

GATOR

FLORIDA

SUMMER 2022

Science Alliance

New Scripps Biomedical
Research partnership creates
opportunities for discovery.

Page 24



UF's CHAMPIONS

GATOR GAME-CHANGERS

Thanks to investments by Gators who want to make a difference, three University of Florida initiatives are getting a boost. The Consortium on Trust in Media and Technology will get a chair and an advisory committee to guide its work. The Center for Jewish Studies will get a renowned Holocaust scholar. And the College of the Arts will get funding to promote racial equity in community arts. On behalf of Gator Nation, thank you.



**DIANNE B. SNEDAKER,
MITCHELL AND ELISSA HABIB**

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 Aleksium**, 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 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 Aleksium'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 Oshubi Craig.

FEATURES

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

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University historian Carl Van Ness retired in June after 38 years as the go-to person for questions about UF's long history.

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

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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.

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

DEPARTMENTS

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ON THE COVER



UF Scripps Biomedical Research, the integration of Scripps Florida and UF Health, is creating a powerful collaboration that leaders predict will speed up efforts to turn basic science into new drugs and treatments for patients. The newest UF Scripps scientist, Ciaran Seath, says the technologies and expertise available make UF Scripps a perfect place for teamwork. **See story, page 24**

UF UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

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Conversation with UF President **Kent Fuchs**

TOGETHER AGAIN

TIM TEBOW URGES SPRING GRADUATES TO BE GATOR GREATS AS COMMENCEMENT RETURNS TO STADIUM

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.

It was a cloudless evening, with a cool breeze, and the University Women's Chorale and UF Wind Symphony led the crowd in singing the National Anthem.

From a stage at the North End Zone, I and Provost Joe Glover welcomed and congratulated the graduates and their families. UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Dean Elaine Turner presented Tebow, whose bachelor's degree is in family youth and community sciences, as he received a university Distinguished Alumnus Award — one of three such awards presented at our spring commencement. UF Alumni Association President James Gadsby applauded the graduates, telling them “the Gator Nation needs you. The world needs you.”

UF Trustee and Tebow family friend Bill Heavener introduced Tebow. Wearing black regalia with a pale yellow hood signifying his CALS degree, he began by urging graduates to be inspired to aim high.

“You know what ‘inspire’ means? To fill someone with the urge to do something,” Tebow said. “... I want this group of ‘Gator Greats’ to do something: To do something with their lives and their goals and dreams and aspirations.”

Pacing the stage, his voice rising and falling from whispers to shouts, he said the word “passion” comes from a 12th century Latin word that means “to suffer.” For the graduates and their lives ahead, Tebow said, true passion will mean caring about something enough to suffer for it — a rare and valuable attribute.

“If you love something and you are passionate about it, you will be willing to suffer for it,” he said. “And you know what

that makes you? It makes you different. It makes you unique. It makes you contagious. And guess what? The world wants to be around you!”

He said that shortly after he won the Heisman Trophy in 2007 he visited a poor region in Southeast Asia, where he volunteered to help distribute food to a huge crowd of people. He saw an apparently starving young boy who happened to be wearing his #15 football jersey, jarring him to appreciate how little his Heisman Trophy meant compared to the value of human life and of helping others.

He urged graduates to live a life of success — but also one of significance.

“You’re going to do amazing things. I hope you know that, I hope you believe that, and I hope you are confident in that,” he said. “But I hope it doesn’t stop with success because you know what success is about? You. But significance is about other people. I would rather have a life of significance than a life of success.”

All told this spring, we graduated 9,994 students from 89 countries, including 795 first-generation students and a 79-year-old with a master of science in entrepreneurship. I’m thankful to Tim Tebow for serving as the speaker at our university wide ceremony for all graduates, and I can’t imagine a better sendoff, or a better message, for each one of them.





BACK IN THE SWING OF THINGS

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.*

YELLOW AND BLUE SOLIDARITY

EVENTS IN UKRAINE SPUR GATORS TO ACTION



DYLAN TAYLOR/UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

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.

To view the UF panel, **The War in Ukraine: Why, How, And What Happens Next**, visit: uff.to/86rkgt

In some places, orange gave way to yellow as a companion to Gator blue, and fundraisers sprang up, including one by four neurologists at the UF McKnight Brain Institute that raised \$20,000. Dr. Riley Jones, a veteran of other war-torn regions,

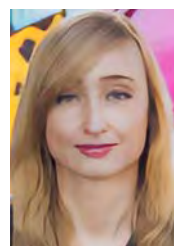
Only on rare occasions does Century Tower not proudly shine orange and blue. Tonight, in solidarity, it was blue over yellow.

— TWEET BY UF PRESIDENT KENT FUCHS ON MARCH 2

took a break from the global health department at UF Health Shands to head to Ukraine. UF students and local clergy joined more than 20 other institutions as part of the U.S. Collegiate Student Solidarity Vigil by holding a ceremony at Lake Alice in remembrance of those who have lost their lives.

Here are four alumni and students whose lives have been affected by the war in Ukraine.

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.

"On Feb. 24, I decided immediately that the only thing I can do to actually help is to start fundraisers here, organize public art and raise awareness," she said.

Her latest mural will adapt contemporary artist Shepard Fairey's "Make Art, Not War" (pictured at left) in tones of yellow and blue to represent the Ukrainian flag. The project began in April at The Woolly with the help of local artists.

"Firstly, we want to attract attention through social media and the mural itself," she said. "And secondly, we want to use the attention to fundraise money for Ukrainian organizations."



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANTON SVIRSKYI

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 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 aunts 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, raising my children 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.

The Scholar

Kasia Wiech (BS '20) went to the University of Warsaw in Poland in October as a Fulbright Scholar intent 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 from 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."



KASIA WIECH



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEX BAER

U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Alex Baer, third from right.

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 Geilenkirchen 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.

Julia Bauer and Jenny Rogers are seniors in the College of Journalism and Communications.



PHOTO BY JORDAN MCKENDRICK/UF ATHLETICS

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 Spurrier 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.

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



Rahul Patel

- **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

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 presidentsearch.ufl.edu.



‘TWEETS’ DRAWS CROWDS TO CAMPUS WOODS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BRAD McCLENNY (BSJ ’07),
SENIOR STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER AT THE GAINESVILLE SUN

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

Don Kurts, right, from Dunnellon, traveled with a group of friends to try to photograph a rare yellow cardinal, at left, at the Natural Area Teaching Laboratory.

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.

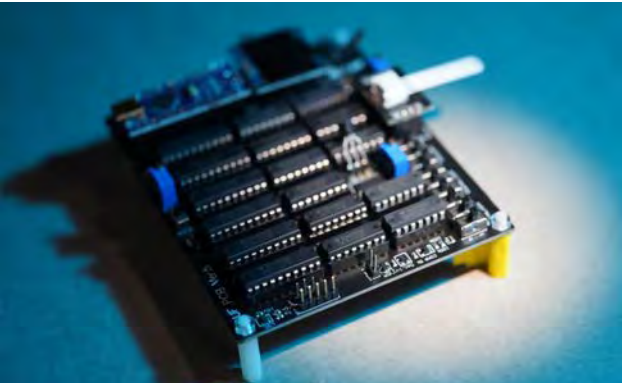
Seeds, grains and fruit give a cardinal a yellow pigment, and a specific enzyme later turns yellow to red. If the enzyme is missing, the cardinal remains yellow.

“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. 🐦



HOUNDSTOOTH ANALYTICS

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 developed 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 Houndstooth 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 lying around," Lau recalled. "I said 'funny 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 like a tornado kind of blew into San Francisco and picked him up and was about to take him to Gainesville."

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 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,"

For more on the hiring of UF men's basketball Coach Todd Golden visit:

uff.to/apqsfp

For more information on Gator Boosters and the Directors Circle visit:

uff.to/s4qskv



PHOTO BY TRESA LAU

Todd Golden found himself with no Gator gear just hours before his first interview on ESPN as the UF men's basketball coach. Marin County Gator Jeff Lau came to the rescue.

Lau says. "Mission accomplished."

Lau says he met Schulman after Gator Boosters began paying more attention to the west coast, realizing "there's no shortage of Gators out here." He joined the Gator Boosters Directors Circle because he wanted to give back to UF, not realizing one day it would mean the shirt off his back (or out of his closet).

While Gator games on campus would be a hike from San Francisco, Lau is hoping to see the new Gators this Thanksgiving at the PK85, a 16-team tournament in Portland in honor of Nike co-founder Phil Knight's birthday.

Golden, Lau says, is the first Gators coach he's actually met.

"I felt a little bit like a kid meeting the coach," Lau says, "except that now I'm actually quite a bit older than the coach." 🐼



ABOVE: Frank Henry Shapleigh, Fort Marion From San Marco Pier, St. Augustine, 1887

AT RIGHT: Arthur Vidal Diehl, St. Augustine Courtyard, 1922



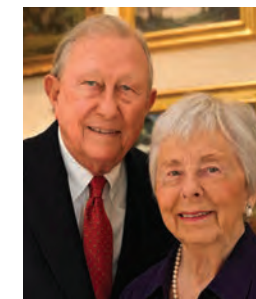
VISIONS OF ST. AUGUSTINE

The Harn Museum of Art presents Painting St. Augustine: Selections from the Samuel H. and Roberta T. Vickers Collection, featuring works by more than 20 artists who captured landscapes and city views of Florida's oldest city. The works date from the late 19th to the mid-20th century and cover a broad range of themes from views of coastlines and waterways to depictions of historic landmarks, picturesque streets and courtyards. Collectively, these paintings comprise a visual record of St. Augustine, its unique topography and climate, as well as its people and their daily lives.

The exhibition is drawn from **The Florida Art Collection**, a landmark gift to the Harn Museum of Art at the University of Florida in 2020 by **Samuel H. and Roberta T. Vickers**, who formed one of the most extensive collections of Florida-themed art.

PAINTING ST. AUGUSTINE: SELECTIONS FROM THE SAMUEL H. AND ROBERTA T. VICKERS COLLECTION

At the Governor's House Cultural Center and Museum, St. Augustine



AAAS HONORS UF FACULTY

UF AAAS LIFETIME FELLOWS

AAAS has honored the following faculty:

- **J. SCOTT ANGLE, UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences**, for distinguished contributions to the agricultural sciences and for administrative excellence at three land grant universities.
- **SIXUE CHEN, UF College of Liberal Arts and Sciences**, for distinguished contributions to the field of plant biology.
- **MATIAS KIRST, UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences**, for distinguished contributions in the area of molecular breeding, genomics and informatics.
- **YUNCONG LI, UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences**, for distinguished contributions to the field of soil and water sciences.
- **JOSE C. PRINCIPE, Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering**, for distinguished contributions to the field of statistical signal processing.
- **TONY ROMEO, UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences**, for distinguished contributions to the field of bacterial physiology and genetics.
- **KATHRYN SIEVING, UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences**, for distinguished contributions to the fields of behavioral, community and landscape ecology.

WHY WE LOVE WORDLE,

ACCORDING TO SCIENCE

BY ALISSON CLARK (BSJ '98, MAMC '16)

Social 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 guessing 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." 🐼



Cuthbert Allen and his fiancée Tracy, Jacksonville

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

Visit Heart.UFHealth.org to learn more about Cuthbert's story and how we are ranked among the best hospitals for adult cardiac care.



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‘WE ALL HAVE A DIVERSITY STORY’



Dr. Marsha McGriff took over as UF chief diversity officer in December.

UF’s new chief diversity officer has caught the Gator spirit and says she wants that for students of all identities, too

STORY BY SOPHIE JEAN-MICHEL (PR ’22)
PHOTOS BY AARON DAYE

Marsha McGriff will lead diversity, equity and inclusion efforts at the University of Florida as the new chief diversity officer and senior adviser to the president.

McGriff agreed to do one of her first interviews with a student reporter, senior Sophie Jean-Michel, PR ’22, of West Palm Beach. In a wide-ranging conversation, McGriff talked about her goals, her family and her move to Gainesville.

How has the transition from Indiana to Florida been?

It’s been wonderful. My husband and I are enjoying Gainesville very much. I will say, I was born in the Midwest, so it’s jarring for December to be 80 degrees. It’s a reminder that we’re in the deep south.

What do you think of the area?

I believe the Florida that we see as midwesterners is Miami or Fort Lauderdale, the beach vibes. In Gainesville, I am reminded that this is really the deep south, with deep values, long histories, long ancestor lines, lots of pride, lots of the conventions of southern hospitality. Both my husband and I attended college

in the deep south, in Alabama, and Gainesville reminds us both of the warmth and vitality of this region. Here, everybody says “good morning” and expects a return “good morning.” So, it’s been a pleasant return to a value system we both admire. And of course, being here at a top 5 public institution, my husband and I sometimes look at each other and say, “can you believe we’re at the University of Florida?”

What interested you in applying for the position?

I felt this role was a pinnacle of sorts. In my 20-plus-year career, I had done a great deal to advance diversity, equity and inclusion, and all that preparation paid off. I have the skills. I have the passion. And I’m at a point in my life where I can be particular about where I want to spend my professional capital and acumen. I am incredibly grateful that I have the ability to choose my career path and where I want to be — I don’t take that for granted. My parents didn’t have much of a choice and neither did my ancestors. Their goal was to raise a family and support them as best they could in the vocations that they were relegated to. We are the dream and the hope of the slave, like Maya Angelou says. So to be in this space, to be the legacy of my father, who drove a city bus after a long career in the military, and my mother, who worked on the military base — I am humbled. I hope I’m doing them proud.

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 megaphone 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. Upper crust is another spot we love. My husband and I went to Paris in 2019, right before the pandemic, and we had the best French pastries. Upper crust 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. We love to show them around the area. So much history, culture and great food.

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

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.”

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

presented to the campus, was to find out the data already gathered so we can be actionable about those data. There is so much DE&I activity at UF and opportunities to map that work to ensure everyone is aware of what’s going on across the entire UF system. We have engaged a consultant to help us do this incredibly important step in our work. Year two will involve the creation of the inaugural strategic plan for inclusive excellence, which will take those data we’re gathering right now and create goals and action items. In year three, we soar. We’ll do a complete culture and climate survey. I think of any inclusive excellence or strategic plan as dynamic; when you get new information, you change, adjust, calibrate. And what taught us that better than COVID? We had to do some very quick thinking and strategizing to figure out the best way to serve and support our campus community.

How do you plan to advocate for marginalized groups that you do not personally identify with?

The previous CDO created a strong grassroots DE&I movement here at UF, the Campus Diversity Liaisons (CDL) Network, which is a council of diversity leaders from across UF’s colleges and business units. I meet with this network monthly and one-on-one with CDLs as needed. We also have a council of affinity group leaders that I meet with regularly to talk about the intricacies within identities and how to serve and support our diverse communities fully. For me, I think part of it is really about education. When I do trainings, one of the questions I ask is, “do you see yourself as diverse?”

That’s a good question.

In truth, we all have a diversity story. I believe once we see ourselves as a large and wonderful tapestry of beautifully diverse



“At the end of the day, I’m just a mom who has a black son, who I know has had so many microaggressions...”

— DR. MARSHA McGRIFF,
UF’S NEW CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER

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 have 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 demography 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. 🙏



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 160 countries.

UF filmmaker’s American Muslim rom com is tops



Still from “Americanish”

“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.



Iman Zawahry

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

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UF ATHLETICS

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 position.

One day this spring, Gators linebackers coach Mike Peterson (BA '13) was walking that hallway with redshirt sophomore Antwaun 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 1998 season, Peterson went on to a 14-

year career in the NFL.

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.

"Anytime you can get a fantastic teacher who has an authentic and sincere care for players and people, and has done it — I mean, he's been between the lines in 'The

Mike Peterson getting some hands-on work with linebacker Antwaun Powell-Ryland Jr. (52) during a recent practice. AT RIGHT: Peterson led the Gators with 122 tackles his 1998 senior season and was voted MVP by his teammates.

Swamp,' is 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 don't think you can have an idea where you're going if you don't understand where you've been," Peterson said. "The history here. The standard here. What's expected here. My job is not just coaching

"I don't think you can have an idea where you're going if you don't understand where you've been,"

— MIKE PETERSON, GATORS LINEBACKERS COACH

conjures up emotions of days gone by and thoughts of the days to come.

"It just feels great to be back home," he said.

From his parking space at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium, it takes Peterson about 25 minutes to drive to the home where he grew up in Alachua. He arrived at UF in 1994 along with one of the best signing classes in program history — Fred Taylor, Reidel Anthony, Ike Hilliard, Jacques Green, Ed Chester, Johnny Rutledge, Willie Cohens.

Over three seasons, the 6-foot-1, 233-pound Peterson was named first-team All-SEC and All-America, and Peterson's teammates voted him MVP.

Peterson got the itch to coach after working with Muschamp's and McElwain's Gators in the weight room.

"I knew I could do this," he said of coaching. "As a player, you always think about coaches needing to do this and do that. I watched them and I knew I could do it. I just thought to myself, 'This is me.'"

Blackshear

Carolina in his first job as a full-time assistant. The traits he sought then are the same as now. Peterson looks for toughness but puts an equal emphasis on intelligence and discipline.

"If you're tough, smart and disciplined I can do the rest. After that, we're going to learn the game and you're going to master your craft," he said. "I don't want guys who do what I did. I'm going to find what they do best. He may not be a '10.' That might not be his max. He might be a '7,' but my job is to get the highest amount of ability out of that kid."

When UF athletic director Scott Stricklin hired Napier, the new coach got a visit from an old coach-turned-ambassador



Peterson on Game Day as linebackers/defensive end coach at South Carolina.

of athletics.

"I'd mentioned to the other coaches since I'd been here, both McElwain and Mullen, that if you get a chance to hire a former Gator who's a good coach that I hoped they'd consider doing that," said Spurrier, who had a trio of former UF players (Jerry Anderson, John Reaves and Dwayne Dixon) on his first Florida staff in 1990. "I just think it's good for all the 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. 2, 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

uff.to/ct6jv0

The Man with the Answers

*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)

CARL 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





“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 what motivates me the most. That was the draw for working with the sugar collection — just opening it up for the first time, being the person who gets to look at all this material and organize it.”

Each day on the job is different, Van Ness said. He works closely with UF President Kent Fuchs’ office, hunting down historical details for columns and speeches. He also handles much of the digitization of the library’s audiovisual materials and fields reference requests related to the history of UF and its collections from researchers and members of the public.

He has discovered a few buried treasures in the archives along the way. One of his greatest triumphs was uncovering field-level, full-color film footage of star quarterback Steve Spurrier’s famous

1966 field goal against Auburn, a kick credited with helping him secure the Heisman Trophy. But his personal favorite is a delicate crystal shot glass commemorating what was then Florida State College’s victory over UF’s football team in 1904. The previous year, UF had decided to become an all-male school, a decision that forced the glass’s original owner, Ida Morgan, to transfer to Florida State. She played basketball for both institutions, and a sepia-toned photo of her team hangs in the president’s house. UF and FSU would not contend on the football field again until 1958.

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,” woolen beanies 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.

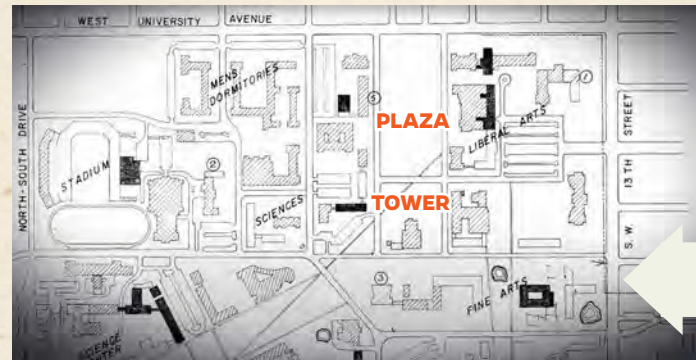
“Some people don’t necessarily know the history of Florida, and you can’t separate the institution from the state,” he said.

In a Black History Month presentation, Van Ness described the “glacial pace” at which UF integrated its first Black students. In 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered UF’s law program to admit Virgil Hawkins, a Black student. The Florida Board of Control, which then oversaw public higher education, circumvented the ruling by using a survey of parents to claim his

DID YOU KNOW?



University of Florida in Lake City.



One historic layout placed the entrance at the Plaza of the Americas.

THE OTHER UF

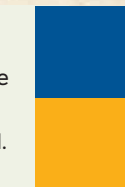
The University of Florida was not always located in Gainesville. Prior to the passage of the Buckman Act, the university was located in Lake City. Florida is the only state in modern history to move its university from one location to another.

PLAZA ENTRY

The original plan for the university envisioned a bell tower and administration building together, with an entrance from the Plaza of the Americas. After World War II, however, the administration building was situated on 13th Street.

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.



ONLY TWO

When UF opened in 1906, two buildings, **Buckman** (pictured) and **Thomas**, both built as dorms, served all the university’s office needs. UF’s first big expansion happened after World War II.

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.



1



2



3

Information provided by Carl Van Ness

attendance would cause turmoil on campus.

Following what Van Ness said was largely a “wasted decade” for integration, Black students staged a sit-in at then-President Stephen O’Connell’s office in 1971, insisting on more representation among faculty and the student body. Dramatic shifts began to follow, in part because Florida itself had changed, Van Ness said: The children of thousands of Northerners and Midwesterners who began moving to the state in the late 1940s were now attending university, diversifying Florida more than many of its Deep South counterparts. Van Ness said he himself was surprised to learn UF is home to the largest Jewish student population of any public university in the nation.

When he shares about UF’s past, whether the stories are positive or painful, “the response I’m hoping for is that people would understand where we’ve come from. This is not ancient history,” he said.

READING OTHER PEOPLE’S LETTERS

Van Ness’ extensive tenure at the university means he has witnessed a good portion of its history himself. Nevertheless, “I had no idea what was going on behind the scenes,” he said. “You get a totally different perspective when you open up the archives and start reading what people were actually saying.”

He confessed that he loves reading other people’s letters,

including those sent from university president Thomas Taliaferro to his successor Andrew Sledd in 1904, warning him about malcontents in Lake City, UF’s original hometown. Town residents had a habit of besieging the university with complaints and demands. The roiling relations eventually spurred UF’s move in 1906 to the small, yet prosperous, town of Gainesville.

“We’re the only public university in Florida that has records going back to the 1800s,” Van Ness said. “This is an older institution with a lot of depth and one of the most diverse curriculums in the nation.”

What’s next for one of UF’s most dedicated bibliophiles? His own book. Van Ness is writing a history of public higher education in Florida from the end of Reconstruction to 1927, the year UF’s second president Albert Murphree died and the beginning of the Florida land bust that, in some ways, was a precursor to the Great Depression. This will be the second book he has penned, after “Honoring the Past, Shaping the Future,” co-authored with English professor Kevin McCarthy.

Van Ness said he will miss working with the library’s collections, colleagues and students — but he’s not ready to hang up his rat cap entirely.

“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.”

Partnering for Science

UF, Scripps Florida combine to
create research powerhouse

BY DOUG BENNETT

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.

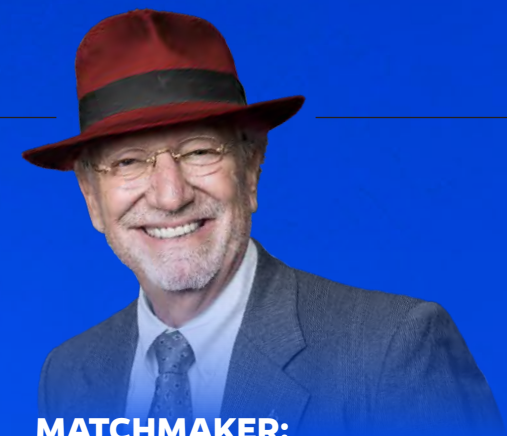
"Together, UF Health and UF Scripps Biomedical Research can more effectively fight disease threats, address lingering medical challenges and create new science education opportunities," Nelson said.

"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.

see Scripps next page ►



MATCHMAKER:

THE MAN WHO PLAYED CUPID FOR UF AND SCRIPPS

Seven years ago — in fall 2015 — optometrist and inventor Dr. Herbie Wertheim set his sights on transforming UF Engineering. To do it, he gave the university \$50 million to jumpstart a bold ambition to reimagine engineering education and discovery to turn UF into a 21st century international powerhouse. In gratitude, the college was renamed the Herbert Wertheim College of Engineering.

"We're going to prepare [new engineers] to have the tools to be great thinkers and great humanitarians and great leaders," he said at the time.

see Wertheim next page ►



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 Mori Hosseini, UF Board of Trustees chair.

Wertheim is founder and CEO of Brain Power Inc., the world’s largest manufacturer of ophthalmic instruments and chemicals. He attended UF in the early 1960s before becoming a scientist, clinician, entrepreneur, philanthropist and community leader whose discoveries — including in 1981 ultraviolet light dye absorbers for eyeglasses — and contributions in eye care and other scientific fields have touched millions. In all, Wertheim and his wife, Nicole, have contributed \$150 million to UF, primarily for UF Engineering and UF Health.



Scripps continued

The UF Scripps campus, with approximately 45 researchers, is one of the state’s top National Institutes of Health-supported research centers.

Discussions to integrate UF and the Scripps Florida campus began in mid-2021. Scripps Research in La Jolla, California, is unaffected by the transition.

“Our Jupiter campus has specialized resources that allow for drug discoveries that are more typically associated with the pharmaceutical sector and all of this happens in an academic, nonprofit setting,” said Patrick Griffin, scientific director and professor of molecular medicine for UF Scripps Biomedical Research (see next page.)

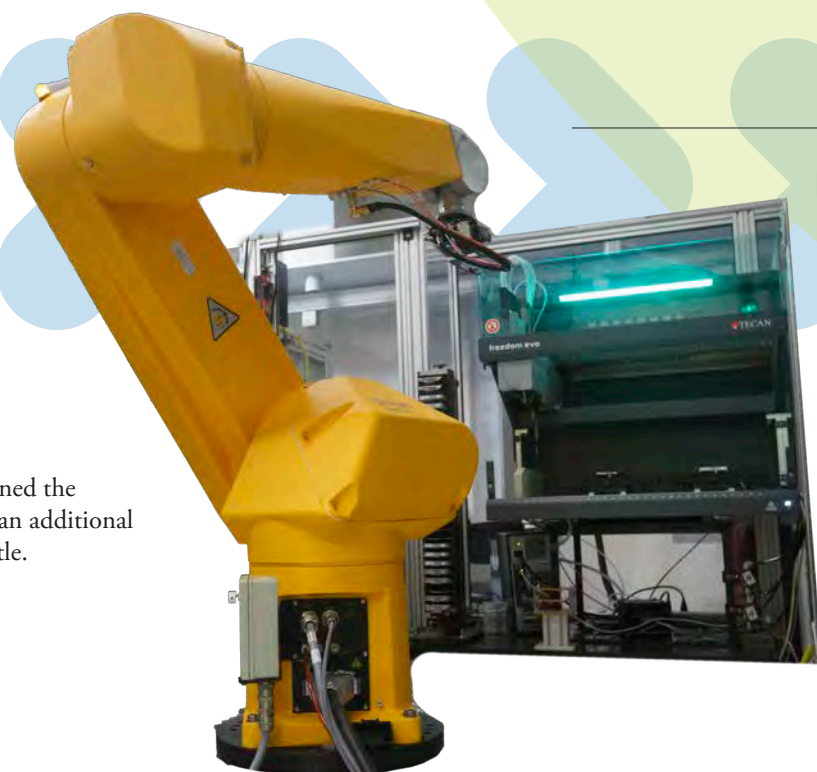
Work to bring additional prominent biomedical scientists to the faculty is underway (see next page) as are efforts to add personnel with expertise in artificial intelligence and computational biology.

“The amazing discoveries that I know will be coming from this team will bring hope and healing for millions of people,” said Mori Hosseini, UF Board of Trustees chair.

UF President Kent Fuchs said UF Scripps Biomedical Research ushers in a new era of even more scientific collaborations similar to recent projects by UF and Florida Atlantic University on Alzheimer’s disease and emerging drug abuse trends.

UF Scripps Biomedical Research will maintain its 30-acre Jupiter, Florida, campus, and continue to support postdoctoral, postbaccalaureate and undergraduate training.

Scripps scientists have joined the UF faculty while retaining an additional Scripps Research affiliate title.



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 been 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 SOPHISTICATED 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 professor 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 pipette tiny quantities of compounds onto cell targets — brain cancer cells from a particular patient, for instance — and read the results using fluorescing 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.

University's Family Tree Grows



New names join a long Gator history of investing in the future of the state, nation and world

BY DAVID FINNERTY, BARBARA DRAKE (MFA '04) AND CINDY SPENCE

GENERATIONS OF GATORS HAVE LIVED WITH NAMES like Buckman and Murphree, 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:



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.



Alan and Cathy Hitchcock Field & Fork Pantry

OPENED: 2015

LOCATION: Union Lawn near McCarty Hall

DONORS: Cathy and Alan Hitchcock



Cathy and Alan Hitchcock

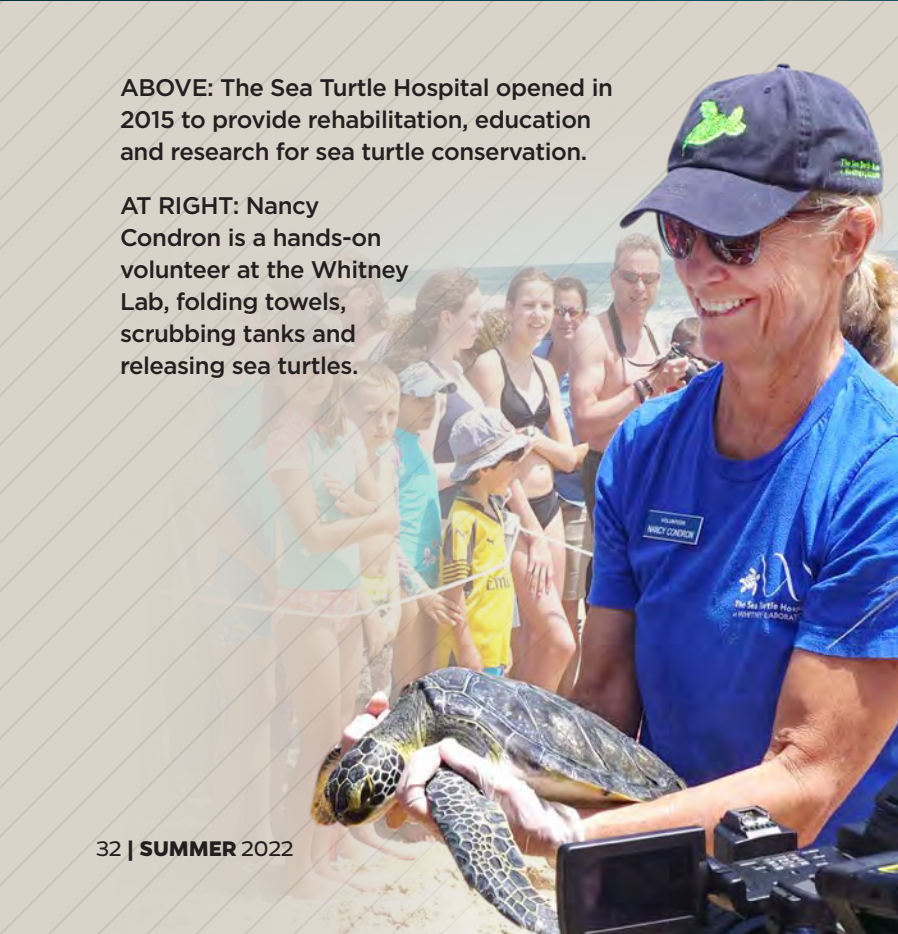
No Gator need ever go hungry. That's the goal of the Alan and Cathy Hitchcock Field and Fork Pantry, established in 2015 and renovated with a 1,194-square-foot expansion in 2019 thanks to a gift from Alan (BSA '74) and Cathy Hitchcock, founders of Hitchcock's Markets. The pantry assists members of the 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.





ABOVE: The Sea Turtle Hospital opened in 2015 to provide rehabilitation, education and research for sea turtle conservation.

AT RIGHT: Nancy Condrón is a hands-on volunteer at the Whitney Lab, folding towels, scrubbing tanks and releasing sea turtles.



Nancy Condrón Family Sea Turtle Research Center And Hospital

OPENED: 2015

LOCATION: Whitney Laboratory for Marine Bioscience, St. Augustine

DONORS: **Nancy and Gary Condrón**

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 Condrón 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. **Condrón** (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 Condrón's honor, opened in 2015. It now has an emergency room, nursery for hatchlings and offers community education programs.



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."



Lauren and Lee Fixel



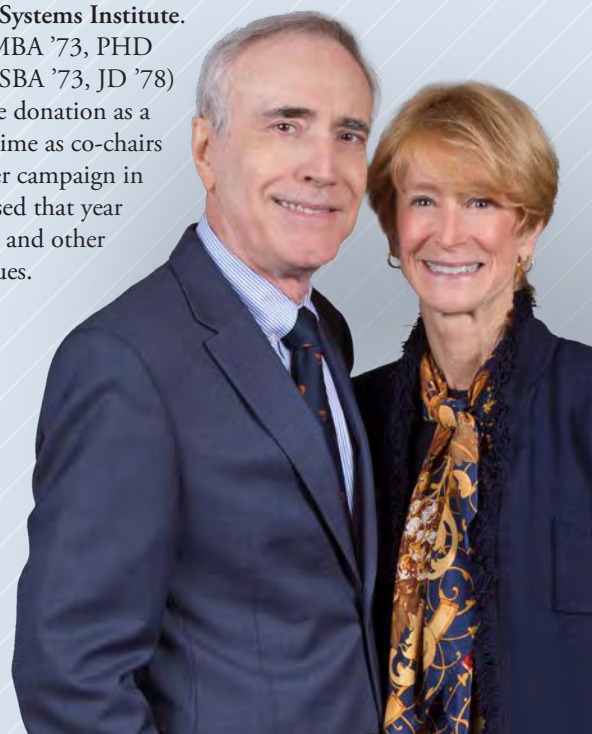
Ken and Linda McGurn Exhibition Hall

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.



Ken and Linda McGurn



Adam Michael Rosen Neuro-Oncology Laboratories

OPENED: 2021

LOCATION: Basic Science Building

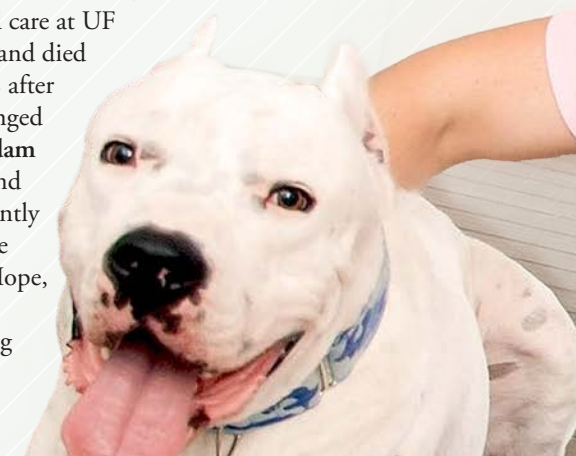
DONOR: The Harris Rosen Foundation



Harris Rosen

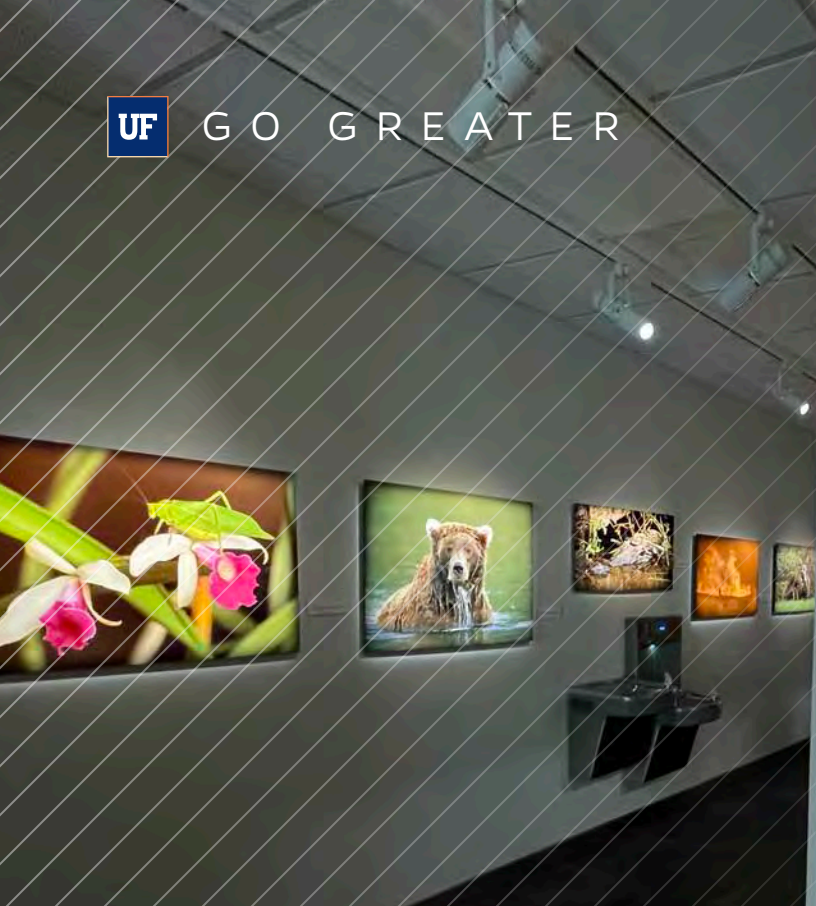
After eight years at the **McKnight Brain Institute**, Dr. Duane Mitchell's Brain Tumor Immunotherapy program had outgrown its campus facility. To foster breakthroughs, Orlando hotelier **Harris Rosen** and his foundation gave \$12 million to create an expansive, state-of-the-art laboratory in UF's Basic 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.

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



Adam Rosen with his rescue dog Samson Bear.





Dr. Howard and Brenda Sheridan Auditorium

OPENED: 2017

LOCATION: Scott Family Chemistry Building

DONORS: Howard and Brenda Sheridan



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.



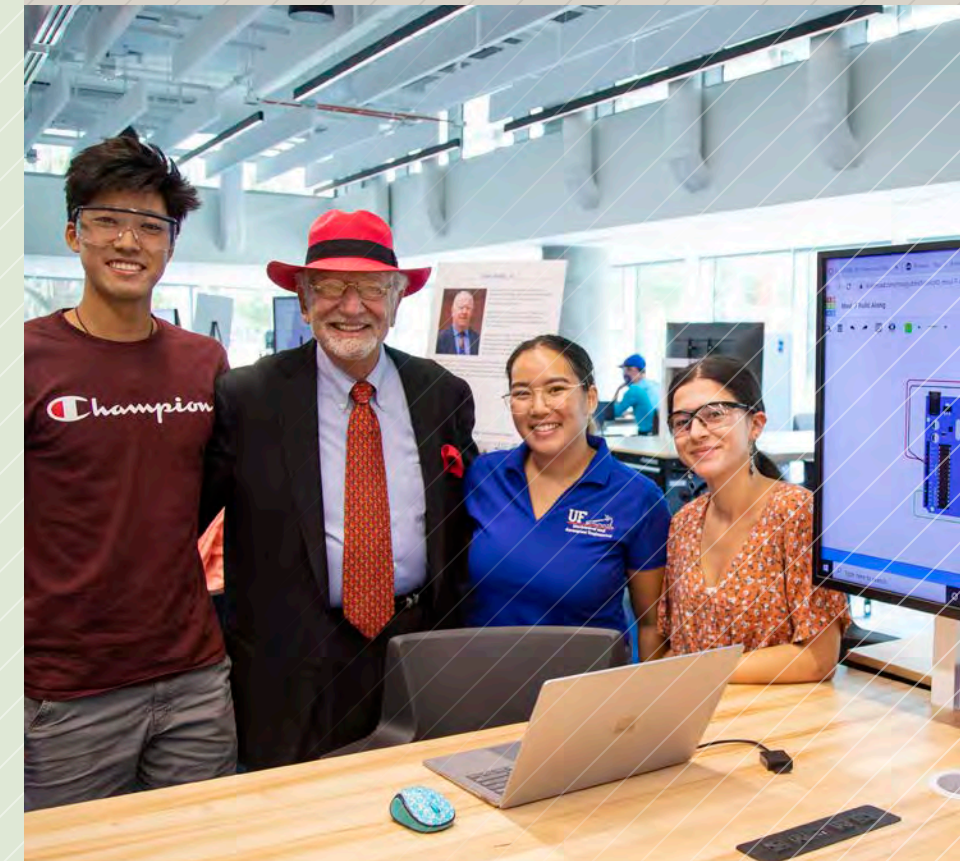
Herbert Wertheim Laboratory for Engineering Excellence

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."



Herbert Wertheim
Laboratory for
Engineering Excellence



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

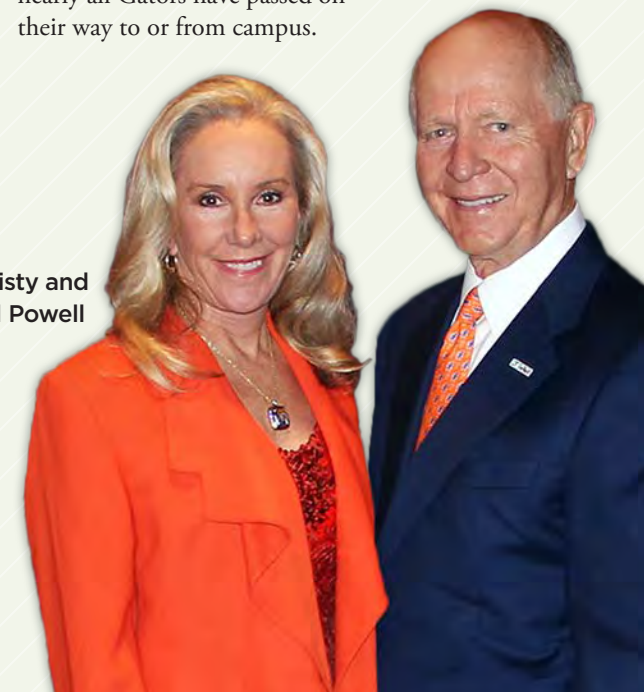
OPENED: 1953, 2015

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.

Christy and Earl Powell





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.



THE NICEST VILLAIN YOU'LL EVER MEET

Actor Juan Javier Cardenas says the bulk of the knowledge he uses as an actor came from his time at UF

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

FX

BY BARBARA DRAKE (MFA '04)

“I’M USUALLY CHOPPING UP BODIES and burying people in backyards.”

Actor/producer Juan Javier Cardenas (BFA '05) is speaking via Zoom from his home in L.A., summarizing his 10-plus-year career in television, indie films and theatre, and a smile flits across his face when asked about “those roles” – the sinister, violent and sometimes depraved ones that have made him a fan favorite.

Characters like Alejandro Usteves, a Nicaraguan contra soldier who saws up an American grad student in her bathtub in the FX series “Snowfall” (2017). Simon Alonso, half of a father-son serial killing team who feeds his victims to ravenous bulls in the CBS series “Criminal Minds: Beyond Borders” (2016). And, of course, the most high-profile villain he’s played yet: Dante, the fast-talking Whisperer spy in season 10 of AMC’s “The Walking Dead” (2019).

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 analytical, he takes pleasure in making complex characters, even sociopaths, believable and relatable, skills he originally honed as a

theatre student at UF.

“These villains are often the most fun to play because they’re the most complicated as far as their interior life and their motivations,” says Cardenas in his deep, resonant voice. “The classic adage is that these characters don’t see themselves as dark characters. They see themselves as the heroes in their own story.”

Don’t pigeonhole Cardenas as just a talented bad guy, though. This summer, the actor reveals another side of himself when HBO Max airs its new family comedy, “The Gordita Chronicles,” produced by Eva Longoria. The series centers on a willful 12-year-old Dominican girl who struggles to fit into hedonistic 1980s Miami, and Cardenas plays her loving father, Victor Castelli. It’s a role he resonates with on many levels, especially as a father and the son of Cuban and Puerto Rican immigrants.

“It’s nice to do something my mom is going to be excited to see,” says Cardenas. “She’s not going to be disappointed that I’m not some horribly dark, violent character!”

“‘The Gordita Chronicles’ is essentially a Hispanic ‘Wonder Years,’” he adds. “The humor in the show comes from the kids trying to find their own independence and carve their own path in life, but the parents can’t help doting and being on top of them. That’s a very immigrant thing, culturally.”

Here are excerpts from our recent conversation.



You’re known for playing villains and criminals. Were you always drawn to those darker roles?

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

“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

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 theatre. 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 intriguing 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.



HBO MAX

As father Victor Castelli, with wife, Adela (played by actor Diana Maria Riva), in “The Gordita Chronicles” (2022).



PHOTOS COURTESY JUAN JAVIER CARDENAS

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

Wait. Let me show you something. [Cardenas reaches behind him 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 in professional settings: how to act in a company, how 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 a performer 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 Sarasota. 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,



AMC

AT TOP: Cardenas as doctor/Whisperer spy Dante in “The Walking Dead” (2019).

AT LEFT: As Tony Montana from “Scarface,” with fellow actor Jason Martinez, in a UF improv performance in 2004.

FAR LEFT: Cardenas’ portrayal of a father in the new HBO Max comedy “The Gordita Chronicles” echoes real life. From left to right: daughter Rafaella (age 4), wife Miskha, daughter Gavriella (age 7) and Cardenas in L.A. in April.



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 started picking up gigs, working on those television productions, “Blue Bloods,” “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 has



As a Cuban revolutionary, Manny, with actor Rebecca Soler, in the Huntington Theatre Company’s production of “Becoming Cuba” (2014).

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. 🧟‍♂️



PHOTOS COURTESY JUAN JAVIER CARDENAS



FAR LEFT: Cardenas as a baby with his Cuban-born father, also named Juan Cardenas.

LEFT: Juan playing bass in his college band, the Duppies.

Follow Juan Javier Cardenas on Instagram at @juanjaviercardenas



The brothers of Kappa Alpha Psi add orange and blue to their trademark red in honor of Homecoming 2019.

Brothers *for life*

*UF's first black fraternity,
Kappa Alpha Psi, celebrates 50
years of achievement*

STORY BY CINDY SPENCE
PHOTOS COURTESY OF KAPPA ALPHA PSI

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



In front of their house, from left, Terrence Hollingsworth, Andrew Webb, Chuck Tolliver, Steve E. Baker, Chris Carrington, John Wise and Al Battle.



ABOVE: Reggie Smith and his brothers near Little Hall in the 1970s.

TOP RIGHT: Founding brother, Leonard Spearman, in the hat, prepares for a 1973 step show with his brothers.

AT RIGHT: A performance with Kappa's classic canes.



Chuck Tolliver, left, and Kamal Maragh at the 50th Anniversary celebration.

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, 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 brothers who share their success with the generations after them. “Many of us were first generation, or our parents never really had powerful positions, so we did not grow up with mom or dad coming home from business meetings and telling us how to succeed,” Tolliver says.

It was his involvement in Kappa, Tolliver said, that allowed him to capitalize on his UF engineering education. “The fraternity helped me achieve. The guys really pushed

each other to do better,” Tolliver said. “My grades were good, but learning how an organization works, those leadership skills, helped me when I graduated.” Current Kappas like **Davis** and **Georry Desruisseaux** saw the network in action at the gala, as they celebrated with men much older. “I am connecting with brothers I had never met before five minutes ago,” said Desruisseaux, a criminology major who plans to take a gap year then go to law school. He said a brother, a lawyer in Atlanta for 30 years, offered him great advice. The brothers want to give back to the university, too, Tolliver said. In honor of the 50th anniversary, the fraternity created a \$50,000 endowment for students in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. “UF is a top five university,” Tolliver said, “and we can contribute to that.”

A BIGGER STAGE

The history of the Kappas reflects the history of UF. Tolliver says the line names took on the flavor of their decades, the Superfly 7, Jive 5 and The Players, coming right after the inaugural line in the 1970s. Other lines used the Kappa “K”—Kontraversion, Kold Sweat, Kritikal Konditions. For his generation – the 1988 line that took the name 6 Feet Under because of the work of going to school and pledging – shirts and ties were de rigueur and study hall was mandatory every night. He recalls friends outside Kappa asking him why the brothers wanted to be separate from UF. For the brothers, the opposite was true. “I believe we were, we are, a part of UF,” Tolliver said. **Michael Killings** (BA '98) echoed Tolliver’s sentiments. By the late 1990s, Kappa already had a long history, but many students

only knew the fraternity from small performances at Turlington Plaza. Then came an invitation to perform at Gator Growl. The brothers performed a Kappa step routine with classic Kappa canes in 1998 for a packed stadium. “Growl was a bigger platform, and the crowd loved it,” said Killings, the “kane master” for the performance. Some students, he said, didn’t know Kappa existed until the Growl performance. “We had a story, too, and we were part of the campus fabric,” said Killings, whose line was Final Kut. “They saw that the love we had for the university was the same as theirs.” Killings said the alumni brothers make it a point to engage with 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 23 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.

“What I so love about the Zeta Phi chapter is its origin story,” Fuchs told the men and their families at the gala. “It is a story of the good that can be created in the world by a small group of young men who have purpose, empathy and vision ... they gave UF’s Black men a way to find and support each other in brotherhood, providing a resource that white male students had enjoyed for many generations — but that had never before existed for Black male students at the state’s flagship university. “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 ago chartered 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**



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.



PICTURED HONOREES

1. **Martin Foster (BSBC '92)**, Bryan Builders (#3)

2. **Scott Bryan (BSBC '00)**, Bryan Builders (#3)

3. **Leigh Feenberg (BSHE '04)**, Mid-Atlantic Dental Partners (#4)

4. **Dhvanit Patel (BSBC '98)**, Onicx Group (#1)

5. **Jason Goldman (BA '06)**, Davis Goldman PLLC (#7)

6. **Aaron Davis (BS '05, JD '08)**, Davis Goldman PLLC (#7)
7. **Josh Firestone (BSADV '18)**, Bearbottom Clothing (#2)

8. **Robert Felder (BSA '16, BSBA '16)**, Bearbottom Clothing (#2)

9. **Megan Simon (BSBA '16)**, Bearbottom Clothing (#2)

10. **Morgan Lampp (BA '16)**, Hypolita Co. (#10)

11. **Brian Lampp (Alumnus)**, Hypolita Co. (#10)

Go-Getters

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

2022 GATOR100 CLASS FACTS

\$3.9 BILLION Combined revenue of the 2022 Gator100	\$5+ MILLION Combined lifetime giving to UF		
29 Gator leaders hold two or more degrees from UF	7 Companies celebrating five+ years on the list	47 First-time companies on the list	13 Of 16 UF colleges represented

GATOR 100



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.

FIRST LEG OF NEXT MOON MISSION IS A SLOW ROLL

Apollo-era vehicle keeps rockets moving toward launch with help from a UF alum



NASA/CORY HUSTON

BY CINDY SPENCE

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



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN GILES

The 6.65-million pound vehicle crushes the rocks on the crawlerway.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN GILES

The crawler, far left, is vintage Apollo but the only way to get Artemis, left, in position for a Moon launch.

LEARN MORE

About the Artemis moon mission: uff.to/detffb

Giles' NASA bio:

uff.to/qpvvec8

"In the time since the crawler was designed, the launch vehicles, the mobile launch tower, the launch pad, the rockets — they're all new. But they roll to the launch pad on equipment built in 1964." — **JOHN GILES, NASA ENGINEER**

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.

"It's 57 years old, so we have to be prepared to fix things on short notice, especially if we're moving to launch," Giles says. "Say you had an antique car sitting in your garage. One day, it's not going to start. Engines are made to move, and the crawler is no different, so we drive it about every two weeks for a couple of miles."

Apollo-era parts are not on sale at your local hardware or auto parts store, so it takes engineering and ingenuity to keep the crawlers running. The original motors were for 1960s locomotives and are no longer available. When spare and refurbished parts no longer do the trick, the parts are sent to a machine shop in Jacksonville for a rebuild.

Giles says although both degrees come in handy, he didn't set out to get two engineering degrees.

"I got to the end of the first degree and realized I had been working so hard that I didn't have the fun they say you're supposed to have in college. Since I had electrical engineering electives, it didn't take long to get the second degree."

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.

SEE GILES, Page 72

INAUGURAL AWARDS HONOR LEADERSHIP

IN DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION



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



FLORIDA CICERONES

Founded in 1968, the Florida Cicerones serve as the official student ambassadors to UF and as the governing body of Students Today, Alumni Tomorrow.



YOLANDA CASH JACKSON

Jackson is a lobbyist and shareholder with the Becker & Poliakoff law firm. She's spent the past 30 influencing the laws that govern every Florida citizen.



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.



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.



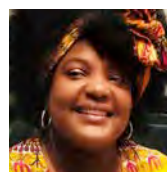
ADRIENNE WIDENER

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.



ALICIA WILLIAMS

Williams is the senior director of anti-racism and racial equity at DevaCurl, leading strategy and advocacy for equity while pushing to eradicate racism in the hair industry.



RHONDA WILSON

Wilson is the founding executive director of the Star Center Theatre in Gainesville. She founded the Star Center with the vision of providing culturally diverse theater.



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.



ADANIA FLEMMING

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



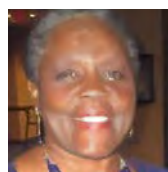
ADRIENNE GARCIA

Garcia served as executive director of Hillsborough Community College Foundation and, in particular, raised funds for scholarships for minority students.



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.



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.



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GOOD GATOR READS

An Immigrant’s Journey

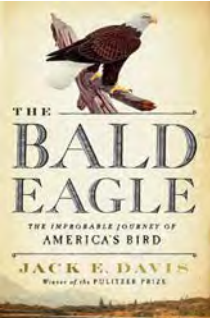
Uwem Akpan’s “New York, My Village” follows Nigerian editor Ekong Udousoro as he immigrates to Manhattan for a fellowship granted for his expertise on the Biafran War. Ekong is determined to reveal the beauty in humanity, while navigating the complexities of white-dominant office culture, learning about 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 funhouse mirror that reflects back the truth.” Read a Q&A with the professor at: uff.to/rw3w23



Uwem Akpan, assistant professor of creative writing

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 living bird behind their national symbol as a malicious predator of livestock and, falsely, a snatcher of babies. Taking us from before the nation’s founding through inconceivable resurgences of this enduring all-American species, Davis contrasts the age when native peoples lived beside it peacefully with that when others, whether through hunting bounties or DDT pesticides, twice pushed *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* to the brink of extinction. Filled with spectacular stories of Founding Fathers, rapacious hunters, heroic bird rescuers, and the lives of bald eagles themselves — monogamous creatures, considered among the animal world’s finest parents — “The Bald Eagle” is a much-awaited cultural and natural history that demonstrates how this bird’s wondrous journey may provide inspiration today, as we grapple with environmental peril on a larger scale.

THE SECRET LIFE OF CONVERSOS

The newest novel by **Sharon Gloger Friedman**, BA ’67, came out in March. Her first novel, “**Ashes**,” won the 2019 Next Generation Indie Book Award for Historical Fiction and the 2019 New Apple Summer E-book Award for Historical Fiction.

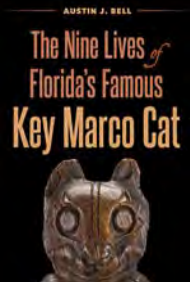


“**In Freedom’s Light**” is set in 1785, when enforcers of the Spanish Inquisition are hunting down and torturing conversos—Jews who outwardly converted to Christianity, but who practiced Judaism in secret. When 19-year-old converso Anica Amselem refuses a cut of pork in Valencia’s marketplace, she and her husband Efren 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 Efren’s uncle, Philip, owns a rice plantation. As they form unexpected bonds with the young house slave Ruth and her mother Lindy, Anica and Efren are forced to confront family secrets and the horrors of slavery.

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

The Key Marco Cat was excavated from a waterlogged archaeological site on Florida shores by legendary anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing in 1896. 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—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**.”

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 Rubel’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 Unell**, BA ’97 MBA/MHA ’00, 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.

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CALLING ALL FUR FANS

Cats have nearly broken the internet with memes galore, 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.



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.

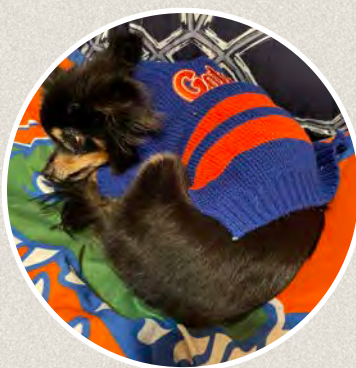
Darcie

This rescue pup is part Chihuahua, Shar Pei and toy fox terrier. Owner **Sandra Cole**, BA '70, is retired from Allstate in Fort Lauderdale.



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 parttime.



Princess Lexi

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



Teddy

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



Gigi

Patti Abril, TEL '92, drove from Miami to Alachua County in 2021 to pick up **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 collie 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**.

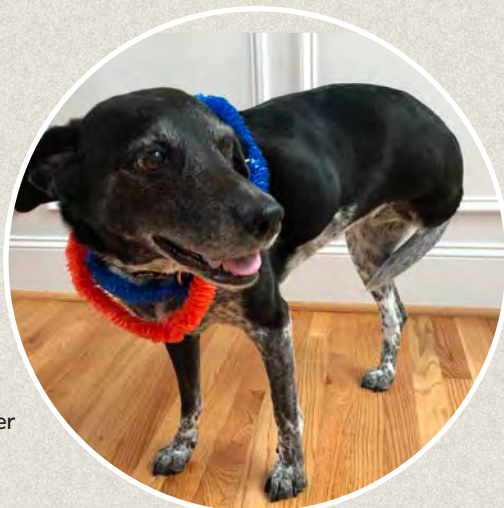


Tyson

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

Cassidy

You don't need four legs to be a fur Gator fan. **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.



GATORS GO AROUND THE WORLD

Reader-submitted photos from past and present adventures



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.

THE GATOR NATION IS EVERYWHERE

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

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



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



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.



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.

Great Geysir, Iceland



Mary Carhart (BABA '01), **Lauren Sciroto 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 '82, M.ED & ED.S '87) right, and her college roommate **Terrie Schilling Leonard** have started traveling together again now that their children are off at college. Here, they're on the island of Madeira, Portugal.



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.

YOUNG ALUMNI WHO’VE

The awardees come from a variety of backgrounds: business, law enforcement, education, government. What do they have in common? They are Gators who have had uncommon success by the age of 40. Outstanding young alumni have been honored since 2006 by the UF Alumni Association, and this year’s cohort are featured on the association website at uff.to/k7xqbz



Here are a few of this year’s honorees.



AARON DAYE

Attendees on Spurrier Field at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium.



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 Sasvari (BSBA '07, MS '09). The fantasy sports website RotoGrinders.com — which later sold for \$60 million in 2021 — followed. Nowadays, MacMillan is a busy “angel investor,” supporting charities like P4H 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 P4H Global, then re-focus efforts on Africa and globalization progress, along with some community benefit drives to promote local education.



THE ADVOCATE

Erin Collins

(BA '05, BSTEL '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, Popo. She passed away in September 2021 at the age of 98 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.

MADE THEIR MARK



THE MOTIVATOR

India White (BA '07, MED '13, EDD '20)

There was a time when India White had no home. On Christmas Eve — the year she was 16 — White was told to leave her house and not come back. Being a homeless student didn’t stop her, though. She went on to earn three UF degrees and used her hardships and triumphs to become a motivational speaker, author and national educational consultant. Along the way, she was twice named Teacher of the Year for two counties.

What did you want to be when you were a kid?

Five years old: no clue; 10 years old: a famous singer; 15 years old: a stockbroker for a Fortune 500 company.

First job?

Server at an assisted living program — 14 years old.

Best advice received?

Life comes in cycles, accept the mountaintops and the valleys — you need both to keep you balanced. Also, fight the urge to be average.

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 2019 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 Speedoff — 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!

THE MAYOR



Dave Kerner

(BA '06, JD '10)

Dave Kerner, it seems, was born to be a civil servant. Even as a kid his wish was to be a policeman. So it was little surprise when he enrolled in Alachua County’s police academy — except, perhaps, that he was just 19 years old and a UF freshman at the time. A year later and carrying a

full class load, he was named the county’s Officer of the Year. He later went on to serve two terms in the Florida House of Representatives and be elected to the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners. Then, in 2021, Kerner, the county’s mayor during the Covid-19 pandemic, was selected to work on Gov. Ron DeSantis’ executive committee of the Re-Open Florida Taskforce.

When you were 5 years old, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A police officer.

What do you enjoy in your free time?

Spending time with my family; my dog, Mich; and sporting clay contests

What’s the best piece of advice you’ve received?

Treat others as you would like to be treated, and live life with humility and gratitude.

IN MEMORIAM



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, BAE '51 MAE '52, died Feb. 16 at the age of 101 in Provo, Utah.

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.

On his 100th birthday, Halvorsen reflected in a letter on his website that West Berliners survived the blockade not because of the rations airlifted in but because of their spirit.

“It was hope, not flour, that gave the West Berliners the strength to carry on,” he wrote. Even chocolate, he wrote, meant hope.

Born on Oct. 10, 1920, in Salt Lake City, Gail Seymour Halvorsen grew up in a farming family. He earned his wings in the Army Air Forces in 1944. In the early 1950s, Halvorsen used a program sponsored by the Air Force Institute of Technology to attend UF.

He returned to Tempelhof to command the US Air Force base there from 1970-74. One day, a dinner invitation arrived, and he accepted.

“The lady of the house handed me a letter dated November 1948,” said Halvorsen, recalling the letter he wrote so long ago. He had signed it: Your Chocolate Uncle.

Information from the **Gail S. Halvorsen Foundation** contributed to this report. For the full obituary, please see uff.to/Oztqrd



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: uffgive.to/byv10c

For a complete obituary, please see uff.to/2q4vx4

For a 2017 **College of the Arts** profile of Uelsmann, visit uff.to/3kyfw3

William (Bill) M. Jones



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 1968-1973. 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.

“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 McElwee-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.”

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 Krajna.

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.

25% of UF DBA students and graduates used **GI BENEFITS** for the program

“The UF DBA program has helped me be an innovative problem solver that is capable of generating new research ideas, acquire advanced research skills which have sharpened my business acumen, and hone my skills in research, writing, and presentation. My dream is to one day be a Chief Executive Officer of a major corporation, and attending the Warrington College of Business is helping me realize my dream.”

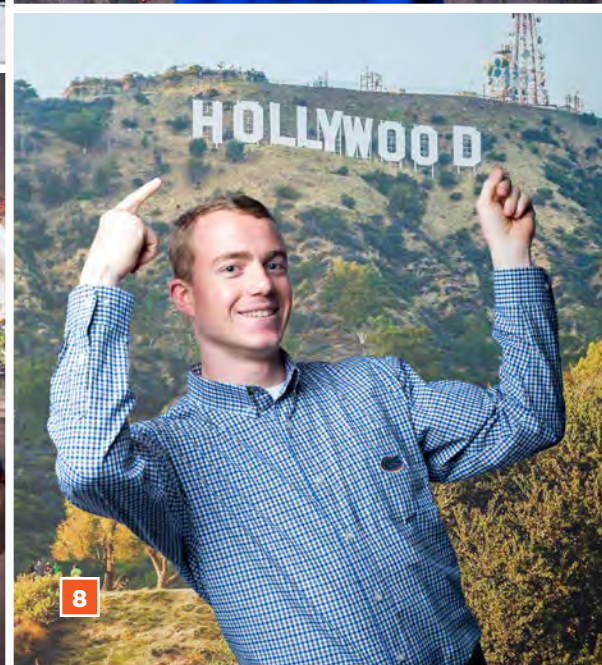
PAUL CLARK
Product Line Manager, Caterpillar Inc.
U.S. Army

MORE INFORMATION

→ warrington.ufl.edu/DBA
or contact Angie at: angie.woodham@warrington.ufl.edu

UF DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

WARRINGTON COLLEGE of BUSINESS



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 ...

What's just *one unique thing* about 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 **Kamelya Hinson** and **Cavrine Harris**.

2. Gina Wansor 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**. (Jacksonville, along with Association of Black Alumni - Gainesville Chapter, won a Clubbie for Outstanding Event.)

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

FLORIDA GATOR | 67



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

GATORS WITH GREAT NEWS

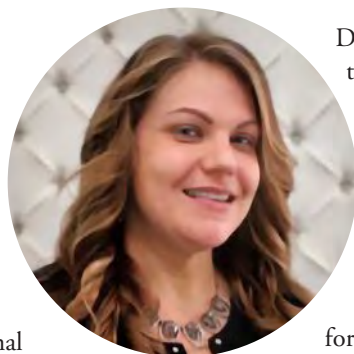
Kitt Peak National Observatory

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 all of NSF's nighttime observatories into one organization. Kitt Peak is widely recognized as a top-ranked research facility and 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 exoplanets is underway. A cutting-edge spectrometer will observe the sky from Kitt Peak, hunting for Earth-like planets elsewhere in the Milky Way. 

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.

UF architecture grad designs “underground” port in Istanbul

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 \$1.7 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.”

Galataport seaport rendering



Holding back the water meant building a wall to hold back the sea as cranes and concrete trucks worked five stories below sea level. Today, the state-of-the-art cruise facility can host up to three ships and 15,000 passengers a day. The site also features a nearly 200-room hotel and 250 retail units. Not bad for a site off inaccessible to the public for two centuries.

For the complete story, see  uff.to/rxhb09



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 co-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.



In addition to research, **Alexandria Tucker** will lead physics outreach programs.

A Mermaid's Tale

LONGTIME GATOR BOOSTER STILL MAKES A SPLASH YEARS AFTER HER WEEKI WACHEE MERMAID DAYS



Images of Mary sipping a Grapette showed up on postcards for Weeki Wachee. *This photo has been colorized.*

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.

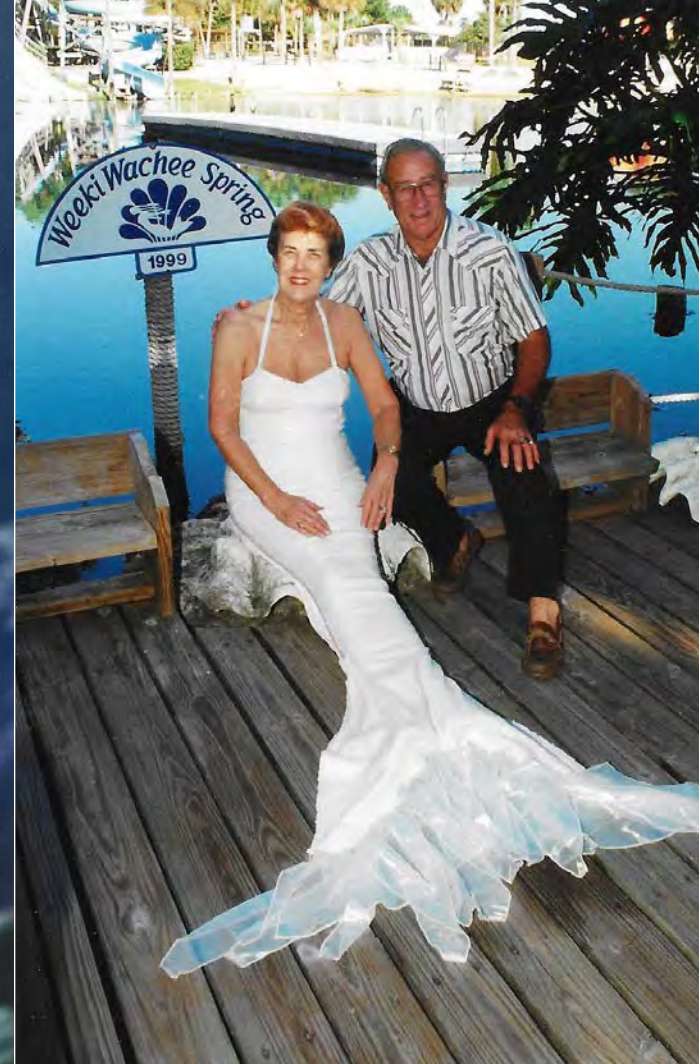
Richard met Mary when Mary’s roommate, Peggy, insisted the two were suited, like “two peas in a pod.”

“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.’

“I said, ‘oh yeah?’ He said ‘yes, and I’ll tell you the rest of the story tonight when I pick you up for dinner.’”



FAR LEFT: The mermaid motto — once a mermaid, always a mermaid — rings true for Mary. Her brother, Ed, right, was one of the original mermen at Weeki Wachee.

ABOVE: The mermaids often entertained onlookers by feeding schools of fish.

AT LEFT: Viewers were amazed that the mermaids could play as if they were on land. Here Mary, right, is being pushed in a swing.

WATER THEATER

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.

“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.

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

SWIMMING WITH THE GATORS

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



In 1997, Mary returned for the 50th anniversary of Weeki 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 Swimcapades, a popular Homecoming show, even though she was no longer a student.

GILES *From Page 53*

"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 hopes to end his career in human space flight.

"I told myself I was not going to retire

GATOR NATION



WONDERS OF WEEKI WACHEE

Images were provided by Mary Fletcher and also appear in "Weeki Wachee Mermaids: Thirty years of underwater photography," University Press of Florida. Find the book at uff.to/d1z5mp

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 39th 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 90th birthday, which passed during the pandemic. One fitting place came to mind: Spurrier's Gridiron Grille.

"Mary will be in all her glory." 🦢

until we launched astronauts again on a NASA launch vehicle," Giles says. "That's what's keeping me here."

The Artemis missions, which started in March with the first dress rehearsal rollout, are aimed at landing the first woman and person of color on the Moon.

"The rockets for Artemis have to go 24,500 mph to escape Earth's gravity, but in order to get to launch, we take this all-day trip, leaving the VAB at 0.05 mph," Giles says. "Crawling is the only way to get

to the launchpad."

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." 🦢

FOND MEMORIES NEW DISCOVERIES UNDER THE GLOW OF ORANGE & BLUE

10

TALLAHASSEE

75

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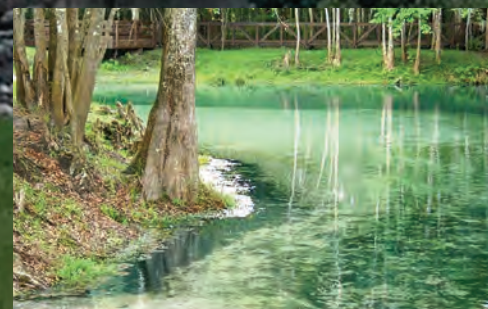
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Main Image: Sweetwater Wetlands Park by @wildlifeventures | Poe Springs: Courtesy of Alachua County
Drink Gainesville Beer: Courtesy of Swamp Head Brewery | Musical Performance: Courtesy of Heartwood Soundstage



2022 DATES

September 3	Utah
September 10	Kentucky
September 17	South Florida
October 1	Eastern Washington
October 8	Missouri (HOMECOMING - OPEN TO PUBLIC)
October 15	LSU
November 12	South Carolina

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