gator Club (which, along with the Association of Black Alumni - Gainesville Chapter, received a Clubbie for Outstanding Young Alumni Event) said the SoCal club is a little slice of the swamp: “The farther away you get, the more important the Gator Club network becomes.”

9. The Gator Club that plays together stays together, and the Gator Band Alumni Association does just that every Homecoming, when former musicians pick up their instruments and march on Florida Field. “Band is family. A very large, occasionally dysfunctional family,” joked Andrea Williams. Third from right, in formation with Debbie Kaplan, Deborah Baker and David Snedeker.

10. Warren Corpus of the Palm Beach County Gator Club says it takes four locations to host watch parties for the club’s 2,200 alumni. Gator Clubs is a registered trademark of the UF Alumni Association
GATOR NATION

GATORS WITH GREAT NEWS

UF Alumna Reaches New Heights at Kitt Peak National Observatory

BY LAUREN BARNETT

Michelle Edwards (PHD ’08) has been named associate director of Kitt Peak National Observatory. As a leader of the most diverse collection of astronomical observatories on Earth, Edwards will advance the quest to uncover the secrets of our solar system.

Edwards joins a team of scientists working on the Mid-Scale Observatories program for the National Science Foundation’s NOIRLab (National Optical-Infrared Astronomy Research Laboratory). Launched in 2019, NOIRLab is a major NSF initiative unifying a collaborative center for educational institutions.

During her time at UF, Edwards was involved in the Department of Astronomy’s instrumentation program, which prepares students for careers building and overseeing the development of instruments. Edwards’ thesis work involved the design of an instrument for the Gran Telescopio CANARIAS, one of the world’s largest and most advanced optical and infrared telescopes.

As a research complex, Kitt Peak has been a hub for notable astronomic discoveries over the past 60 years. The first evidence of dark matter was discovered there. Most recently, as of June 2021, an extensive study of the sky from Kitt Peak, hunting for Earth-like planets elsewhere in the Milky Way. Edwards will lead physics outreach programs.

UF architecture grad designs “underground” port in Istanbul

BEA Architects

For two centuries, a seaport in Istanbul was an industrial space, essentially closed to the public. Then Bruno-Elias Ramos (BDES ’82, MARCH ’85) was asked to reimagine it, moving much of the working seaport underground, while opening the surface to the public.

“It was definitely a huge challenge because the site is in a very historic area, and the land is incredibly valuable,” said Ramos, who founded BEA Architects in 1992 in Miami. “It was a working port closed to the public, so unless you were going there for business or to set sail on a cruise, there was no access to the waterfront.”

The $4.7 billion project is in the Galataport neighborhood of Istanbul, home to the historic Hagia Sophia and the Basilica Cistern, which have large underground spaces that inspired the team.

“We quickly began to think outside the box,” Ramos said. “Going underground meant we could free up the top side for other uses and give the public its first access to the waterfront.”

CJC Alumnus and Former Faculty Member Receives Presidential Appointment

President Joe Biden has appointed Laurence Alexander (MAJC ’83), former University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications journalism professor and department chair, as chair of the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD). The seven-member committee advises the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) on issues concerning agriculture, higher education in developing countries and food insecurity.

Alexander has served as the chancellor of the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff since 2013. As board chair, he will ensure that USAID brings the assets of U.S. universities to bear on development challenges in agriculture and food security, and supports their representation in USAID programming.

Before moving to Arkansas, Alexander had a 22-year career at UF as a professor and administrator. He served as a distinguished teaching scholar, provost administrative fellow in the Office of Academic Affairs, director of the Office of Minority Programs, associate dean of the Graduate School and chair of the Department of Journalism.

Newly minted Physics Ph.D. receives $300,000 NSF Research Fellowship

Alexandria Tucker (PHD ’22) has been selected for the NSF Mathematical and Physical Sciences Ascending Postdoctoral Research Fellowship, which provides $300,000 to fund a three-year postdoctoral research position at the Illinois Center for Advanced Studies of the Universe, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign.

The fellowship supports outstanding future scientists who will broaden the participation of underrepresented minorities as future leaders in math and physical science fields and facilitates the fellow’s transition into a faculty appointment. Tucker’s postdoctoral research will aid in the hunt for gravitational waveform models that include spin and eccentricity as well as expand our current understanding of how and where gravitational wave sources form. Additionally, she will lead outreach projects including virtual reality physics education programs for middle-school students; planetarium shows starring scientists from underrepresented communities; and art shows that promote scientists of different ethnicities and genders.

For the complete story, see uff.to/rxhb09
LONGTIME GATOR BOOSTER STILL MAKES A SPLASH YEARS AFTER HER WEEKI WACHEE MERMAID DAYS

BY CINDY SPENCE

FOR MARY DARLINGTON FLETCHER, becoming a Gator meant giving up life as a mermaid. Mary arrived at the University of Florida in 1950, just a few years after women broke the gender barrier at the all-male school. Her dance card, she found, filled quickly.

“There were eight boys for every girl,” Mary recalls. “I once had two dates in one night.”

The $2,000 Mary had saved for tuition and expenses ran out in two years, putting an end to her college career in 1952. But her love affair with the Gators is still going strong.

Mary and husband Richard have been Gator Boosters since 1966: Section 12, Row 28, forgoing box seats for a close-up view of the action on the field. She and Richard were in the stands that year when quarterback Steve Spurrier made the most iconic play in Gator history, kicking a field goal to beat Auburn 30-27. That kind of excitement is good for a few decades of ticket sales.

Richard met Mary when Mary’s roommate, Peggy, insisted the two were suited, like “two peas in a pod.”

“We went on a blind date,” Mary said, “and that was the end of that.”

Richard, however, had a long memory. A few years later, Mary and her co-workers from a campus office went to the corner drugstore for lunch. They were sitting at the lunch counter when two men came in and one said, “Hi Mary” as he passed. Mary didn’t recognize him, but after lunch decided to find out who he was.

“I walked up and said ‘I don’t remember you,’” Mary recalls. “He said, ‘Aren’t you Mary? We met a long time ago.’”

The man was Newt Perry, already a name in Florida roadside attractions, and he had a vision of building an underwater theater where patrons on the dry side of a glass window could view a performance on the wet side through crystal clear, spring-fed waters. Perry told the hopping mad Mary to calm down, then changed her life.

“He asked me ‘Would you like to be a mermaid?’” Mary says. “Well, I should say so!”

He told her tryouts would be the next Saturday at 8 a.m.

“Honey, I was there at 6:30.” Mary, her brother, Ed, and many of their neighborhood friends lined up on the bank. Perry told them to swim across the springs and said those who made it back would be Weeki Wachee’s first mermaids. Mary, a strong swimmer whose mother was a diver in her own college days, made it back. “All of a sudden, I was a mermaid.”

Mary was such a strong swimmer that in 1948, for the film “Mister Peabody and the Mermaid,” shot at Weeki Wachee, she was one of two mermaids who served as a stand-in for the actor Ann Blyth.

In three years, the teenager performed, sipping on a Grapette, slicing and eating a watermelon, entertaining tourists.

Mary hung up her mermaid tail in 1950 to head to Gainesville, the big city. Freshmen had to stay on campus, and Mary bunked at Yulee Hall on the fourth floor, with no elevator and no air conditioning.

“I was busy as a bee and meeting all these great kids,” Mary says.

Still drawn to water, she signed up for the Swim Fins, one of the new clubs for all the women who flocked to campus in 1947. The club offered an added benefit: Mary got to be a mermaid again.

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MARY GROWING UP

Mary grew up near Tarpon Springs on her family’s farm. For fun, her parents would hitch a trailer to a truck and drive to pick up friends and take them to a nearby swimming hole out in the woods. One friend would pack a Greek salad and Mary’s mom would make fried chicken, and the whole group would swim till it was time to go home.

One day, when she was 15, Mary arrived at the swimming hole to find her access blocked by a yellow rope around the site.

“They had a lot of nerve,” Mary recalls. “I lifted that rope and walked up to a man to find out what they were doing to my swimming hole. He pointed to another man and said, ‘ask him.’”

The man was Newt Perry, already a name in Florida roadside attractions, and he had a vision of building an underwater theater where patrons on the dry side of a glass window could view a performance on the wet side through crystal clear, spring-fed waters. Perry told the hopping mad Mary to calm down, then changed her life.

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Images of Mary sipping a Grapette showed up on postcards for Weeki Wachee. This photo has been colorized.
Not long after came the chance meeting with Richard at the lunch counter.

“I had come from a farm, where I milked cows before school, and I was dating a lot of law students,” Mary says. “I had one goal: I was not going to marry a farmer.”

But marry a farmer she did.

Richard’s family owned cattle and farmed acreage in west Gainesville that extended from Newberry Road to 99th Avenue. “The pasture was where the Oaks Mall is now, and the cowpen stood where North Florida Regional Medical Center is today. She didn’t leave UF with a degree, but she did leave with the love of her life, her husband of 67 years.

As carrying costs for land rose, Richard and Mary began to sell some of their property and went into real estate. That’s how she ended up with a perfect spot for tailgates.

Dave Grabosky (BBC ’84), owner of T&G Constructors in Orlando, a three-time Gator100 honoree, called Mary one day, looking to buy a house for two children who would soon be heading to UF. Mary found them one on NW 15th Avenue, and Grabosky insisted she join them for tailgating. The tradition continued from 2005 until the pandemic.

“Mary would pull up in an old blue Cadillac, just honking her horn,” says family friend Jeannie Macaluso (BAE ’81, MA ’95), a member of the Palm Beach County Gator Club. After tailgating all those years, says Macaluso, “We’ve become a family.”

Macaluso and friends are planning a belated party for Mary’s retirement. “Mary will be in all her glory,” says Macaluso.

In 1997, Mary returned for the 50th anniversary of Weki Wachee and, at the age of 65, performed with her husband Richard.

Seminole, UF’s yearbook, noted that the synchronized swimming club was “open to any coed who can pass tests on certain aquatic skills.”

For a mermaid! Piece of cake.

By the end of the second year, though, Mary’s money had run out. She left school but took a job with the campus comptroller and talked the university into letting her swim in the Swimpadaces, a popular Homecoming show, even though she was no longer a student.

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“I began taking them back to campus from about the age of 7, to football, basketball, baseball, softball, volleyball.”

Aaron says he applied to other universities — “heaven forbid I didn’t get in to UF” — but Vittoria and Connor were so smitten, they applied only to UF.

Giles says retirement looms, but he “has no longer a student.”

Giles says working with the crawler has deepened his respect for the engineers of half a century ago, who likely never dreamed their invention would be state-of-the-art in 2022.

“We’re lucky that in the 1960s, engineers still drew by hand on vellum and used slide rules for calculations and designed it with multiple factors of safety,” Giles says. “Without that, we wouldn’t be able to adapt them to use today.”

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Main Image: Sweetwater Wetlands Park by @wildlifeventures | Poe Springs: Courtesy of Alachua County | Swamp Head Brewery Beer: Courtesy of Swamp Head Brewery | Musical Performance: Courtesy of Heartwood Soundstage
The UF Alumni Association invites all members and their guests to gather at *Emerson Alumni Hall* prior to each home football game. Located directly across the street from the Swamp, these family-friendly tailgates feature a prime view of the *Gator Walk*, live music, face painting, kids crafts, tailgate games, food and beverage for purchase from *Mojo Hogtown Barbeque* and Gator gear from the *UF Bookstore*.

*For more info visit uff.to/tg22*