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South

magazine

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

Dr. Aromi's
Azaleas
20

Happy
Dolphins

Data
Driven

Sea
Students

Art
Therapy

South magazine

SOUTH MAGAZINE is published twice a year by the University of South Alabama and distributed to alumni and friends.

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STRATEGIC AND EXECUTIVE
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Jeb Schrenk

**SENIOR DIRECTOR OF
MARKETING AND CREATIVE
SERVICES**
Diana Nichols

CONTRIBUTORS
Dan Anderson
Casandra Andrews
John Jay Cabuay
Lance Crawford
Riley Ferrer
Teri Greene
Mike Kittrell
Seth Laubinger
Kim Lovvorn
Steve Millburg
James Palomo
Carolina Peláez
Bill Starling
Courtney West
Chris Wormell
Amelia Rose Zimlich

ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Jim Berscheidt
Lance Crawford
Amber Day
Karen Edwards
Teri Greene
Kim Lovvorn
Diana Nichols
Jeb Schrenk
Margaret Sullivan
Joy Washington

ON THE COVER
Azalea hybrids Kevin Patrick, Glory Be, Coral Reef, Jane's Gold and Amelia Rose — all created by longtime faculty member Dr. Eugene John Aromi Jr. Read his story, page 20. Illustration by Carolina Peláez.



STUDENTS CELEBRATE HOLI
and the arrival of spring at the intramural fields. The annual festival of colors is organized by the Indian Student Association.



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On the Waterfront

Aloe Bay will become an outdoor classroom for marine and environmental sciences students.

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Numbers Game

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Fly High

Yellowhammer Coffee: Brewing big, spreading its wings.



PRESIDENT JO BONNER enters the USA Mitchell Center arena for Spring Commencement. Moments earlier, graduates and guests watched a video paying tribute to The USA Way. See page 41.

By Design

Everyone in the South family has helped shape our ‘do the right thing’ culture.

FROM OUR EARLIEST DAYS, we were blessed with leaders who created a culture based on integrity, dedication and class and who inspired us all to be ambitious, determined and bold. I have come to think of this culture as The USA Way.

I see the tangible results of our trailblazers’ thoughtful design every day as I travel our campus. Its beauty lifts my spirits as I watch it change through the seasons — with fall foliage, spring blooms and, every once in a while, a surprise like this past January’s record-breaking snow.

At every step in our history, the local businesspeople and elected officials who worked together to create the University, as well as the visionary administrators and faculty who guided its development, have kept a single mission in mind: to be the best we can be in all that we do.

The USA Way shines from every page in this magazine. USA Health medical vans will bring top-quality healthcare to rural areas. Our hospitals and clinics provide art therapy to reduce stress and improve the mental health of seriously ill or injured patients and even their families.

South students received prestigious Goldwater Scholarships (three, more than all but one other university in the state) and took home a first-place trophy from a national cheer competition. As someone who remembers when handheld stopwatches were state of the art, I marvel at the amazing new technologies that our coaches and other

athletics staff are using to help our student-athletes become the best they can be.

The USA Center for Archaeological Studies dug into its biggest project ever, a study that spans the full sweep of our region’s history. Thanks to the steadfast support of the USA Foundation, the Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences and a group of engineering students are designing an open-air classroom that will open this fall out in the middle of Dauphin Island’s beautiful Aloe Bay. Students will step right down into the water to put what they learn in the classroom into action.

And our alumni continue to make us proud in so many ways. Winners of our annual Distinguished Alumni Awards demonstrate that leadership in the business world goes hand in hand with service to others. A 2007 Mitchell College of Business graduate has built an idea he first pitched via YouTube into a fast-growing local coffee chain that specializes in “wow moments.” All three 2025 Teachers of the Year for Mobile County Public Schools are Jaguar alums.

Everyone associated with the University has had a role in designing and carrying out The USA Way. You have all helped us move upward and onward as the Flagship of the Gulf Coast. You will always be Jaguars, and we will always cherish your legacy.

Go Jags!

Jo Bonner
President

VIEW FROM THE

Bell Tower



THE 2025 SPRING SEMESTER kicked off with a historic dose of winter: A record 7.5 inches of snow fell in Mobile, piling up throughout the course of one memorable day, Jan. 21, and breaking a record set in 1895. South students were up for it, turning the campus into a giant playground.

“THIS RECOGNITION ONLY VALIDATES what all of us already know: We have the nation’s best enrolled in our classes, engaged in the research activities across campus and serving within our community.” — **DR. DAVID FORBES**



Three South Students Win Goldwater Scholarships

THREE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA STUDENTS have been named Goldwater Scholars for 2025. They are among only nine students in the state to receive the award.

Genevieve Batman, a junior majoring in exercise science and interdisciplinary studies; Mary Helene Marmande, a sophomore majoring in chemistry; and Gabriel Merchant, a junior majoring in chemistry, are among 441 new college Goldwater Scholarship recipients nationwide. All three students are members of South’s Honors College.

Considered one of the most

prestigious undergraduate STEM scholarships in the country, the scholarship covers tuition, room and board, book expenses, and fees up to \$7,500 annually.

“This recognition only validates what all of us already know: We have the nation’s best enrolled in our classes, engaged in the research activities across campus and serving within our community,” says Dr. David Forbes, professor of chemistry and campus representative of the Goldwater program.

The Goldwater Scholarship Program was established in 1986 to honor then-U.S. Sen. Barry Goldwater.



ROTC’S NEW COURSE RAISES THE BAR

YOU CLIMB A 16-FOOT ROPE to a platform where you walk unaided across a series of beams suspended high in the air to get to a 20-foot ladder. You ascend, then navigate over a 30-foot-high log and make your way down a 30-foot cargo net.

There’s a reason they call it **The Tough One**.

It’s just one of six obstacles on a new ropes/obstacle course for South’s Army and Air Force ROTC students. It sits on about an acre just behind the newly renovated ROTC building on the northwest side of campus. There remains plenty of space to build additional obstacles and possibly a rappel tower.

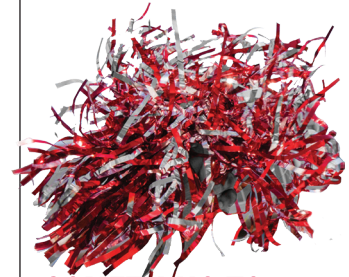
The new course is very similar to what you would find on a standard Army base. In addition to **The Tough One**, there are monkey bars, an incline wall, a rope climb, a vertical wall and **The Weaver**, in which cadets twist their bodies up and over a series of bars.

The obstacles are already in place — construction took less than three months — and by the middle of summer, fencing and landscaping will be complete. ROTC students will use it weekly to climb, jump, crawl, run, balance and traverse their way to discipline, confidence and teamwork.

PURPLE AND GOLD FOR THE RED, WHITE AND BLUE

LESS THAN A YEAR after launching an expanded Office of Military Services, the University of South Alabama has received two recognitions of its commitment to military members, veterans and their families.

South has earned the 2025-2026 Military Friendly School Gold Award designation. The University also has been designated as a Purple Heart University by the Military Order of the Purple Heart.



SOMETHING TO CHEER ABOUT

SOUTH ALABAMA took home first place in the all-girl group stunts category at the College Classic national cheer competition, held in April in Orlando, Florida. The first-place team members were Emily Morgan, Logan Collins, Maddie Welch and Mallorie Collins.

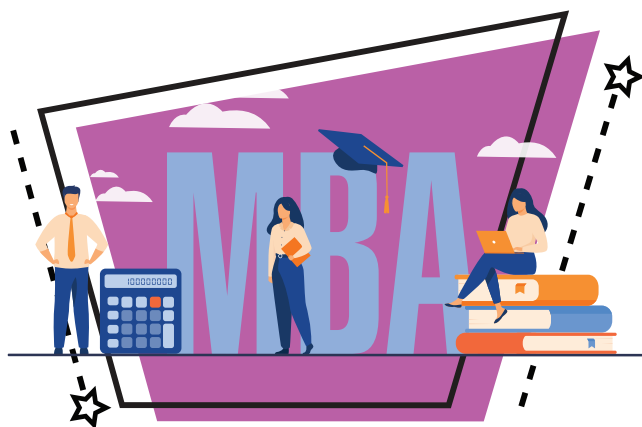
GRADUATE PROGRAMS GET NATIONAL RECOGNITION

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA graduate programs continue to be recognized as some of the nation's best in U.S. News & World Report's annual graduate school rankings. South was recognized in 12 categories this year.

U.S. News & World Report ranked South's programs in audiology, physician assistant studies, physical therapy, occupational therapy, earth sciences, speech-language pathology, computer science, psychology and biological sciences.

South also was ranked in the following categories: most graduates practicing in health professional shortage areas, most graduates practicing in primary care and most graduates practicing in rural areas.

"The University of South Alabama continues to provide our students with world-class programs that allow them to pursue their academic goals. This latest national recognition only adds to the momentum of our University," says Dr. Andi Kent, executive vice president and provost.



South's MBA Program Goes Online

EARNING A MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION has long been a stepping stone to career advancement. Yet, for years, it remained out of reach for many professionals unable to find a program that fit their busy lives.

A decade ago, the space for fully online MBAs was dominated by nonaccredited, for-profit schools that advertised on billboards and TV.

Though respected business schools did offer online coursework, none had leaped into a fully online program. Skepticism abounded: Could an online MBA really carry the same weight as a traditional, in-person program? But the need was always there.

Enter the pandemic, and top-ranked business schools like Harvard entered the arena. The perception of online MBA programs shifted from questionable to competitive.

Now, USA's Mitchell College of Business is helping to shape that evolution, says Dr. Jessica Franks, director of graduate programs. "Our goal is to remove barriers and create opportunities," Franks says. "Moving the MBA program online allows us to reach more students while maintaining the same level of rigor, engagement and career impact that defines our program."

The program will reach students who struggle to balance full-time work, raising kids, caring for aging parents or serving in the military.

Creating an engaging and interactive student experience was key to online course development. USA's Innovation in Learning Center led workshops to equip faculty with best practices for online instruction — emphasizing both content quality and maximum student engagement — and developed a standardized course shell, to be used across all the MBA courses, to create a cohesive, user-friendly learning environment.

"Beyond the virtual classroom, we are committed to providing both online and in-person networking and professional development opportunities," Franks says, "ensuring that our students remain connected and supported throughout their MBA journey."



PARRISH APPOINTED VP OF RESEARCH

DR. ALLEN PARRISH, who led one of the University of Alabama's signature research institutes, began April 1 as the new vice president of research and economic development at the University of South Alabama.

Parrish has served as the executive director of the Alabama Cyber Institute, a senior workforce development adviser for the Alabama Transportation Institute and a professor of computer science at the University of Alabama.

"I am delighted to launch a new chapter in my career at the University of South Alabama," Parrish says. "This opportunity will allow me to explore ways to help shape the culture to embrace research and economic development as critical drivers and expand South's impact."

Parrish has also served as interim vice president for research and economic development at Alabama, as associate vice president for research at Mississippi State University and as a professor and chair of the department of cyber science at the United States Naval Academy.

He received his Bachelor of Science in computer science from the University of Tennessee at Martin. He holds a Master of Science and Doctor of Philosophy in computer science from The Ohio State University.

USA HEALTH CEO OWEN BAILEY TO RETIRE

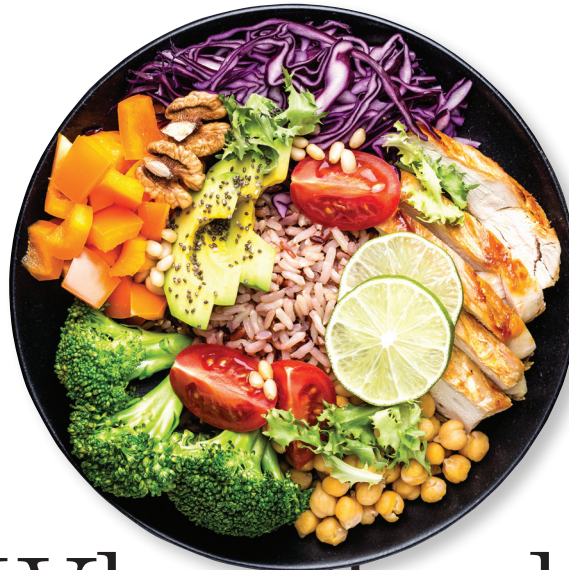
OWEN BAILEY, a driving force behind USA Health's expansive growth from seven facilities in 2016 to more than 40 care-delivery sites in 2025, will retire as the health system's CEO Aug. 1.

A nationally recognized healthcare leader, Bailey has been in his current role with USA Health since 2016, having previously served as the administrator of USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital for five years.

"Owen's contributions to USA Health over the past 14 years have been invaluable, helping make our academic health system one of the very best in the nation," says USA President Jo Bonner. "We are truly grateful for all he has done for our patients and our community."

Most recently, Bailey was part of the executive team that led the October 2023 acquisition of Ascension Providence, negotiating an agreement that brought on an additional 1,800 employees and 14 clinics in two states, a move that made USA Health the largest public health system in the region. Today, USA Health is responsible for a more than a \$1 billion annual impact on the Gulf Coast economy.

Dr. Natalie Fox, chief physician enterprise officer for USA Health, has been named interim CEO.



What Should I Eat?

DR. ROBERT ISRAEL, an internal medicine physician with USA Health, leads a series of cooking classes in the academic health system's teaching kitchens — at University Commons in Mobile and the Mapp Family Campus in Fairhope — that offer participants hands-on experience making and tasting simple, healthy dishes.

"I am frequently asked, 'What should I eat?'" says Israel. The short answer: Something that tastes great and also makes you feel and perform better.

Here are Israel's building blocks to a better plate:

WHOLE FOODS — grains, fruits and vegetables, healthy proteins — have the best nutritional content and, if eaten in variety, are really all you ever need.

Combine some **PROTEIN**, **FAT** and **GOOD CARBS** at every meal; achieve a balance of 20-40% of your total intake from each.

GOOD CARBS, such as whole grains, beans, seeds and nuts, have hundreds or thousands of micronutrients. These include antioxidants, anti-inflammatories, probiotics and many other naturally occurring phytochemicals that you can get only in whole foods. Even your multivitamins miss most of these.

PLANT PROTEINS such as beans are high in very budget-friendly protein and also loaded with healthy fiber and antioxidants. The fiber feeds your microbiome, which helps modulate your metabolism, inflammation and your mood, among other things. Plant-based options are first choice, followed in order by fish, dairy, fowl, and finally lamb, pork and beef.

Our bodies need **HEALTHY FATS**, such as those found in olives, olive oil, nuts, avocados and yogurt.



[>> LEARN MORE](#)

Register for upcoming cooking classes through South's Integrative Health and Wellness Program.

THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE THAT COMES TO YOU



USA HEALTH, in collaboration with 10 rural hospitals in Southwest Alabama, soon will begin operating three mobile clinics to expand access to healthcare in more remote areas.

USA Health was awarded a \$1.5 million grant from the state to purchase and maintain three vans for the rural telehealth initiatives. The vehicles are being outfitted with medical equipment and audio and video capabilities to create mobile health units that will offer clinical and virtual care, along with community outreach, in areas where needs are the greatest throughout the region.

An aim of the project is to build a stronger foundation of support to help rural healthcare providers and hospitals broaden their reach to the residents they serve and to provide specialty services not already available in rural areas.

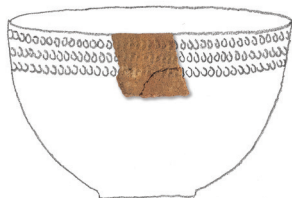
Mobile Unearthed

Spanning the history of Mobile Bay, the I-10 Mobile River Bridge Archaeology Project is the largest undertaking the USA Center for Archaeological Studies has ever conducted.

Partnering with Wiregrass Archaeological Consulting, the team excavated 15 sites along the new bridge route from November 2021 to June 2023, uncovering a trove of artifacts, including pottery. The team painstakingly examined each fragile piece of pottery they found, unveiling, one by one, significant fragments of local history.

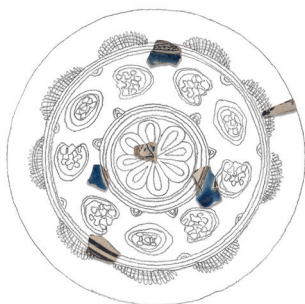
“Ceramics are one of our best sources of information at an archaeological site,” says Rachel Hines, the project’s public outreach coordinator. Because designs and methods of making pottery change over time, these items — even tiny fragments — can reliably indicate a site’s age and provide valuable insight into trade networks, international connections, lifestyles and social classes of their times.

PHOTOGRAPHS of excavated pottery sherds are shown within the context of the full piece they might have come from.



BAYOU LA BATRE STAMPED POTTERY SHERD
(2,650-1,800 years ago)

The oldest artifact identified by the project, this fragment is from a vessel that was stamped while the clay was wet, likely with a scallop shell edge, making the design easy to replicate. Excavated near Virginia Street, this type of pottery was first identified in the 1950s in the south Mobile County city of Bayou La Batre.



PUEBLA POLYCHROME MAJOLICA CERAMIC SHERDS
(1650-1725)

The colorful majolica, a tin-glazed earthenware ceramic, was made in Mexico until the 1800s and often shaped into deep-brimmed plates or bowls. At that time, Mexico and Mobile were both part of New Spain. These sherds were found just south of the Spanish settlement in Mobile, which was located near Fort Conde.



ST. CLOUD FAIENCE PLATE
(1675-1766)

French faience is often found on French colonial sites in the Southeastern United States established before 1800. The nearly complete plate, an extremely uncommon find, was excavated south of downtown Mobile inside a barrel well. Such wells were often used for trash after they ran dry.



COMMON CABLE PEARLWARE BOWL
(1790-1820)

Pearlware, made in England around the turn of the 19th century, has a distinct blue-tinted glaze. This cabled, finger-painted bowl, found near the corner of Royal and Madison streets downtown, gives us a glimpse of life during a period of scarce archival records just before Mobile became part of the United States in 1813.



#SoMobile

During the I-10 excavation project, the team discovered items that were a part of the city’s identity, such as an old Mardi Gras pin and this token for a trip on a local streetcar.



STREETCAR TOKEN
(1916)

By 1908, the Mobile Light and Railroad Co. had 50 miles of streetcar track along 20 different lines. This token was found behind the former 906 S. Franklin Street, the home of the Owens family. The city’s first electric streetcars emerged in the 1890s and were prevalent until 1940, when buses replaced them.

EDGE-MOLDED WHITEWARE PLATE
(1943)

Recently produced pottery, like this, often has a maker’s mark, which provides more information about the manufacturer. Homer Laughlin produced this pottery; its maker’s mark indicates that it was made in May 1943. It was found on Franklin Street near the former homes of the McCall and Sanders families, who were working-class African Americans: Sterling McCall worked at the shipyards, and Maggie Sanders was a maid at the Battle House Hotel.

SNAPSHOT

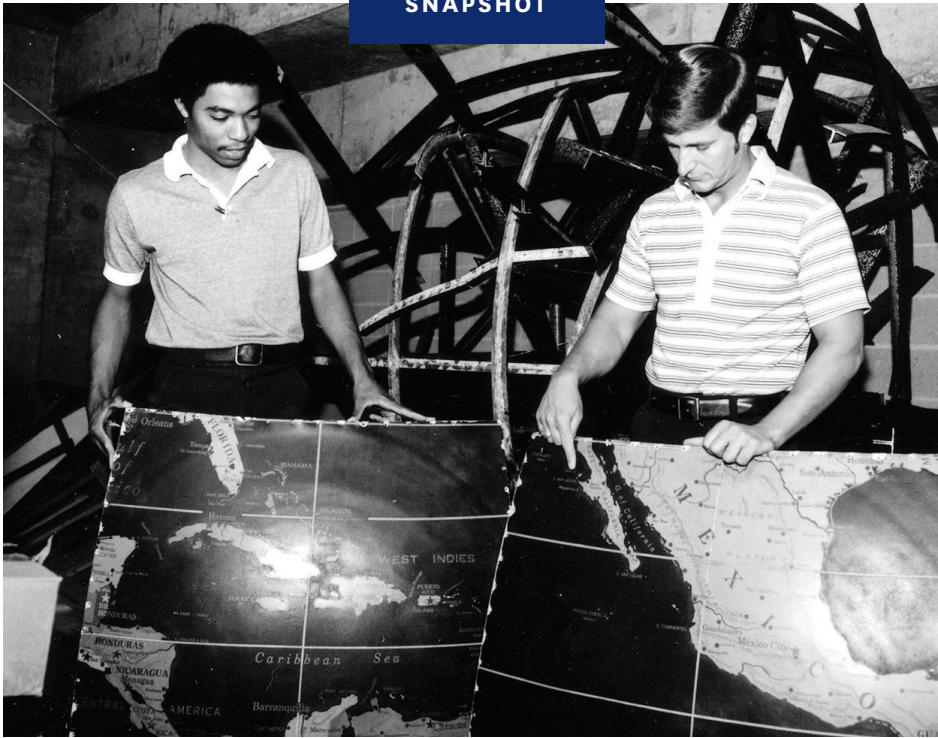


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE DOT LEA MCCALL PARE BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY

DR. BILL WILLIAMS, right, and student Alfred Archer saw potential for the Waterman Globe to find a home on the University of South Alabama campus. It was moved from storage at the Mobile Municipal Auditorium, pictured here, to the University, where it was eventually restored.

The Wandering Globe

The beginnings of one of South's most photographed locations

WHEN DR. BILL WILLIAMS FIRST SAW the pieces, he thought it might be the end of the world. Or at least the globe.

The 12-foot-tall rotating globe, made by Rand McNally, had spent 23 years in downtown Mobile's Waterman Building. (Original cost: \$37,915, equivalent to more than \$500,000 today.) Dismantled in 1973, it ended up at the Mobile Municipal Auditorium (later the Mobile Civic Center).

Plans to display it fell through. To the rescue in 1978 came Alfred Archer '79, a South geography minor and now a retired teacher in Cut Off, Louisiana, and Williams, an associate professor of geography and now director emeritus of the Alabama Power USA Coastal Weather Research Center. (Archer's wife of 46 years, the former Ashley Balasco '81, was one of South's original Southerners in 1978.)

After they discovered the plight of the globe (neither today remembers how), Archer and Williams teamed to persuade the city to donate it to South. "So what we had to do was to go down and inspect it and have those dismantled parts transported to the University," Archer says.

"Concern" was Williams' first reaction: "In looking at the surface, I could see there was going to be trouble trying to keep the paint from peeling."

South engineering lab technician Lanny McCormick reassembled the pieces after years of storage at the University. In 1999, the Mitchell Center opened — featuring the globe in the lobby. With its 1940s paint stabilized, it revolves majestically inside its original brass railing.

"Everybody wants to get a photograph with it," Williams says. "It has more attention now than it ever got down in the Waterman Building."

MURAL MAN

The Waterman Globe originally had a striking setting. Commerce-themed murals graced the lobby walls of the downtown Mobile high-rise built for the Waterman Steamship Corp. — and still do, although the space is currently vacant. Constellations decorated the domed ceiling. Two full-time guides showed off the decor for visitors and school field trips.

Conrad Albrizio, the artist, lived for

several years in New Orleans and taught art at Louisiana State University from 1936 until 1954. He created public murals across the South.

Carolyn Bercier, in her 2019 book "The Frescoes of Conrad Albrizio," describes the Waterman frescoes and his Louisiana history murals in the New Orleans train station (1954; restored in 2016) as his masterworks.

In the 1950s, Albrizio switched from frescoes (paint on wet plaster) to mosaics (inlaid bits of colored stone or glass) as a better fit for the angular lines of modern buildings. He created the "Mardi Gras" and "Circus" mosaics (1965) for what became the Mobile Civic Center (see page 44) and the "History of Medicine" lobby mosaic (1966) for Mobile General Hospital, now USA Health University Hospital.

He also made a mother and child mosaic for the old downtown YWCA building that burned in 2001 and a law and justice-themed mosaic for the old Mobile County Courthouse (both 1958). The latter now decorates Mobile Government Plaza.



Jag Tags *for scholarships*

In Alabama, proceeds from the University of South Alabama collegiate license plates go to the “Jag Tags for Scholarships” Endowment Fund, a statewide student scholarship. More than \$100,000 in scholarships will be awarded in the 2025-26 academic year.

We invite our alumni and friends to join this effort by purchasing a Jag Tag for your vehicle.



SouthAlabama.edu/Alumni

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voted on by South Alabama Alumni!



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EXTENDING AN OLIVE PIT

STANKY FIELD'S NEW polyethylene turf covers three acres, supported by an infill that's a layered mixture of graded sand and olive core. Yes, ground olive pits.

They're environmentally friendly, naturally sustainable and ideally weighted: lighter than sand alone but heavier than cork or microplastics.

Along with the surface of FieldTurf DoublePlay, increasingly popular among college teams, the infill means optimal traction, drainage and

heat control, plus a stunning aesthetic.

Underneath lies 4,413 linear feet of corrugated plastic pipe up to a foot wide set in trenches insulated with stone, allowing for quick drainage even after significant rainfall. That means far fewer delayed games and canceled practices.

The original field — built in 1980, renovated in 2004 and 2013 — was Bermuda grass and clay. The new turf, at \$1.3 million, cuts down significantly on maintenance and expense.



Joy in Sound and Motion

TRACKING HAPPINESS IN ANIMALS

BY TERI GREENE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SETH LAUBINGER



IN HER RESEARCH of emotions in animals, Dr. Heidi Lyn, a psychology professor at South, travels in the wake of dolphins — to Bermuda, the Florida Keys and here, at the Institute for Marine Mammal Studies in Gulfport, Mississippi — where she studies them as they interact with people and with each other.

“I HAVE A GREAT STORY ABOUT A DOLPHIN

telling a joke,” says Dr. Heidi Lyn, professor and Joan M. Sinnott chair of psychology at the University of South Alabama.

Lyn, who runs the Comparative Cognition and Communication Lab in the Department of Psychology and also is a faculty member at the Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences, gets along well with dolphins — as well as bonobos and other apes, hermit crabs, walruses, and dogs and cats.

She looks at animal emotions through a new lens. For years, studies into the internal lives of animals have aggressively leaned to the negative, with scientists tracking depression, fear, anger and grief; those studies have been useful in helping people struggling with the same emotions, but they don’t address the full array of feelings animals experience.

Lyn tracks animal happiness, seeking, documenting and analyzing bursts of intense positive emotion — what could be defined as joy — through animals’ vocalizations and movements. It’s not exclusive to dolphins, but they’re the most fun and the most challenging to work with, she says.

“There’s no way to actually make a dolphin do anything, right?” she says. “You can’t put a harness on them and force them to do something — they’re 300 pounds, they’re incredibly fast, and they live in the water.”

But the most adorable of apex predators does love to play. Early researchers pinpointed the specific vocalizations dolphins made when told they were “correct” during training. The sound became known to some as the “victory squeal” and can be accompanied by a small leap into the air, something Lyn sees a lot.

Which brings us back to the joke: As researchers watched from a tower, an instructor signaled for the dolphin to pick up a small toy and put it in a basket at the other end of the pool. Instead, the dolphin stopped midswim and put the toy on a leaf that was floating in her pool. When the instructor

EARLY RESEARCHERS

pinpointed the specific vocalizations dolphins made when told they were “correct” during training. The sound became known to some as the “victory squeal.”

let her know that was wrong, she didn’t behave like admonished dolphins usually do — swimming away quietly, as if they’re embarrassed. Instead, she looked up to the group of scientists, leapt into the air and let out a loud squeal similar to the victory squeal. It was the behavior of a young child trying to get a group of adults to laugh at her antics.

“She was like, ‘This is so hilarious,’” Lyn says. And it’s not isolated behavior.

“We see dolphins coming over to boats that are going really fast and surfing behind them, and that clearly is a behavior — they’re interrupting whatever it was that they were doing in order to be part of that behavior. So we have no other explanation for it, other than play.”

Recent research, funded in part by the Templeton World Charity Foundation, took Lyn and her students to the Dolphin Research Center in the Florida Keys and Bermuda’s Dolphin Quest dolphin encounter attraction. She regularly visits the Institute for Marine Mammal Studies in Gulfport, Mississippi, and Gulf World Marine Park in Panama City Beach, Florida.

If we learn what triggers happiness in animals, we can use those tools to create a more balanced human world, Lyn says.

“If we start with this idea of ‘How do we trigger positive emotion in animals?’ that gives us a better understanding of how to trigger positive emotion in people, potentially,” she says. “And it gives us this other potential of figuring out how better to communicate and cooperate with animals in the future.”



DISCOVER MORE

DR. TRÉS STEFURAK, associate dean of the College of Education and Professional Studies, in collaboration with the College of Nursing, has been awarded \$742,500 to expand South's sexual assault services program, HEART, by improving medical care and advocacy in multiple areas as well as producing a promising practices guide for other campuses. The project is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice.

DR. KUANG-TING HSIAO, professor of mechanical engineering, has been awarded \$399,038 to develop methods of mechanically reducing the fire risk of carbon fiber reinforced polymer during the manufacturing process rather than using toxic flame retardant chemicals. This project is funded by the National Science Foundation.

DR. TUAN TRAN, assistant professor of biology, has been awarded \$502,995 to determine the composition and functions of plant plasma membrane nanodomains involved in interactions between plants and major foliar and soil-borne pathogens that threaten U.S. agriculture. This project is funded by the National Science Foundation.

DR. AISHWARYA PRAKASH, associate professor of biochemistry and molecular biology and pharmacology, has been awarded \$300,000 to deepen understanding of mitochondrial DNA repair and cellular health through novel interventions. This project is funded by the National Science Foundation.

DR. GABRIEL DE OLIVEIRA, assistant professor of marine and environmental sciences, has been awarded \$149,835 to develop and apply a novel multiscale observation and modeling approach to assess climate change impacts and land-use change in the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta. This project is funded by RESTORE Act funds through the Dauphin Island Sea Lab.





LET'S HAVE CLASS OUTSIDE

At an outdoor classroom in the middle of a picturesque bay, marine and environmental sciences students will immerse themselves in their studies – literally.

BY STEVE MILLBURG | ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRIS WORMELL

IF ALL GOES ACCORDING TO PLAN, BY FALL 2025, students at the Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences will study at an outdoor classroom built over a beautiful bay.

“And then the idea is,” says the school’s director, Dr. Sean Powers, “as soon as the lecture’s over, they step right into the water and do whatever their class assignment is.”

How cool will that be? And what an enticing recruiting tool this Outdoor Living Lab will make for what is already the University of South Alabama’s fastest-growing school or college. “We had 49 graduate students four years ago,” Powers says. “We now have 100 graduate students and 200 undergraduates.”

Five South civil engineering students designed the Outdoor Living Lab as a senior capstone project.

The idea grew from a 2023 donation to South from the University of South Alabama Foundation: 60 acres of Dauphin Island bayfront land, most of it submerged, valued at nearly \$2 million. The serene property, with a white sand beach and gorgeous sunset views, is on (and under) Aloe Bay, just west of the Dauphin Island Causeway and 40 minutes south of South’s campus.

The foundation regularly asks the University about its needs, says foundation Managing Director Maxey Roberts. The Aloe Bay property had been discussed for a while, so the foundation turned down interested buyers until the time was right for the donation.

“The University is putting it to excellent use,” Roberts says. “They have wonderful plans that are going to support a phenomenal program.”

The property was part of a shoreline restoration project this spring that two South faculty members helped guide: Dr. Bret Webb, professor of civil and coastal engineering, and Dr. Ronald Baker, assistant professor of marine sciences and a senior marine scientist at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab.

Meg Goecker ’01 of Moffatt & Nichol, a coastal and ports consulting company, is project manager. While an undergraduate at Michigan State, Goecker spent a semester at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab.

“I fell in love with the Gulf Coast that semester,” she says. She came to South to earn

“THERE’S NO BETTER PLACE to educate students in the marine sciences than right here on the Alabama Gulf Coast.”

— CHRIS BLANKENSHIP

a master’s degree in marine sciences and now lives on Dauphin Island.

The restoration project extended the shoreline to its 1950s boundaries, restoring marshes and tidal creeks. It also added an oyster reef consisting of oyster shells donated by Wayne Eldridge of J&W Marine Enterprises in Bayou La Batre, Alabama.

A long pier will extend to the open-sided Outdoor Living Lab, equipped with ceiling fans to augment the cooling power of the sea breezes. The Stokes School will moor a 35-foot boat alongside. Boardwalks leading to the pier will protect marshes.

Most of that part of the bay is less than three feet deep. “You’d be amazed that, even though we have marine sciences students from all over the country, a lot of them still don’t know how to swim well,” Powers says.

“Having some shallow, very safe water that’s very protected from most storms, with no rip currents, really gives us an excellent resource.”

A \$250,000 grant from the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, headed by South alum Chris Blankenship ’92, made the outdoor classroom possible.

“We in the Department of Conservation hire many marine biologists, environmental scientists and natural resource planners,” says Blankenship, who grew up on Dauphin Island. “So we think it’s wise to invest in the university that educates those students that hopefully will become future employees for our department or other agencies and companies that we work in tandem with.”

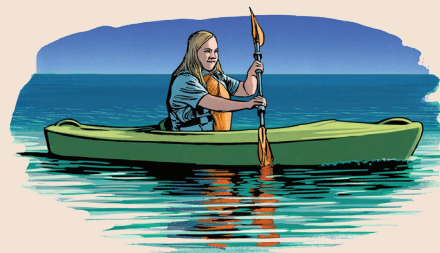
He says shoreline restoration, which the department also helped fund, aids Alabama’s seafood industry by rejuvenating the marshes that act as nurseries for juvenile fish and crustaceans.

All in all, Blankenship says, “There’s no better place to educate students in the marine sciences than right here on the Alabama Gulf Coast.”



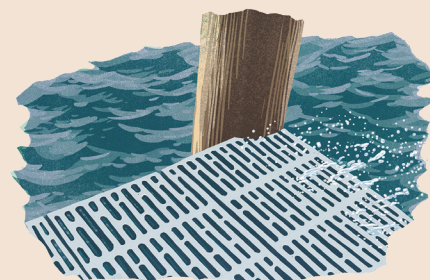
WALKING IN WATER

Students will be able to step outside the outdoor classroom at Aloe Bay and cast nets in waist-deep water.



RECREATION

The classroom at Aloe Bay comes with kayaks, and students will be encouraged to get out there and go exploring.



STORM RESISTANT

All boardwalks and decking will be made from flow-through reinforced polypropylene, making the structure resistant to damage from rough waters.



>> LEARN MORE

Meet the team of engineering students who designed the Outdoor Living Lab.



TIMBER MAKES A NICE FOUNDATION

High Points

1988

Timberland investment begins with gift of partial interest in 900 acres and \$4.2 million purchase of more than 4,500 acres.

1992

Total foundation assets reach \$100 million.

1995

Assets top \$200 million.

1997

Foundation purchases more than 55,000 acres of timberland. Total assets top \$300 million.

2020

Assets top \$400 million.

2025

All-time timber revenue tops \$166 million. Total assets top \$455 million. To-date contributions to the University of South Alabama exceed \$278 million.

THOUSANDS OF SOUTH STUDENTS every year get opportunities to learn from first-rate teachers and researchers, and USA Health patients benefit from highly skilled care providers and state-of-the-art equipment — with a big assist from the University of South Alabama Foundation. Its go-to investment shoots sky-high: trees.

Since its inception in 1968, the USA Foundation has contributed more than \$278 million to the University and USA Health. In the last two decades alone, contributions include nearly \$12.5 million in scholarships, \$28.5 million for faculty support to help attract and retain top talent, and almost \$99.3 million for academic programs — totaling more than \$140 million.

The foundation's multimillion-dollar yearly support for the University derives from careful planning, close collaboration with University leadership and an investment portfolio designed for the long term.


That's where the trees come in. While most of the foundation's investments are in marketable securities including stocks, the foundation owns 77,585 acres of timberland in Alabama and in Mississippi valued at \$177.9 million, or 39% of net assets. As investments go, trees are things of beauty — stable, renewable, environmentally friendly and good for wildlife.

"Timber is a renewable resource that allows the Foundation to harvest approximately 1,500 acres per year," says Managing Director Maxey Roberts. "It's an amazing stream of income." It also creates jobs in areas of limited economic opportunities, while hunting fees provide additional revenue.

The foundation was established five years after the University was founded in order to create an endowment for the growing institution. It was set up as an independent, tax-exempt entity, insulated from political pressures. Initial assets totaled \$100,000.

Major gifts to the University and USA Health include early commitments to help fund the construction of the Mitchell Cancer Institute and a 2010 expansion of Children's & Women's Hospital. A \$30 million gift is supporting construction of the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building, and property donated on Dauphin Island is being used to construct an outdoor classroom on Aloe Bay.

"I am just thrilled that the Foundation has been able to be an integral part of all the great things that are going on," says longtime Foundation President John McMillan. "That's the only thing we're here for is to support the University."

A man with glasses and a light blue button-down shirt is looking down at a small notepad he is holding. He is standing in a garden with several bright orange azalea flowers in the foreground. The background is a soft-focus garden scene.

DR. EUGENE "GENE" JOHN AROMI JR., a University of South Alabama education professor, hybridized more than 1,000 azaleas before his death in 2004.

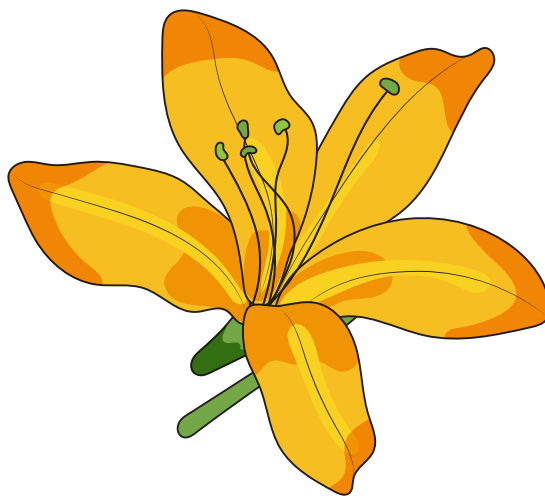
Mobile

PHOTO BY MIKE KITTRELL, COURTESY OF ALABAMA MEDIA GROUP

in Bloom

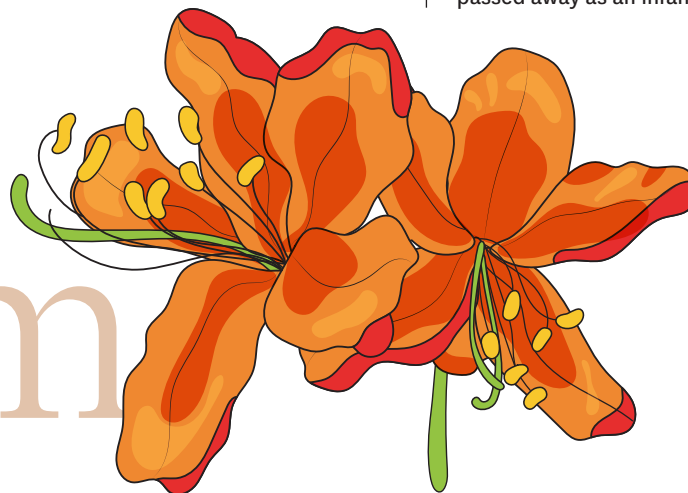
Thanks to one University of South Alabama professor,
Mobile has azalea hybrids all her own.

AN ESSAY BY AMELIA ROSE ZIMLICH '22
ILLUSTRATIONS BY CAROLINA PELÁEZ



JANE'S GOLD. Named after Jane Aromi, his wife of 39 years. The two met in Tampa, Florida, where Jane was an elementary school teacher and Aromi was a professor, and were married in 1965.

KEVIN PATRICK. Named after Aromi's only son, who passed away as an infant.



MY GRANDPA, DR. EUGENE “GENE” JOHN AROMI JR., was many things: A World War II veteran. An education professor at the University of South Alabama. An artist.

But he is best known by one title: azalea hybridizer.

In the late '60s, he began researching how to help the azaleas in his front yard thrive. A devotee of hands-on learning, he soon experimented with breeding azaleas to withstand Mobile's hot and humid climate.

What started as a lunch break pastime between South classes bloomed into something else. My mom tells me how little pots under grow lights covered their entire foyer as he crossed evergreen and deciduous azaleas. The backyard became a mini nursery, the front yard a display of his blooming creations.

Grandpa's azaleas benefited from his artistic touch. He crossed varieties to create gorgeous hybrids sporting flowers of different sizes and petal patterns in a rainbow of colors. He bred his flowers for heat tolerance, disease resistance and increased fragrance.

While Mobile has native deciduous azaleas — ones that lose their leaves in the fall — the azaleas that most of us are familiar with are the evergreens imported from Asia more than 200 years ago. It wasn't until the 1920s that

AROMI AZALEAS

appear in gardens throughout the South, even stretching to the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C.

the Mobile Junior Chamber of Commerce integrated the flowers into the city's identity by creating the Azalea Trail. In 1949, the first Azalea Trail Court was established — its legacy being the Azalea Trail Maids.

"The Azalea Trail created a big push in azalea popularity," says Seth Allen, director of horticulture at Mobile Botanical Gardens, "mainly for the Southern indica type of azaleas, the old-fashioned ones that you typically think of in Mobile."

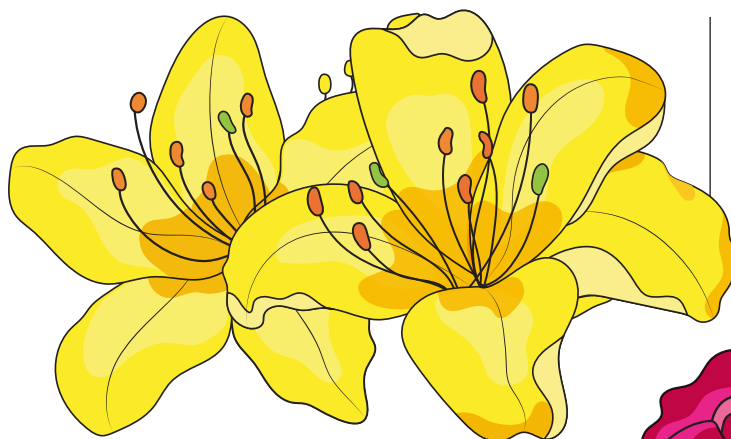
Years later, Grandpa gave the Azalea City true local hybrids. One reason for his venture into horticulture — though he'd never taken a botany course — was his love of education, both teaching and learning. He started at South in 1966, teaching art education classes for 24 years before his retirement.

With curiosity and a thirst for knowledge, he began his azalea propagation, which lasted over 30 years until he passed away from lung cancer in 2004. In that time, he produced over 1,000 crosses.

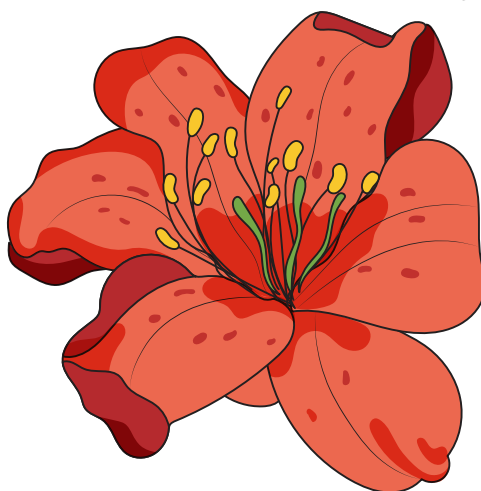
"Dr. Aromi transferred several thousand seedlings to our nursery from his small backyard," says Maarten van der Giessen, president of Van der Giessen Nursery in Semmes, the leading source for Aromi azaleas. "The day before he passed, he asked me to take his stud books," van der Giessen says, referencing the books in which Grandpa kept track of each cross. "There are seven volumes describing over 100,000 flowering seedlings."

I remember the Aromi Hybrid Azalea Garden opening in 2016 in Mobile Botanical Gardens. Seeing Grandpa's flowers honored in the city where he did his work and within minutes of the University that he loved so much — and the Azalea Trail — was a full-circle moment.

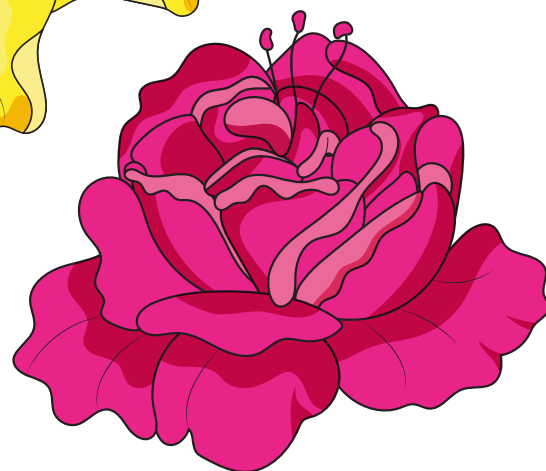
Aromi azaleas appear in gardens throughout the South, even stretching to the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C. "Groups like the Azalea Society of America and the American Rhododendron Society, as well as gardens and arboretums throughout the



GLORY BE. One day another hybridizer, visiting Aromi's backyard nursery, got a sneak peek at a new azalea. The guest's reaction: "Glory be!" The name was set.



CORAL REEF. A flower created by Aromi and brought to maturity by Mobile nursery owner Maarten van der Giessen, who eventually found its name and genetic history in Aromi's hybridization records.



AMELIA ROSE. A double azalea, with its stamens transformed into petals, resulting in a greater number of petals and a fuller appearance. Aromi had 10 grandchildren. The Amelia Rose was named after his eighth.

Southeast, clamor for them," says van der Giessen.

Grandpa named several of his hybrids after those close to him. One of my favorites is Jane's Gold. Named after Grandma, it displays creamy yellow flowers with a yellow-orange blotch and pink-tinged tips.

There's another I'm partial to: a double azalea with rich, purplish-pink flowers. It's one of his final hybrids, named after his eighth grandchild — Amelia Rose.

Amelia Rose Zimlich '22 is a native Mobilian and granddaughter of Dr. Eugene John Aromi Jr. She is the former editor of the Vanguard student newspaper and writes for Mobile Bay Magazine. She comes from a family of South graduates; her youngest brother is a current student.



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Drawing Patients to Healing

USA Health teams take a holistic approach in the treatment of disease and illness. Art therapy plays a role.

BY CASANDRA ANDREWS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILL STARLING

“IT IS PROVEN that if people do art often that is meditative and spiritual, they remember better, they have a sense of purpose, and it is easier for them to rest.” — **ART THERAPIST MARGARET WIELBUT**



CHEMOTHERAPY IS A POWERFUL treatment for cancer. Coloring can help, too.

On a path to healing acute injuries and chronic illnesses, multidisciplinary teams across USA Health's hospitals and treatment centers seek to engage the whole patient — and often their closest family members.

Many times, that process goes beyond the clinical to include the creation of art, an evidence-based practice that can contribute to faster recovery times and stress reduction, among a myriad of benefits for patients.

At the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute, cancer patients find unexpected comfort in the therapeutic power of art. Margaret Wielbut, a trained art therapist, has introduced an innovative program that blends creativity with emotional support, providing patients with a unique way to process their treatment journey.

Steps away at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital, Mapp Child & Family Life Program staff member Lorie Evans uses therapeutic art concepts to provide an alternative focus for some patients during painful procedures. She also involves patients, their parents and siblings in creative artistic pursuits that can promote coping and healing.

“To me, art therapy is the perfect marriage between art and psychology,” says Wielbut. “It is proven that if people do art often that is meditative and spiritual, they remember better, they have a sense of purpose, and it is easier for them to rest.”

Wielbut, originally from Poland, has a master's degree in art therapy. She has long believed in the profound connection between art and healing. After moving to the Gulf Coast, she saw an opportunity to bring her passion for art therapy to the Mitchell Cancer Institute. Her mission was simple: Help cancer patients find a creative outlet that eases their

emotional burdens and gives them a renewed sense of purpose during their treatments.

The program, funded by The Zoe Foundation, has been a resounding success. Each week, cancer institute patients are invited to participate in art sessions during their chemotherapy infusions. Wielbut brings art supplies and offers project ideas based on themes from nature, such as creating landscapes or using found objects in artwork.

Through art, patients can process complex emotions, reduce stress and experience a sense of accomplishment. Research has shown that art therapy can lead to significant improvements in mental health for cancer patients, with many experiencing reduced anxiety, depression and fatigue.

More than a decade ago, Dr. Matilde Tellaetxe Isusi Sherman '98, an instructor in USA's art and art history and biomedical sciences departments, worked with oncologists at the cancer institute to bring art therapy concepts to those battling cancer. Since 2019, she has taught a special class to psychology and art students on creative arts and healing. After earning a medical degree and Ph.D. in microbiology and immunology in Leioa, Spain, Tellaetxe Isusi Sherman received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from South. She combined her passions for art and immunology and now trains students to help others through art therapy.

“Patients going through any sort of illness, anything that is chronic, there is a suspicion that the immunological system is not working well,” Tellaetxe Isusi Sherman says. “Normally, this immunological system may not be working well because the system is faulty or the individual is under tremendous stress. What art therapy does is allow a patient to express the deep emotions that can be triggered in the stress.”

Specifically, she explains, the process of art making can activate the parasympathetic

nervous system — which allows us to relax.

“It really is not about making a major piece of art. It's not the technique. It's the process of picking up the pen and picking out colors and allowing the person to express him- or herself.”

At Children's & Women's Hospital, Evans has discovered that taking time to make art can be just as important for parents and siblings as it is for sick and injured patients: “Moms can relax — just slightly — when they are painting or coloring. Some have told me they haven't done those things since they were in school.”

In addition to enjoying Evans' therapeutic art sessions, young patients at Children's & Women's Hospital also have the opportunity to create art through an artist-in-residency program with the Eastern Shore Art Center in Fairhope. Once a month, an artist visits the hospital in Mobile and works with patients to make original pieces. Some of that artwork recently hung in hospital hallways.

Beyond the personal benefits for patients and families, the artwork created at chemotherapy sessions and during quiet moments in hospital rooms contributes to a more positive, vibrant atmosphere within the cancer institute and the hospital. The art seems to help transform the energy in the clinical spaces, offering a sense of peace and light.

At the Mitchell Cancer Institute, Wielbut is committed to expanding the art therapy program even further. She believes art has the power to connect people, foster a sense of community and create an environment of healing that extends beyond the treatment room.

“If you do something that is interesting,” she says, “it's contagious.”



DATA DRIVEN

Coaches and players embrace high-tech tools for improving athletic performance.

BY STEVE MILLBURG
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SETH LAUBINGER

AS SOON AS THE BALL IS RELEASED, the Rapsodo monitor captures everything a player and coaches need to know.



HANNAH CAMPBELL KEEPS glancing between her pitcher and her iPad. Campbell, associate head coach and pitching coach for South's softball team, is leading a workout in the home-team bullpen at an otherwise empty Jaguar Field.

"You're overthrowing," she tells the player. "Trying to do too much. Let your fingers do the work."

The pitcher nods. She winds up, then leaps forward, whipping the ball underhand toward the catcher. The ball zips over a small black plastic wedge that's on the ground, then dives sharply as it crosses the plate.

Campbell looks at the iPad, then smiles. "That's the spin you want!" she says.

Campbell was an All-American pitcher for the Jaguars a decade ago. She's a member of the South Alabama Athletic Hall of Fame. She knows pitching.

That black box — a pitch monitoring device, connected wirelessly to Campbell's iPad — helps her know a lot more. It's part of a flood of new technological marvels that use cameras, radar systems, lasers and other tools to help coaches design better athletes.

Monitors clock the speed of a pitch as well as the spin rate and axis, which are crucial to making it curve and dip. Other devices measure bat speed in baseball and softball,

serve speed in tennis, sprint speed, vertical leap, heart rate, and just about every possible variable involving the interaction between a golf club and ball.

Technology has even invaded the weight room. A device that clips to a barbell measures how explosively and effectively an athlete lifts weights.

This technological boom has not supplanted the human factor. To pinpoint precisely what's going on, check the tech. To figure out what to do with that information, ask the coach.

Or, as softball Head Coach Becky Clark puts it, "You can't make up for bad coaching with good technology."

For example, a golfer might consistently hit the ball with the clubface at an angle instead of head-on, so the ball goes right or left instead of straight.

Electronic analyzers can detect that problem and precisely measure the clubface angle with each swing as the golfer works on a fix. South's men's and women's golf clubhouse — seven miles from campus at Magnolia Grove, part of the renowned Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail — features two portable analyzers, one for swings and one for putting strokes.

An electronic analyzer can identify swing problems. It can't tell you how to fix them. For that, says men's golf Head Coach Ben Hannan, the player and coach head to the driving range.

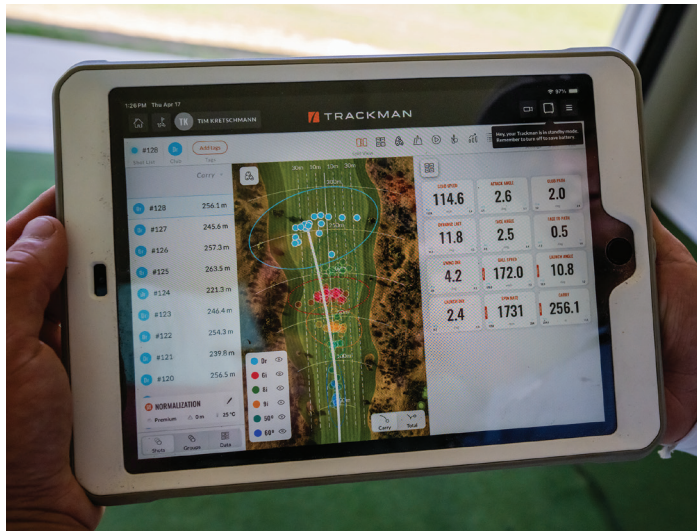
"You can't make up for bad coaching with good technology."

— **SOFTBALL HEAD COACH
BECKY CLARK**



**IN BETWEEN PITCHES, KOOPER
BARNES** checks her stats measured
by the Rapsodo.

GOLF'S TRACKMAN MONITOR, similar to softball's Rapsodo, gives Coach Ben Hannan and golfer Hugo Thyr, right, real-time data on Thyr's swing.



"Sometimes in this game, we're just standing there hitting a bucket of balls and trying things," he says. He'll suggest a tweak. The golfer tries it. Hannan checks the readouts. The two make adjustments until they find what works.

"What the technology has really helped with is getting to a potential answer much, much quicker," Hannan says, "because you know at impact what's happening in the relationship of the clubface and the golf ball."

David Ventress, director of athletic performance for the men's basketball and tennis teams, says coaches love his data-driven input. He's technically support staff, but "they treat me like an assistant coach."

Ventress monitors weight room workouts. He uses laser devices to measure sprint speed, and sensor-equipped jump mats to track jumping ability. For every game, practice or conditioning session, athletes wear small fobs that record running speed and distance, jumps, starts and stops, and heart rate.

"We'll download all the data," he says. "I'll put it into a graph and let the coaches look at the report."

He might recommend that coaches push a certain player to work harder in practice, or suggest that another player might be fatigued and could use a lighter workload to prevent injury or regain strength for an upcoming tournament.

The numbers also present an opportunity to start conversations with players. "How's your

nutrition? How's your sleep?" Ventress says. "It allows you to actually see what's causing the stress and what's causing the guys not to be at their best."

Having data for practices and workouts as well as official games and matches also allows coaches to leverage athletes' competitive instincts. Here's your sprint speed; think you can put in some extra workouts and beat it next week?

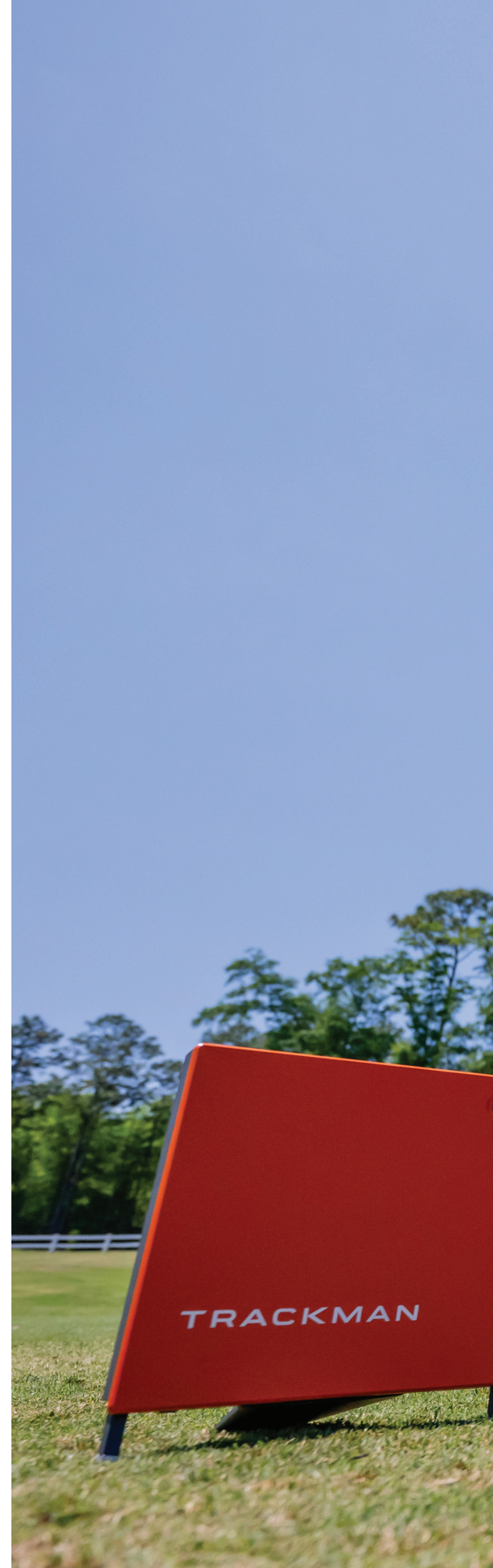
This March, softball player Gabby Stagner, who plays first base, became South's career leader in runs batted in. The record came with two outs, on a ground ball to the shortstop's backhand that Stagner hustled to beat out for a two-RBI single. The close play at first triggered a video review, which confirmed the call of safe.

Stagner, a slugger who leads the team in home runs, had been working on getting faster. Clark says the coaches and players teased her that she owed the record to her blinding speed.

"Her times in the 20-yard sprint have been getting really good," Clark says. "So it's kind of a win for the strength coach too."

Technology helped Stagner measure and improve a key component of her performance. But she still had to put in the work to make the improvement happen.

"The coaches have to know what they're doing," Clark says. "The player has to be able to execute." Because, in the end, the bit of data that matters most is the number of wins.



“What the technology has really helped with is getting to a potential answer much, much quicker.”

— MEN’S GOLF HEAD COACH BEN HANNAN



COFFEE GOLD

JEFF ROBERTS '07 grew an idea to sell coffee out of a trailer into a local enterprise with seven locations. “Fly High, Hammer Down” has become the company philosophy.

Jeff Roberts started serving coffee out of a trailer after earning a business degree from the University of South Alabama. Today, Yellowhammer Coffee has a loyal following and locations throughout Mobile and Semmes.

BY **TERI GREENE**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **SETH LAUBINGER**

BEFORE HE EVER SERVED a single Americano, frappé or shot of espresso through the window of a trailer, Jeff Roberts '07 made YouTube videos. Specifically, ones that took people behind the scenes of an idea for a new business venture. A paper cup — a bright yellow one with a black lid and sleeve that soon would become synonymous with the company he would create and grow — is featured prominently in the first episode of “Yellowhammer.”

“Even if it completely flops and crashes and burns, that’ll be kind of cool, too,” Roberts told viewers in 2016. “Kind of a ‘here’s what not to do’ lesson.”

Less than 10 years later, that idea that percolated in Roberts’ brain has produced endless lessons, seven locations and an eighth on the way.

The videos are still up, but he had to stop recording. Things just got too busy.

EARLY TO RISE

Roberts was primed to be an entrepreneur. When he was a kid on school breaks, his dad woke him up around 3 a.m. to milk cows on the family’s farm near Mobile. They brewed coffee on-site and drank it the way he still does — black.

After high school, Roberts opted for a gap year and applied to a yearlong leadership program in Colorado that he describes as a boot camp. Some of the physical challenges resembled Navy SEAL training, including swimming endurance tests that made him throw up and abrupt awakenings in the middle of the night to perform drills.

When he talks about the impact of that training and how it helped him survive Yellowhammer’s early years, somehow it doesn’t sound like bragging. “There’s no way I would have kept going. I wouldn’t have lasted six months.”

After Colorado, Roberts enrolled at the University of South Alabama and earned a bachelor’s degree in business with an emphasis in entrepreneurship, leadership and management in 2007. One enduring lesson was that you could go bankrupt at any time, that failure could be abrupt. That you have to expect risk, and thrive on it.

Therefore, don’t be impulsive. Don’t make rash decisions. Sleep on it. Yet when Roberts and his wife, Monique, finally debuted Yellowhammer Coffee in a shiny black trailer with a bright yellow coffee-bean logo, he almost gave it all up after a disastrous opening. “Does anybody want to buy a food truck?” he asked half jokingly.

BIG DREAMS AND HARD WORK

Better days followed, and the Yellowhammer Coffee truck soon had a cult following. That’s when Will Fusaiotti gave Roberts a call. From early on, the owner of the Foosackly’s chicken finger empire had watched Yellowhammer’s progress. In a part of the country with no shortage of chicken finger restaurants, Foosackly’s stands out as a local, independent success story with 16 locations in Alabama and Florida.

Roberts had no idea that Fusaiotti — a man he called his hero — even knew Yellowhammer existed. And Fusaiotti was now on the phone? Roberts immediately thought it was a prank. Instead, Fusaiotti offered sage advice: Get into the brick-and-mortar business.

Roberts was reluctant, but he soon followed through with his customary all-in approach, setting up shop in a former Foosackly’s on Dauphin Street.

“Fly High, Hammer Down,” inspired by the company’s name, has also become its philosophy. To sum it up: Have spectacular dreams and work tirelessly to bring them to life.

WOW MOMENTS AND MOTORING FRIENDS

A big part of the business’s success is its emphasis on people. That includes customers, who are called friends, and employees, who are called team members. Team members are thoroughly vetted and meticulously trained under the watchful eyes of Sam Wyatt, a 2015 South business grad and Yellowhammer’s regional manager since 2018.

One of the precepts of Yellowhammer is, “The culture of our company should be just as important as the coffee.” Required reading for all staff is the 288-page book “Unreasonable Hospitality” by Will Guidara. It seems like a big ask — homework for employees at a coffee shop — but Yellowhammer has waiting lists of prospective employees while its industry peers are desperate to find workers.

“Wow moments” are a takeaway from the book. A road trip pack that includes an energy drink, a pack of gum and a playlist is given to drive-thru customers whose cars are packed with suitcases and pillows. If floaties and towels are spotted, there’s a pack for that, too — the “beach trip pack,” complete with sunscreen and sand toys.

THE COFFEE AND THE ROASTER

The search for the perfect bean and roast was an early part of Jeff and Monique Roberts’ journey. They found Greg Jacobs, a 25-year roaster based in Jackson, Mississippi. Jacobs

has an international “Q grader” on his roasting team — think sommelier, but for coffee — who has undergone years of training to master the art of bean selection.

Roberts says he once handed a shot of espresso to a man from Italy. The man walked away, took a taste, then turned around. Roberts was sure he was coming to ask for his money back.

Instead, he said, “This is the first time since I have been in America that I have felt like I was in the streets of Italy.”

THE FAMILY BUSINESS

The Robertses have four young kids. The two oldest have started “businesses” — pool cleaning and yard maintenance — and the third is planning a specialty hot chocolate shop. They’re learning about entrepreneurship and concepts like profit and loss and risk-taking. It’s not forced on them, but good lessons abound, and it may just create a legacy.

Eventually the children may work in a Yellowhammer coffee shop, like that eighth one, already primed and in prelaunch near Government Boulevard and Azalea Road. There are other big plans: Roberts, a licensed pilot, plans to buy a Yellowhammer jet — for convenient business travel and, ultimately, as a perk for staff to fly anywhere they want.

“We try to keep ourselves in the position to always go to the next opportunity,” he says.

Once, a barista suggested that he’d never get the jet idea off the ground.

He asked her, “How much would you bet that we don’t?”

Her reply: “Well, I wouldn’t bet against you.”

“Yeah,” he told her. “Me neither.”

THE YELLOWHAMMER VIBE, clockwise from top left: Branded merchandise; Jeff and Monique Roberts; painted graphics bold like the coffee; Sam Wyatt ’15 manages all the stores; the iconic yellow cup; at the Cottage Hill and Schillinger roads store (a former PNC Bank) in Mobile, the vault is a popular hangout.



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HIGHEST OF ACCOLADES.

BY TERI GREENE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN JAY CABUAY

Mr. Lenus Perkins '91

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD



Executive vice president and COO of Bhate Environmental Associates Inc., Birmingham; USA Board of Trustees, secretary, chair of budget and finance committee

Civil engineer. A founding member of the nonprofit Bong Education Center Alumni Association, supporting educational programs in Liberia, his birthplace. Member, board of directors of Navigate Affordable Housing Partners in Birmingham; active in many community improvement organizations. Recipient of the Patriot Award for supporting employees serving in the National Guard and Reserve.

Dr. Mike Wojciechowski '78, '81

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD



Senior lecturer, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles

Recipient of the USA Mitchell College of Business Impact Award. Teacher of new venture creation and social entrepreneurship at Loyola's Fred Kiesner Center for Entrepreneurship; named professor of the year in 2018. Instrumental in raising over \$5 billion in investor funds and developing more than 60,000 apartment units to provide affordable housing. Lends expertise in governance, strategic planning and entrepreneurship on numerous boards.

Dr. Carol Scott Cash '70, '72

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

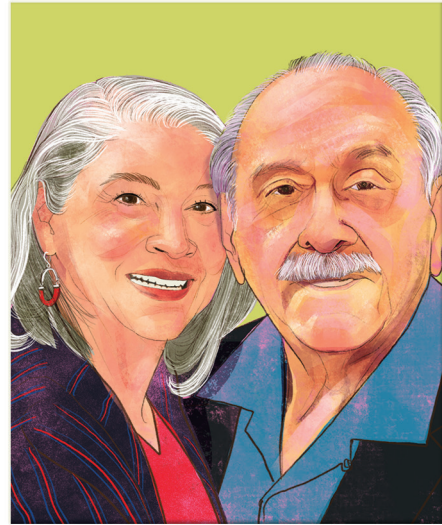


Professor, educational leader, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg

Bachelor's in secondary education and master's in guidance counseling at South. Doctorate in education from Virginia Tech. K-12 teacher and then principal for 30 years; named Outstanding Virginia High School Principal of the Year. Teacher, mentor and leader at Virginia Tech for 15 years. Tireless promoter of educational opportunities. Has contributed to the graduation of more than 211 doctoral students.

Mr. Ray Kennedy '78 and Mrs. Patsy Kennedy '96

**V. GORDON MOULTON
DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD**



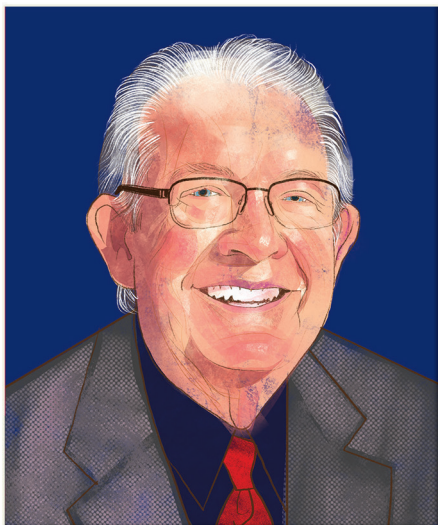
Members, University of South Alabama Legacy Society; previously served on the University of South Alabama National Alumni Association Board of Directors

Patsy: Chair of the College of Nursing Development Council. Served the University for more than 30 years, retiring in 2014 from the Health Services Foundation administration. Charter member, Jag-Gals women's booster club.

Ray: Mitchell College of Business graduate. Former member of the Jaguar Athletic Fund Board of Directors. On committees that supported the design and construction of the MacQueen Alumni Center and the Jaguar Baseball Ring of Honor.

Dr. Robert V. Barrow

**WILLIAM J. "HAPPY" FULFORD
INSPIRATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
(AWARDED POSTHUMOUSLY)**



Professor emeritus, established the Criminal Justice Program at the University of South Alabama

A pioneer at South; retired in 1998 with more than 30 years of service. Consultant to numerous local and state governmental bodies. Faculty adviser for student on-campus organizations. Received commendations from the Mobile Police Department, Mobile County Sheriff's Office, U.S. Marshals Service and U.S. Secret Service. Successful advocate: From his efforts, South received hundreds of thousands of dollars in grant funding.

The J.L. Bedsole Foundation

COMMUNITY PARTNER AWARD



Has dedicated nearly \$2.5 million to South since 1979, including gifts for scholarships and the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine

Committed to making a difference in the lives of young people at South and across southwest Alabama. Avid supporter of civic, cultural, artistic and economic development opportunities. Through the Bedsole Scholars Program, gives students a chance to earn an undergraduate degree to impact their lives and the lives of their families. The foundation is named after its founder, the late businessman and philanthropist Joseph Linyer Bedsole.



>> LEARN MORE

Watch videos of each Distinguished Alumni Award recipient.



JAGUAR SPOTS

Rosette

PROGRESS CONTINUES on construction of the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine. After preparing the foundation, crews begin bolting and welding the structural framework of the building. In all, about 2,000 tons of steel will be used.



WILLIAMS HOGUE SHAPING THE STATE

EACH YEAR, ALABAMA CELEBRATES the extraordinary women who are making a lasting impact across the state. One USA Health provider, leader and advocate earned a well-deserved place among the 2025 honorees of This is Alabama's "Women Who Shape the State" class.

Dr. Ashley Williams Hogue is a trauma, acute care, and burn surgeon at USA Health University Hospital, an assistant professor of surgery at the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine and the director of the Center for Healthy Communities. She was recognized for

her tireless dedication to her patients, her community and public health advocacy.

Among her many impactful initiatives is Project Inspire, a hospital-based injury prevention program co-founded by Williams Hogue and her husband, Dr. Antwan Hogue, which seeks to reduce youth violence in the Mobile area. Project Inspire, through its hands-on approach to preventing gun violence and providing support for at-risk youth, has shown promising results in changing lives and offering new paths to success.



ALL THREE TEACHERS

recognized by Mobile County Public Schools as its 2025 Teachers of the Year earned degrees from the University of South Alabama: Krissy Brown '21, a fourth-grade educator at Gilliard Elementary School; Justine Wilson '09, a sixth-grade history teacher at Grand Bay Middle School; and Roseann Byrd '05, who teaches advanced placement U.S. history, psychology, and American government and politics at Citronelle High School.

Seeing the Payoff

AT THE SCHOOL OF COMPUTING Spring Celebration this April, senior D.J. — "just one period" — Moor chatted with a man who played a big part in his education.

In 2016, Joe Shewmake '70 and his late wife, Audrey, set up an estate gift to the University for scholarships. A recent addition of \$2.65 million brought the total to more than \$5 million. But Shewmake would never meet the students those contributions would help. As he reflected to the Board of Trustees earlier this spring, "I had a strong desire to witness these scholarships in action."

So he donated additional money, with matching funds from the Mitchell-Moulton Scholarship Initiative, to immediately activate the scholarships he and Audrey had created. One supported Moor for all four years of his work toward a Bachelor of Science in computing with a minor in mathematics. At the Spring Celebration, Moor thanked his benefactor.

"We talked about how I was doing, how he was doing, how college has been so far, if there was anything that I had lined up or planned afterward," Moor says. He's planning a career in data analytics and has been speaking with prospective employers.

"Being able to worry less about paying for college allowed me to focus more on the actual education and schoolwork," Moor says. "I'm very, very thankful."





R-O-C-K for the USA

THE POPULAR BATTLE-OF-THE-BANDS contest Doc Rock — benefiting USA Health — has been recognized as the philanthropic project of the year by Business Alabama magazine.

More than 350 people attended the fourth annual Doc

Rock, held Jan. 30, 2025, at the Soul Kitchen in downtown Mobile. Five local bands with a connection to USA Health or the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine competed in the event to support research and critical clinical needs.

“We are thrilled to be selected as the best philanthropic project of the year from a field of such worthwhile causes from across our state,” says

Margaret Sullivan, vice president of development and alumni relations for the University of South Alabama. “As the leading academic health system on the Alabama Gulf Coast, our commitment to providing compassionate healthcare, quality medical training and leading-edge research has never been stronger.”

Reagan, Rushmore and Retirement:

A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN BOEHNER

Former U.S. Speaker of the House John Boehner was the guest speaker at the March 25 meeting of the USA President’s Cabinet. University of South Alabama President Jo Bonner asked a series of questions Boehner had not reviewed beforehand. Here are three takeaways:

1. BOEHNER, AS A REAGAN REPUBLICAN, CONTINUES TO WARN AGAINST THE DANGERS OF GOVERNMENT SPENDING.

Given the chance to put another president on Mount Rushmore? No. 40.

“The biggest threat to America is the fact that we continue to spend money we do not have, passing on the bill to our kids and our grandkids and their kids. ... You can’t do this at home, you can’t do it in your business, and your government can’t do it either.”

2. YOU CAN LEARN A LOT GROWING UP IN A BAR.

Boehner discovered early how to work with people with whom he disagreed, including at the family business, a pub in Cincinnati. Sometimes a difficult person finds his way to a barstool.

“And he is going to be sitting there all night. You don’t want to fight with the guy, but you don’t want to agree with him. You learn the art of being able to disagree without being disagreeable.”



3. IN ADDITION TO HIS BLUE-COLLAR UPBRINGING, BOEHNER’S CATHOLIC FAITH REMAINS AN ANCHOR IN HIS LIFE.

He invited three popes to speak to Congress. Pope Francis said yes. At the end of the visit, when it was just the two of them, the pope pulled Boehner close.

“He gives me this big bear hug with his right arm and says, ‘Speaker, will you pray for me?’ Who, me? ... I realized, this might be the happiest day of the 25 years I spent in Washington.”

Boehner announced his retirement the next day.



NOW IN ITS THIRD YEAR, the University's holiday ornament series will feature Hancock Whitney Stadium for 2025. Previous editions highlighted SouthPaw (2023) and the MacQueen Alumni Center (2024). This year's ornament will be available soon, both in-store and online, through USA's Barnes and Noble bookstore.



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA held a groundbreaking ceremony March 14 for a 25,000-square-foot, \$10 million home for the Jaguar Marching Band. The complex is scheduled for completion in January 2026 and will include a lighted practice field that is a reproduction of Abraham A. Mitchell Field at nearby Hancock Whitney Stadium.

REVENUE-SHARING FUND CREATED TO SUPPORT STUDENT-ATHLETES

South Alabama Athletics has launched the Loyal, Strong & Faithful Fund to maximize its revenue-sharing opportunities in a commitment to recruit and retain championship-level student-athletes.

By investing in its student-athletes and equipping coaches with the tools necessary to build and sustain a culture of competitive excellence, the fund ensures that South has the resources to compete at the highest levels.

"The creation of the Loyal, Strong & Faithful Fund represents the continued evolution of collegiate athletics," says Director

of Athletics Dr. Joel Erdmann. "We will not only pursue contributions, but will also organize fundraising events and explore creative means of generating revenue streams for the fund. All Jaguar supporters are encouraged to support the fund as it directly impacts our ability to maintain the level of excellence we all expect."



>> GIVE

Support the Loyal, Strong & Faithful Fund by scanning this code to donate.



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA men's basketball Head Coach Richie Riley led his team to its first Sun Belt regular season championship in 17 years, earning Joe Gottfried Coach of the Year honors. South Alabama's 21 wins in the 2025 regular season are the most in Riley's time with the program and the most by any Jaguar team in the regular season since 2008.

South's 'North Star'

A NEW CREED celebrates the University's culture and its importance to education, research, healthcare and service across the state and along the Gulf Coast.

President Jo Bonner offered "The USA Way" as his remarks at the 20th annual Distinguished Alumni and Service Awards gala

at the MacQueen Alumni Center (see page 33). It was then voiced by members of the University community in a video shown at the May 9 Commencement.

"There is a special bond among Jaguars," Bonner says, "and this is inspired by all the students, alumni, faculty, staff and University friends who build South's legacy."



>> WATCH

See The USA Way embodied in the video shown during Spring Commencement in May.

*You will not find it
ETCHED ON THE CORNERSTONE
of an ivy-covered building,
NOR IN A BOOK ON A*

*LIBRARY SHELF.
YOU'LL HAVE A
hard time even
pinpointing
ITS ORIGIN. BUT
THE
**USA
WAY**
IS VERY REAL.*

IT DESCRIBES
HOW WE CONDUCT
OURSELVES WITH
INTEGRITY, DEDIC-
ATION AND CLASS,
simply because

*IT IS RIGHT TO DO SO.
THE USA WAY
is being proud, with a
grateful heart and a big
SMILE,
WHEN OUR
STUDENTS WALK
**across the
STAGE TO***

*RECEIVE THEIR DIPLOMAS IN A
MITCHELL CENTER FILLED
with glistening eyes and pure happiness
FROM FELLOW GRADUATES,
FAMILIES, FACULTY AND FRIENDS.*

THE USA WAY

IS BEING PASSIONATE
about our role in
TEACHING, RESEARCH
AND SERVICE

— *three elements*
OF A SINGLE
mission with a
COMMON

THEME: TO BE THE BEST
we can be
IN ALL THAT WE DO.

*THE USA WAY is being
CAREGIVERS AND HEALERS WHO GIVE
hope to patients, providing
WORLD-CLASS CARE FROM EXCEPTIONAL
TALENTS THROUGH THE REGION'S
ONLY ACADEMIC*

*health
system. Being the biggest has never been
THE GOAL. INSTEAD, WE CHOOSE
the path of being better —
BETTER EVERY DAY THAN
we were the day before.*

*THE USA WAY
is being fierce,
LIKE A JAGUAR
ON THE PROWL,
giving each play
AND every game
our very best
EFFORT WHILE REPRESENTING
THE IDEALS OF
SPORTSMANSHIP,
character
and honor.*

*THE USA WAY
is being humble,
KNOWING
THAT OURS IS
a tradition steeped in
decades, not centuries.
Each person who came
BEFORE HAS HELPED BLAZE
THE TRAIL THAT WE TRAVEL
today, allowing us to build on the
success of the past as we
EMBRACE the future.*

*THE
USA WAY
is being fiscally
prudent, not wasting what
WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN.
A university*

*built on a solid foundation
is like the wise man's
HOUSE BUILT ON ROCK.*

***THE USA WAY**
is about discovering
the servant leader
in each of us. SOMETIMES WE ARE
CALLED TO LEAD.
OTHER TIMES, WE ARE
MEANT TO SERVE.*

***NO MATTER**
which, **THE**
USA WAY IS THE
NORTH STAR
THAT WE CHOOSE
to follow. FINALLY,
THE USA WAY IS
being a member of Jag Nation,
THROWING OUR J'S WITH CONFIDENCE
AND PRIDE FOR ALL TO SEE. Our destiny
was not pre
Achieving it will*

***BUT** from our
VERY FIRST DAYS,
THE USA WAY HAS
led us to be ambitious,
DETERMINED AND BOLD,
moving onward
and upward,
AS THE
FLAGSHIP
OF THE
GULF COAST.
GO JAGS!*



*Spain's Costa Del Sol & Madrid
February 28 - March 8, 2026*

JOIN US FOR THE JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

For more information visit SouthAlabama.edu/JaguarJourneys

MESSAGE FROM THE MAC



GRADUATING SOUTHERNERS, wearing their red stoles, were set to join the ranks of more than 100,000 University of South Alabama alumni the evening before their May 9 Commencement at a Champagne toast honoring the Class of 2025 at the MacQueen Alumni Center.

GREETINGS, JAG NATION!

As spring turns to summer and another academic year comes to a close, we find ourselves reflecting with gratitude on all that our vibrant University of South Alabama community has accomplished — thanks in no small part to you, our loyal and dedicated alumni.

This season, more than 2,000 new Jaguar alumni are stepping into a world of infinite possibilities, inspired by the example set by you and the more than 100,000 alumni who make up our growing global network. Your leadership, generosity and continued engagement help shape the path forward for future generations.

Over the past six months, we've had the pleasure of hosting alumni receptions in cities across the country — including in Pensacola, Florida, Biloxi/

Gulfport in Mississippi, Houston, and Huntsville and Birmingham in Alabama. These gatherings have offered meaningful opportunities to reconnect, share experiences and celebrate our shared bond, no matter how many miles may separate us. We're excited to continue these receptions in the months ahead and hope to see you at one soon.

In this edition of South Magazine, we are proud to honor this year's Distinguished Alumni and Service Award recipients, whose achievements reflect the values and excellence at the heart of our institution. Their stories are both impressive and deeply inspiring. You can watch their videos, which detail their accomplishments and impact, using the QR code on page 36.

The energy on campus is palpable in everything we do — from groundbreaking research

and new academic initiatives to partnerships that expand our global impact. This momentum is not only pushing the University of South Alabama forward, but it's also opening doors for the next generation, and it's made possible by the ongoing support and involvement of alumni like you.

Thank you for being an essential part of our progress and purpose. Whether through membership, mentorship, giving or simply staying in touch, your involvement continues to make a difference.

Go Jags!

Karen Webster Edwards '80
Executive Director
USA National Alumni
Association



2024-2025 NATIONAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Kristin Odom '09, M.S. '14, Ed.D. '19

Bryan Op't Holt '01

Renee Semiz '98

Mark Spivey '02, M.S. '05

Mike Sumrall '70

Peter Susman MBA '20

Courtney Wegel '18

Micah Wheeler '05

Gia Wiggins Ph.D. '19



Commencing a New Era

CIVIC CENTER MEMORIES

OPENING SHOW

Holiday on Ice, July 9-14, 1964;
tickets \$3 (equivalent to \$30 today)

NUMBER OF MARDI GRAS BALLS BOOKED BEFORE THE OPENING

31

SEATING CAPACITIES

Arena 10,112
Theater 1,938
Exposition Hall 3,000

NUMBER OF ELVIS PRESLEY PERFORMANCES

7

NATIONAL TV BROADCASTS

America's Junior Miss
(now Distinguished Young Women)
National Finals, 1965-85, 1994

IN JULY 1964, JUST A MONTH AFTER the University of South Alabama began holding its first classes on its new campus in west Mobile, the Mobile Municipal Auditorium opened downtown. It immediately became the hub for Mardi Gras parties as well as a venue for sports, concerts and other events — including South's first Commencements.

The complex, known since 1988 as the Mobile Civic Center, featured a theater, an exposition hall and a domed arena. Six decades later, it took its final bow, demolished to make way for a new arena.

"I think this is going to fit in nicely with our attractions and amenities to really support leisure travel and take downtown Mobile to the next level," says Fred Rendfrey, president and CEO of the Downtown Mobile Alliance. More tourism would, among other things, increase internship and job opportunities for South hospitality and tourism management students.

The old arena could no longer host major touring attractions and had become

increasingly costly to maintain. Renovation wasn't feasible. And South had long abandoned the venue in place of the on-campus Mitchell Center.

Many 20th-century South alumni hold fond memories of the Civic Center, and not just because of concerts. Commencements took place there from the University's first, in spring 1967, through fall 1998 — with the exception of two years in the late 1980s when they were held in the Health, Kinesiology and Sport building.

The Jaguars played men's basketball at the arena from the team's inaugural 1968-69 season through 1998-99 (with some games at the Jag Gym starting in 1976-77). The Mitchell Center has hosted Commencement since May 1999 and men's basketball since 1999-2000.

Birmingham-based BL Harbert International is building the new downtown arena, as well as the new Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building on South's campus. Mobile-based Volkert is managing the arena project.

The Civic Center complex cost \$10 million to build in 1964 — about \$100 million in today's



A new facility rises downtown after the demolition of the old Mobile Civic Center, site of South's early graduation ceremonies and basketball games.

BY STEVE MILLBURG

GOODWYN MILLS CAWOOD



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dollars. The new arena has a \$237 million construction budget. Demolition and other work at the site will bring the total cost to about \$300 million.

Like the old Civic Center, the new arena was planned with Mardi Gras in mind. Ballrooms around the main arena (maximum seating capacity 10,275) will be able to handle more than 7,300 revelers at once. An outdoor balcony will provide views of parades. The new facility is scheduled to open in January 2027; Mardi Gras that year will be Feb. 9.

The building's design reflects Mobile's architectural heritage. Arches on all four sides will recall the wrought iron that decorates so many downtown buildings. (For low maintenance, they will be anodized aluminum.)

The Civic Center's most beloved interior decorations — two vibrantly colorful mosaic murals, "Mardi Gras" and "Circus," by Conrad Albrizio — will reappear in the new arena. They have been carefully preserved and stored in the shell of the old exhibition hall. Demolition of

the hall will finish once the murals have been installed in their new home.

The master plan for the site envisions, eventually, a Broadway-style theater, a hotel, retail and residential development, and spaces for outdoor events. A new parking garage has already gone up.

Mayor Sandy Stimpson expects a big upswing in events. The arena manager, Denver-based Oak View Group, will have a financial incentive to fill the calendar with as many enticements as possible — maybe including minor league hockey and arena football.

"I think you'll see, compared to what we've seen in the past, the schedule will be far superior," Stimpson says. "And it won't be just weekends. It'll be weekdays too. They'll keep it hopping."

EARLY UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

Commencements were held in the Civic Center downtown. The ceremonies were eventually moved to campus at the USA Mitchell Center.



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH ALABAMA

FLAGSHIP OF THE GULF COAST.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Wall of Honor Unveiling

Presented by the USA National
Alumni Association

Oct. 30

Moulton Tower and Alumni Plaza

Homecoming Weekend

USA vs. Louisiana-Lafayette

Bonfire, pep rally and
concert

Oct. 31-Nov. 1

A Night Honoring Healers

Benefiting USA Health

Nov. 18

Mobile Convention Center

Holiday Concert

Presented by the
Department of Music

Dec. 4

USA Mitchell Center

>> FOR MORE EVENTS



CARNIVAL BROUGHT WITH IT
a surprise treat at the Student
Center: a red, white and blue
king cake.

