

FGCU

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Marine detectives
on trail of toxic

SUPER BUG

Disaster response:
FGCU reaches out
to Puerto Rico

Eagle lands in
alumni plaza

Engineering student
designs all-terrain
wheelchair

FALL 2019

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ASSESSING THE AFTERMATH

Two years after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico, FGCU professors and students have been traveling to the island and attempting to help people still struggling to rebuild their lives. Professors from the departments of social work, communication, language, education, ecology and environment all brought their expertise and compassion to address the many problems remaining.

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Ciguatera is a toxin found in some of the most popular fish we eat. It poisons 50,000 people each year. FGCU marine sciences Professor Michael Parsons, armed with a \$5.9 million research grant, is the principal investigator in a years-long project aimed at figuring out how to detect it and lessen the number of people sickened by this powerful microalga.

BY DREW STERWALD

ON THE COVER:

FGCU researchers capture a barracuda in the Florida Keys so they can test tissue samples for ciguatoxin.

PHOTO BY JAMES GRECO





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BY SETH SOFFIAN

FIRST



STUDENT SUCCESS

Bioengineering student devises all-terrain wheelchair that enables users to go where they want to go

BY KAREN BOOTH

YESTERDAY'S wheelchairs pale in comparison to today's more sophisticated models, many now designed to meet the challenges of climbing stairs, taking a "hike" across rocky terrain, "strolling" down a beach or maneuvering through snow. But what

about squeezing through narrow spaces? Or what about inventing a wheelchair that does it all?

Cesar Hernandez-Isidro, a junior majoring in bioengineering, not only asked himself that question, he set about designing a type of all-terrain wheelchair that expands and contracts, a

potentially groundbreaking advance in the marketplace.

"My idea is to design a wheelchair that does it all based on what the user needs at any moment," he said.

A successful design would mean that a person would only need to purchase one wheelchair, a boon for consumers since

PHOTOS BY JAMES GRECO



For me, the result of the research is significantly less important than the skills students develop by working on the projects.



DEREK LURA, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, BIOENGINEERING

wheelchairs tend to be expensive.

To accomplish his goal, Hernandez-Isidro said, compromise is the name of the game. Some wheelchairs, especially those designed specifically for outdoor use, sit on a tank-like belt that rolls the chair to and fro. But, he said, the belt is bulky and, therefore, so is the chair. He researched existing climbing wheelchair capabilities and decided to design a chair using the tank-like belt design for stability, control and versatility, but to construct a slimmed-down base that has the capability to contract to the width of the user's body. A lofty goal, and one that requires mechanical and technical skill, laser focus, a good deal of patience and lots of time.

Hernandez-Isidro's research began last spring as an honors project when Derek Lura, assistant professor in bioengineering, introduced him to Jennifer Lee, who was referred to FGCU during a fitting for her new wheelchair. Lee shared her daily struggles with Hernandez-Isidro, among them her inability to navigate through doorways in her home, given the width of her wheelchair. Her bedroom, too, presented a challenge as it is one step up, one step down, and her current wheelchair cannot navigate steps. "I can walk," she said, "but not far. And I rent, so renovating the house is not an option. Cesar is trying to create something that will make my life easier. If successful, it will definitely change my life and the lives of many people."

"A lot of my benchmarks are based off Jennifer's needs," said Hernandez-Isidro,

who continues to meet with her at her home and at FGCU to discuss the progress.

"I'm very excited about all the possibilities," she said. "We've even discussed the chances of my being able to go to the beach," something, she said, she has not been able to do for quite a while.

"This is still a relatively new project for our lab," Lura said, "and Cesar is doing an excellent job as an undergraduate student working on a design of this complexity. For me, the result of the research is significantly less important than the skills students develop by working on the projects. They will have their entire careers to make a difference helping improve the health and well-being of the population. This is just one step on a life-long journey."

When the spring semester ended, Hernandez-Isidro opted to continue his research throughout the summer.

"Dr. Lura has been invaluable to me," he

said, "advising me, sharing his knowledge as to how to build specific mechanisms, helping with supplies to build the prototype, which is now under way."

After using 3-D modeling software to design the base, Hernandez-Isidro initiated the 3-D printing phase, a slow and meticulous process. "I'm focusing on the stair-climbing aspect of my design," he said, "and most of the base mechanism is complete."

Once successfully tested, he will begin designing, prototyping and testing the contracting elements of the chair. And, like any innovation, should any aspect of the test fail, Hernandez-Isidro will, literally, be back to the drawing board.

His career goal is to work in the bio-mechanics industry. "I'm interested in focusing on integrating electronic and mechanical devices to help patients regain mobility and independence despite physical limitations caused through disease or accident." ■



ABOVE LEFT: Cesar Hernandez-Isidro works on his belt-driven wheelchair base in FGCU's Biomechanics Lab.

RIGHT: Hernandez-Isidro shows how a belt-driven wheelchair base climbs stairs.

Have a spoonful of civil debate and a splash of diversity with your coffee

BY KEITH GIBSON



W

ITH MORE than 200 Registered Student Organizations (RSO) at FGCU, there's a club for almost everyone.

While many are service and community oriented, it could be argued that one RSO at FGCU – Coffee and Controversy – perhaps serves a greater good as well, given today's turbulent political climate. The group holds public meetings every other week to create an environment for students to offer

their perspectives on controversial topics of the day, but has no political affiliations. The atmosphere is non-judgmental and respectful. Discussion is organized, open and promotes critical thinking.

In other words, this could be the safest of safe spaces on campus. And judging from the endorsement of two of its members, Coffee and Controversy is a place where some of FGCU's brightest students unleash their intellect, talent for debate and personal research to let engaging discourse fly freely.

Jessica Augustin got involved a few years

ago when she saw a notice on campus about a free-speech discussion inspired by the polarizing views people have over former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick taking a knee on the field during the national anthem.

"What I initially liked, and still like, about the club is that everyone can share their thoughts about different topics with other students they may not normally associate with," said Augustin, a senior economics major from West Palm Beach who served as club president in 2018-19.

(continued on next page)

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"I've been able to discuss controversial issues with students whose political, racial and religious backgrounds differ from mine. This club has changed my views on certain issues that I now see from a different perspective. I'm now a lot more open in hearing the other side of issues. Although I might not completely understand

a certain viewpoint, I'm definitely more open to hearing it and understanding why a person has that viewpoint."

Griffin Oppenheimer, a junior nursing student from Venice, was attracted to the meetings every other Wednesday evening in a Merwin Hall classroom after belonging to a similar club in high school. Oppenheimer looked for a similar group at FGCU and quickly found Coffee and Controversy.

"FGCU is a campus with a large diversity of ideas. That being said, people generally like to surround themselves with like-minded people and not actually debate and defend their viewpoints," said Oppenheimer. "Too much do I see emotionally charged rhetoric thrown around defending the left, the right, and anything in between, lambasting the opposing sides without defending why their opinion should be the commonly held one."

Augustin said the club usually attracts 15 to 30 students at a session depending on the topic, which is decided by majority vote. And as Oppenheimer points out, this isn't a place for know-

it-alls and show-offs. "It can serve as a resource for undecided people who want to know more about an issue," he said. "Members can bring up topics they are passionate about, or would like to know more about. The point is to share perspectives on opinions and reasoning for them – not to be lectured by professionals or guest speakers. Everyone gets an equal voice as long as they remain

respectful and orderly."

Augustin loves the variety of topics introduced. "We're willing to discuss anything and everything, whether it's abortion, free speech, gun laws, feminism, white privilege, capitalism vs. socialism ... we've probably discussed it," she said.

Oppenheimer adds that the club covers "both

mainstream issues as well as more niche discussion points that may go unnoticed by the mainstream media. One week we may be covering an issue about race, religion or political standpoints on issues such as, 'Is reverse racism real?' or discussions surrounding military intervention, healthcare, taxation or social policies. Another week we may talk about a less broad topic, such as controversy over the Oscars or lesser-known groups such as incels (involuntary celibates) or TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists)."

But perhaps the best thing about Coffee and Controversy is that the club has no political ties. "Although all the officers in the club hold our own personal political affiliations, we try our best to make sure the club itself isn't promoting a specific agenda," Augustin said. "We just want to be the space to facilitate the discussion." ■





WGCU

In support of public media

It takes a village to keep multi-faceted stations thriving / **BY DAYNA HARPSTER**

IMAGINE IF YOU COULD decide how much you would pay – or whether you'd pay at all – for your internet service. Or your television provider. Or your newspaper and magazine subscriptions.

All of those companies charge a set monthly fee. You pay it or your service ceases. And, on top of that, every one of those for-profit services comes with a boatload of advertisements or commercials. And then imagine what

would happen if only 2 percent of users decided to pay up. How long do you think those companies would remain in business?

That's the situation that WGCU, the market's lone nonprofit media company, faces. The member-supported service of Florida Gulf Coast University imposes no set fee for its 24/7 radio and television programming. It runs a modicum of sponsor messages, but no commercials. It does not answer to investors.

Decisions about news and entertainment are based on what viewers – aka supporters – tell the station they want.

That's the public media model, the one that's worked for decades, including the 36 years that WGCU has been Southwest

ABOVE: Producer Mike Kiniry makes an on-air appeal for pledges during WGCU FM's recent fundraiser.

RIGHT: Assistant Director of Development Pam James keeps track of pledges.

PHOTOS BY JULIA BONAVITA

Florida's trusted source for news, cultural programming and civil discourse.

But keeping that quality high and the program schedule filled still takes money. And so the fundraising must go on. Here are some of the ways WGCU Public Media keeps its many programs and projects going.

ON THE AIR

"Pledge" takes place about eight times a year, four each on the radio and on television. Public-media watchers and listeners know that it's the time when staff members and volunteers break into TV and radio shows to remind people that it is a nonprofit business dependent on donations. Staff members and members of the public who volunteer to ask for pledges throughout the days of the pledge drive. These sessions run from 7 a.m. through 6 p.m. each day, involving dozens of people who take time from their busy schedules to lend a hand.

The team has tried hard in recent years to minimize program interruptions with campaigns such as "Radio Uninterrupted," which uses testimonials from listeners and other abbreviated tactics to encourage donations in lieu of the standard on-air pitches.

Those who work there are understandably proud that WGCU TV has the greatest market penetration of any public television station in the country – 84 percent of all households in the coverage area – but while people watch, only 2 percent of households supported the station in 2018.

If another 2 percent of households were to contribute \$10 a month, the TV and radio stations could cut back dramatically on the time spent raising money.

But getting on the air to cajole listeners one by one into becoming donors seems to be the public media model. Hence, the tradition continues.

Where does the money go? Although public may be in the name, the lion's share of funding does not come from the government.

PAY TO PLAY IT

As is the case with all public media stations, WGCU pays to air the national programs listeners enjoy.

For instance, radio programming fees due to American Public Media, Public Radio International, WNYC, NPR and Public Radio Exchange topped \$485,000 in 2018. That covered the cost of shows such as BBC World Service, "Science

Friday," "This American Life," "Splendid Table," "Reveal," "All Things Considered" and the other shows not produced locally.

Fees to PBS for television programming topped \$1 million in fiscal year 2018.

Fees are based on a region's population and, hence, the number of potential listeners – not the actual number who listen. So as the population increases, so do fees. With 1,000 people a day moving to Florida, the potential audience increases and fees rise as well. Obviously, the idea is to encourage stations to increase membership accordingly.

Considering that membership is available for as little as \$5 a month, the radio and television programming, learning workshops, online news and games, podcasts, emergency alert services (see below) and other membership benefits are a bargain.

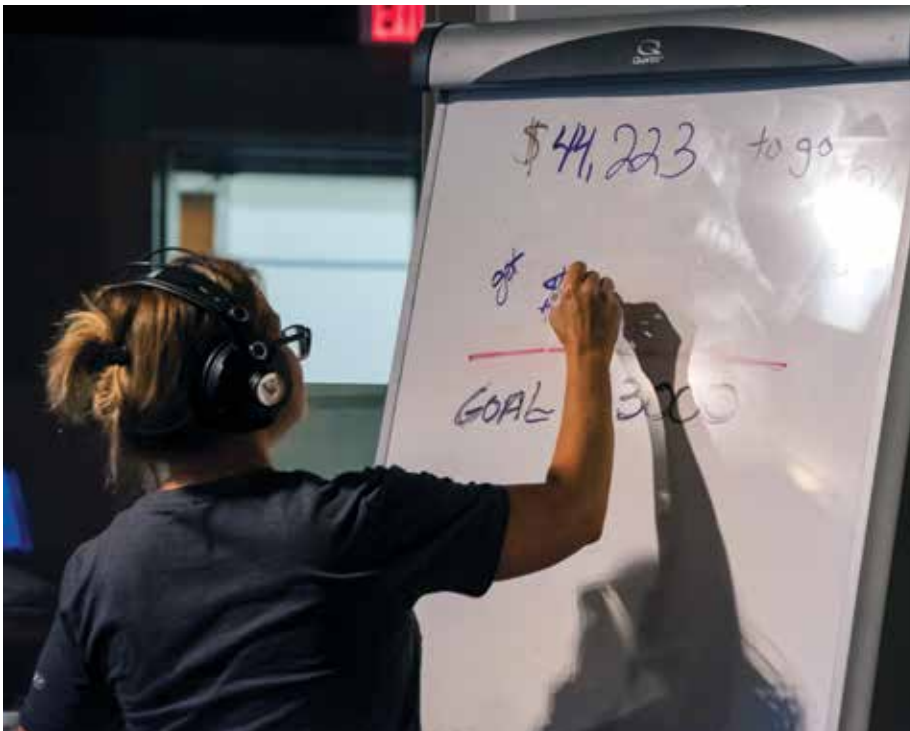
And memberships are critical to the station considering not only the programming costs but the money needed to fund overhead, equipment and assorted expenses. As a result, WGCU has a major fundraising job on its hands every year. Beyond the national programming, there is a great deal that costs money that isn't readily apparent to listeners and viewers.

Programming includes the award-winning local news brought to you by the station's team of journalists. Four days a week, there's also "Gulf Coast Live," a locally produced talk show that strives to connect listeners to people, places and things that make Southwest Florida unique.

STORM COVERAGE

As part of the Florida Public Radio Emergency Network, WGCU FM remains on the air before, during and after a weather or other emergency to keep residents in the listening area informed, even during power outages elsewhere. That means commercial stations rely on the station as well for up-to-the-minute information from public media stations around the state, including WGCU.

The station's staff works with the Florida Division of Emergency Management and local emergency operations centers to broadcast information about preparation, storm trajectory, shelters, recovery





operations – everything residents need to know in the event of a serious storm.

Storm preparation information is available on the website at wgcu.org/beprepared as well.

FRIENDS OF THE DONORS

Even when grant money is awarded for a project, there are associated costs the station absorbs.

To offset some of this, Donor Relations Specialists Gina Dengler and Jennifer Denike help make friends for the station. They get to know donors and potential donors and help them determine what sort of legacy they might want to leave for future generations. Sometimes a donor's passion for things such as nature, or the Seminole tribe, or any number of disparate causes has an obvious match in an upcoming program at WGCU, or at FGCU.

Sometimes WGCU donor relations specialists partner with financial planners and lawyers to present a program for potential donors that explains ways to

support WGCU they may not have considered. Those sums can come in the form of a life insurance policy, annuity, certain kinds of 401Ks, a trust, or by designating a checking or savings account.

"Everyone has something they want to accomplish," Dengler said. "Our job is to see where WGCU fits into that."

Donors of \$2,500 or more are members of WGCU's Leadership Circle, and are invited to special events throughout the year.

ADVOCATES AND CORPORATE SUPPORT

With more than 350 public television stations in the United States reliant on federal funding, some meeting of the minds is necessary when it comes to dividing limited funds. Advocates meet with legislators to ensure that funding

continues for those agreed-upon goals.

Each February, members of the nonprofit America's Public Television Stations meet in Washington, D.C., to determine funding priorities. For a decade, U.S. public media has shared \$445 million annually. Earlier this year, APT stations asked for – and received – \$495 million, the first increase in 10 years. That \$50 million increase should put stations at the funding level of a decade ago in today's currency, said WGCU General Manager Rick Johnson.

A similar process takes place at the state level through Florida Public Media, through which 24 Florida public radio and television stations share money allotted by state legislators. WGCU received \$520,000 this year.

Development, events and underwriting by companies account for about \$4 million of the station's budget each year.

Public broadcasting does not sell advertising. Companies buy air time on radio or TV as short announcements of support for the station, its mission

SUPPORT PUBLIC MEDIA

To give, visit wgcu.org/support.

or a current focus or effort. They also may sponsor programs or screenings by underwriting the cost in full or part.

WGCU does a significant number of “tradeouts,” or in-kind agreements with local media companies. For instance, WGCU publishes the next month’s TV schedule highlights in several local publications in exchange for TV or radio announcements of equal value to be used by those publications.

ABOUT THOSE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Surveys of parents have shown for more than a decade that they trust PBS Kids programming above that of all other networks. And for the past few years, the addition of a 24/7 channel just for kids has made that programming available at all hours.

Public television is known for delivering educational programming onscreen, but some also takes place in person. Over the past year, WGCU’s outreach team has conducted workshops for teachers and parents on how to employ specialized curriculum, PBS LearningMedia, to supplement classroom lessons.

Exercises and educational games based on PBS characters are abundant through apps and the WGCU website as well.

PASSPORT

PBS is onboard with the movement of a good portion of the U.S. viewing audience from multi-channel subscription services to an in-demand model.

Available to all WGCU members who donate at least \$5 per month is PBS Passport, a streaming platform with thousands of hours of public television programming – local and national – that can be accessed on demand through a smart TV, smartphone or tablet.

Other benefits provided by WGCU include the Radio Reading Service, which brings printed materials to those who are visually or physically impaired via a special radio broadcast; podcasts, including “Three Song Stories,” biographies told through music; trips to concerts and places of interest around Florida; and an app for your phone so that you never have to be without the programs you love.

There’s far more than meets the eye – or ear – involved in running a sophisticated nonprofit media operation. The financial support of the government entities, corporate sponsors, viewers and listeners is essential to making it happen, now and for future generations. ■

LEFT: From left, Richard Chin Quee, Rick Johnson, Lyn Millner and Tara Calligan pitch at WGCU FM.

BELOW: WGCU relies on the support of donors.



UPDATES:

STATION UPGRADES TRANSMISSION

Essential to everything WGCU does is the maintenance of its TV and radio transmission equipment.

WGCU’s radio signal is available at 90.1 FM in most of Southwest Florida, but listeners in the Marco Island area tune in to 91.7 FM, designated as WMKO. Earlier this year, crews went to work on the WMKO tower in Marco Island to redirect the FM signal to include more of North Naples and less of the Everglades, where it was essentially wasted on alligators.

Then in April, the station began upgrades to the 929-foot tower shared by WGCU TV and FM, located on State Highway 31 in Punta Gorda, across from Babcock Ranch.

The station successfully applied for \$3.7 million from the state of Florida to repair and reinforce the steel structure, repaint it and replace the LED lighting.

In March 2020, a new, more powerful TV transmission will begin thanks to a new antenna. That means a larger coverage area. ■

SEE ‘FAMILY PICTURES’ ONLINE

WGCU was honored to be part of a national PBS series, “Family Pictures USA,” which aired as three national episodes in August. In the spotlight were people in Southwest Florida, North Carolina and Detroit for separate shows in which they told family history stories based on family photos.

Along with North Carolina public television, WGCU was a presenting station for the episodes that ran all over the country.

The national episode here was accompanied by another, locally produced, 30-minute show that also featured Southwest Florida people. That’s available for viewing at wgcu.org/familypictures.

WGCU members can use the streaming service Passport to watch the national episodes. See wgcu.org/passport for information. ■

BOOKS

Side hustles are front and center

Book helps educators find resources to improve their incomes / **BY ED SCOTT**

BRENDA OWNS A company. She consults as a corporate trainer. She has a master's degree, a briefcase full of ideas and a personality that captivates academic scholars and CEOs alike. But when business is slow, she pays the bills by conducting survey research. Working in a call center is her "side hustle."

Sherm has been a journalist for decades. He's won awards as a reporter and now he's an editor, overseeing a team of freelance writers at a newspaper. But his wife's poor health and an unexpected increase in his son's tuition hit the family budget like a Major League fastball hits a glove.

Thwap!

So Sherm dusted off his master's degree and sought a job as an adjunct instructor at a nearby university.

Teaching is his side hustle.

In 2016, 46 percent of Florida's families could not afford basic needs such as housing, child care, food, transportation, healthcare and technology, according to research conducted as part of the United Way ALICE Project.

ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) describes many who think of themselves as middle class. The middle class is not shrinking, but it is changing. According to a September 2018 Pew Research Center

report, "while the size of the nation's middle class remained relatively stable, financial gains for middle-income Americans during this period were modest compared with those of higher-income households, causing the income disparity between the groups to grow."

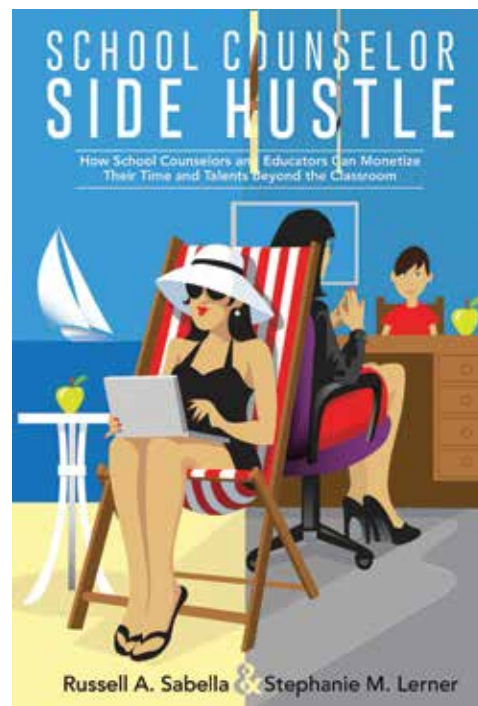
Academia is not immune. Many believe educators have been left behind financially.

Almost 20 percent of public school teachers have second jobs during the school year, according to the 2015-16 National Teacher and Principal Survey, conducted by the U.S. Department of Education. Among teachers with second jobs, half work in a field outside of education, while 5 percent take on a second teaching or tutoring job, according to Education Week.

Russell A. Sabella, a professor in the Department of Counseling in the Marieb College of Health & Human Services at Florida Gulf Coast University, said he pays attention to "the intersection of what school counselors and other educators need, what problems are they trying to solve."

Income shortfall is top of mind among secondary school educators. Many are "doing side hustles, having second and third jobs in order to make ends meet," Sabella said. His latest book, co-authored with Stephanie Lerner, is "School Counselor Side Hustle: How School Counselors and Educators Can Monetize their Time and Talents Beyond the Classroom" (Amazon, \$19.95).

Russell A. Sabella



The book covers seven main areas: creating resources, authoring a book, public speaking, developing tools, selling merchandise, adjunct teaching and private practice counseling.

Sabella said he and Lerner focused on school counselors but they realized quickly that "everything we were writing really does apply to all educators."

Not to mention business owners and journalists.

Every profession, Sabella said, has knowledge and skills that are valuable, and "there is someone else who will value those things. If educators, especially school counselors, were going to look for ways to make extra income, rather than bartending or Ubering – which are all great jobs – what if they were able to do more of what they love, really use their knowledge and skills to help people and provide tools and resources for others, and monetize that?" ■

BY THE NUMBERS

Ride with Eagle pride

The Florida Specialty License Plate Program started when the Florida Legislature approved a tag commemorating the space shuttle Challenger, which was introduced in January 1987. Many specialty plates are unique to the Sunshine State, and much of the artwork that decorates them was created by accomplished artists. Some plates are tributes to landmarks, icons, pastimes, social causes and, of course, schools, with Florida Gulf Coast University among 35 state and private colleges and universities with designated plates. ■

7/1/02

Florida Gulf Coast University specialty license plate was introduced.

11TH

FGCU's 2018 ranking among the 35 Florida universities and colleges with specialty plates

\$41,850

FGCU's share of 2018 plate revenue, which it used for student scholarships. That was an increase of more than \$2,000 over 2017 revenue (\$39,700).

2018
1,674

FGCU specialty license plates sold in 2018

NINETY-FOUR

FGCU's 2018 ranking among the state's 123 active specialty license plates. FGCU's highest ranking was No. 91 in 2013 with 1,531 plates sold that year.

1.5
MILLION

Florida specialty plates purchased in 2018

SHOW YOUR EAGLE PRIDE

To purchase your FGCU specialty license plate, visit: myfloridaspecialtyplate.com/fgcu.html





Sharon Isern and Scott Michael

ON THE
WEB
FGCU360.com
UNCOVERING ZIKA
OUTBREAKS
VIDEO

CUTTING EDGE

Researchers uncover unreported Zika outbreak in Cuba

FGCU team led study featured in science journal cover story / **BY KEVIN LOLLAR**

AS THE ZIKA VIRUS outbreak of 2016 in the Americas was winding down, and the medical community started breathing a little easier, a team of researchers, led by two Florida Gulf Coast University biology professors, made a discovery:

An unreported Zika outbreak was going strong in Cuba.

A paper on the Cuban outbreak by

FGCU's Sharon Isern and Scott Michael and 39 other researchers is the cover story of a recent issue of the journal *Cell* – Isern also created the cover art and graphics for the magazine.

"We initiated the collaboration," Isern said. "It's an ongoing collaboration; we'd been tracking Zika virus in Florida since the outbreak in the Americas. We wanted to know if the Zika epidemic in the Americas was over. What we found was a hidden outbreak that outlasted the

main epidemic by a year. We noticed a continuing number of Zika-positive travelers returning to Florida after visiting the Caribbean. Based on travel destinations, we traced these late cases to Cuba. We estimated that this was a large outbreak with several thousand local cases."

Although people infected with the virus usually have mild symptoms, including fever, rash, headache and joint pain, a Zika infection during pregnancy can cause

microcephaly (when a baby's head is much smaller than normal) in a newborn and other severe fetal brain defects.

A virus transmitted mainly by *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes but that can also be spread sexually, Zika was first detected in May 2015 in Brazil, though the outbreak probably started 1½ years earlier. By 2017, it had spread to 48 countries, with numbers of cases peaking in late 2016.

But only 187 laboratory-confirmed cases were reported in Cuba 2016 and none in 2017.

To determine where people were being infected, the team used two approaches:

1. Travel surveillance, which involved tracking millions of air travelers leaving Cuba between June and December 2017.
2. Genomic epidemiology, which involved genomic sequencing of samples from infected travelers to trace when and where the virus in those cases originated.

"Zika is a reportable disease, so all cases are reported," Michael said. "Samples were sent to the Florida Department of Health for testing, so we had access to what I guess was a large majority of the cases that were reported."

Obviously, tracking millions of travelers and sequencing thousands of samples was a colossal task.

"Hence, the number of authors," Michael said. "It wasn't the sort of thing you do with one scientist in a lab coat. This was a major outbreak. It claimed the attention of world news, so it was pretty exciting to be doing this work."

In all, the team consisted of researchers from 24 universities, organizations or agencies, including the Florida Department of Health, The Scripps Research Institute and Yale School of Public Health, from seven states and four foreign countries (Canada, England, Belgium and Australia).

Ultimately, the team estimated that

there were 5,707 unreported Zika cases in Cuba during the outbreak, but that number is part of a wide-ranging scale.

"We're doing back-calculations on what the outbreak was like in Cuba," Michael said. "There are a lot of variables. The uncertainty is large. There were thousands of cases. Our guess is between 1,000 and 10,000, so we give an average number [of 5,707]."

For comparison, during the 2016 outbreak, Haiti reported 3,103 cases, the Dominican Republic reported 5,305 cases, and Jamaica reported 7,165 cases.

2017, three states (Florida, New York and California) and 15 countries received more than 20,000, with more than 100,000 arriving in Florida, Mexico, Canada and Spain.

Based on how environmentally attractive the areas that received more than 20,000 visitors from Cuba are to *Ae. aegypti*, the team determined that mosquitoes in Florida, Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia were the most likely to become Zika vectors.

"During the main outbreak, Zika virus strains became established in local

mosquito populations in all of those locations," Isern said. "The delayed outbreak in Cuba had the potential to reignite outbreaks in these locations, although it apparently did not do so."

One question remains: Why did the Cuban Zika outbreak lag a year behind the other Caribbean outbreaks? The answer might be Cuba's aggressive mosquito-control program.

"If mosquito control delayed the outbreak, it was not able to contain it completely," Michael said. "If not for mosquito control, it would have spread like everywhere else in the Caribbean."

Methods developed in this study will be valuable in future mosquito-borne outbreaks because lack of access to reliable case reporting during rapidly evolving outbreaks can limit response efforts, and unrecognized outbreaks can silently spread viruses to other

parts of the world.

"In our study, we detected a delayed and overlooked outbreak by combining travel surveillance and sequence analyses of Zika virus genomes from infected travelers," Isern said. "This approach could be used to track other future outbreaks in the absence of local case reporting. Our study highlights the need for close ties between public health organizations and academic laboratories when addressing a public health crisis." ■



Sharon Isern's illustrations are featured on the cover and inside the Aug. 26 issue of the scientific journal Cell.

In addition, travel surveillance showed that 98.7 percent of the documented Zika-infected travelers from the Caribbean came from Cuba (90 of 91 cases in Florida, 63 of 64 cases in Europe).

Of the 4 million air travelers from Cuba between June 2017 and December

OBJECTS OF AFFECTION

Keys to one's heart and soul

BY KEITH GIBSON

“WHERE DID I leave my keys?” This conundrum is not only common, but potentially immobilizing. Whether it's starting the car or unlocking the home or office, our keys are among our most important possessions. Of course, technology has replaced many old-fashioned metal keys, giving us elaborate, electronic ways to unlock our lives. But we still need to hang those fobs and mini swipe cards somewhere. That's where keychains and lanyards come in. Not only do these accessories carry the keys to our daily existence, they often carry memories we love to lock away.

Senior Emily Bernard ¹ uses orange duct tape to preserve the Eagle ID card she was issued her freshman year in 2014. It's attached to a lanyard she got in Portland, Oregon, that's fashioned with a pattern inspired by the carpeting in that city's airport (which has a cult following and a Wikipedia page). Her three keychains represent “each of my favorite fandoms.”

“The one on the left is the Strike Class symbol from ‘How to Train Your Dragon,’” said the Palm Harbor native majoring in integrated studies. “The large leather black one is from ‘Hamilton: An American Musical,’ which I finally got to see this summer in Kansas City. And last but not least, a classic Iron Man, my favorite character in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. This keychain was given to me by my friend and former roommate my freshman year, and has been with me ever since.”

Artist Vincent Van Gogh's “Starry Night” appears on the lanyard of Kaitlyn Hynoski ², a senior art major. “This is one of my favorite paintings and a constant self-reminder of my passion for art,” said the Spring Hill resident. Other

meaningful attachments are a keychain for the FGCU Swim Club, of which she's a member; a dinosaur gifted to her by a friend; a tiny Yoda keychain because she's a “huge Star Wars fan,” and “some buttons pinned to the lanyard that I collected over the summer on a study abroad trip to Denmark and London.”

Inspiration and special connections go everywhere with senior Leah Riggle ³ and freshman Mia Stevenson ⁴.

Riggle, an art major from Myakka City, carries a fabric patch that says “Fujiwara Tofu Shop” in Japanese that was given to her by one of her best friends. “It's from one of our favorite animes, called ‘Initial D,’ which taught me a lot about being confident in myself and remembering it's about how I do things, and not how everyone else does them.”

Stevenson's softball heart charm on her FGCU lanyard was presented to her on Senior Night for her fastpitch team at Western High School in Davie, for which she wore No. 17. “I carry the keychain because it means a lot to me, and it reminds me of the time I spent playing not just high school softball, but playing for my travel team (Pines Thunder),” said the political science major, who also keeps her earbuds on the chain for easy access.

A junior majoring in public health ⁵ asked to share his object of affection anonymously as a transgender man who has yet to come out to his family, but which explains the transgender flag swatch attached to his Pittsburgh Steelers lanyard. “I am from St. Petersburg, but I have a Steelers lanyard because I'm a huge fan,” he said. “My mom is from Pittsburgh and most of her side of the family still lives there. Go Steelers!” ■







SPOTLIGHT

Student and Community Counseling Center opens on campus with regional service in mind

BY KYLE McCURRY

F GCU's NEW STUDENT and Community Counseling Center, which opened Nov. 1, aims to fill a community need for greater access to mental and behavioral health services for individuals of all ages, regardless of socioeconomic status. It's a training center for counseling graduate students who see clients under the supervision of licensed, experienced faculty.

The building also houses Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) and Adaptive Services, which are solely for university students.

"This new training center has been a dream of the counseling department almost since we opened," said Madelyn Isaacs, chair of FGCU's Department of Counseling. "We have our own clinic where we can do primary field-based training with community members and serve the community."

Unlike other health-professional programs, collegiate counseling programs do not have the ability to build simulation labs, Isaacs said.

"The only thing we can do in counseling is either role-play with students, which is a good beginning in training, or we can bring in a real client. With the latter, our professors and supervisors can observe directly what our students are doing, provide care, manage the quality in their training and send them out to other sites or their other internships with

PHOTO BY JAMES GRECO

“This new training center has been a dream of the counseling department almost since we opened. We have our own clinic where we can do primary field-based training with community members and serve the community.”

MADELYN ISAACS, PROFESSOR AND CHAIR, COUNSELING

a real secure knowledge that they know what they're doing,” Isaacs said.

The Community Counseling Center is operated by graduate-student interns who provide a variety of supervised counseling services. Among the services available to the community are individual, group, family, couples, relationship, school consultation and play therapy. The center aims to improve lives affected by depression, anxiety, trauma, relationship and family functioning, career and life transitions, school performance, and parenting challenges.

While the center will serve English-speaking clients, a strong focus is placed on the needs of Spanish-speaking individuals.

“Out of the 10 interns that started on Nov. 4, three of them speak Spanish,” said Alise Bartley, director of the Community Counseling Center. “The assistant director also speaks Spanish. Not only will people be able to receive counseling services in Spanish, but the students will also be receiving the supervision in Spanish. We want to keep the language consistent.”

One thing Bartley and Isaacs emphasize is that this facility is a lab for counseling students. Students learn in this new facility and take on counseling-focused research.

“We’re a counseling center, not a medical center. We provide one aspect of behavioral health, but a medical center would have psychiatrists, nurse practitioners and medical staff on site,” Isaacs said. “A facility like that may refer to outpatient counseling as a part of treatment, but they also have medical assessment and medication monitoring.

There are a number of services a full-service behavioral health agency would offer. This is our counseling lab, but we’re making it available to the community because we can at a very low cost.” ■

HOURS OF OPERATION

Services of the Community Counseling Center are available by appointment to the public 1-8 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays and 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturdays. The fee is \$25 an hour or whatever you make an hour – whichever is less. This sliding scale is used to make counseling affordable to all. Insurance is not accepted. To contact the Community Counseling Center, visit fgcu.edu/communitycounseling or call (239) 745-4777.

CAPS

With CAPS’ move to the new facility, students continue to receive the level of care they have come to expect. The biggest difference outside of the location is the addition of two more group rooms, up from one, to accommodate increasing group therapy needs. The space also gives CAPS the ability to expand its staff in the future. So far in 2019, CAPS Director Jon Brunner said three new team members have been added. To contact CAPS, visit fgcu.edu/CAPS or call (239) 590-7950. FGCU students in immediate distress outside of normal business hours (evenings, weekends and holidays) who wish to speak with a mental health professional can call the CAPS help line at (239) 745-EARS (3277).

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Mike Martin’s
video about
what’s new
on campus.**

ARTS

THEATRE

‘Water Stories’ connects life and the arts

Students collaborate on original musical theatrical production / **BY NINA BARBERO, '16**

SCIENTISTS, economists, health professionals, activists and residents have shared their thoughts about Southwest Florida’s ongoing struggle to maintain its water quality. Now, a new collaboration between Florida Gulf Coast University’s theatre and music composition students is reminding the community of the power and myths surrounding this natural resource.

Earlier this year, Associate Professor Gerritt VanderMeer of the theatre department approached Assistant Professor Jason Bahr, who teaches music theory and composition, to propose that Bahr’s composition students team up with his Creating New Theatre students for a timely project now called “Water Stories.”

“He said, ‘Let’s write pieces – both musical and theatrical – that have to do with water and myths about water,’” Bahr says. “It gives students an opportunity to look at their creativity from a different perspective.”

VanderMeer says the format of the class – seven groups with two theatre and one composition student in each – has given participants the opportunity to adapt and learn from one another’s points of view.

“Any creative project is a journey,” VanderMeer says, “so you very quickly get into uncharted territory, you very quickly get out of your comfort zone.”

Each student group chose its own water-related theme at the start of the semester. Although the course was formed in part to complement FGCU’s new Water School,

the groups chose to stay away from the topic of local water quality.

Julian Grubb, a third-year music education major, says his group is focusing on frogs, based on his unique family tradition that celebrates swamp creatures. He says he appreciates the opportunity to work with theatre students on a

says this project is helping him gain a better understanding of what composing can be like in the music industry, where new points of view from different stakeholders come into play at all stages of the writing process, and composers must be flexible. He says it has been exciting to work on a project involving water, which has been an important topic in recent news.

“Water is an essential part of FGCU from both an educational and environmental standpoint,” Noll says. “This project is an example of how the arts can get involved.”

Noll’s project will feature two actors performing as boaters stuck on the ocean during a hurricane.

Both Grubb and Noll are members of FGCU’s Composers Guild, a group made up of about 12 students who work together to improve their music composition techniques, learn from professional composers like Bahr, and give back to the community through pop-up concerts, which Bahr calls “music happenings.”

While the composition students premiered their “Water Stories” pieces in an October concert featuring only the music, the theatre performances with pre-recorded music will be performed on campus Dec. 6 through 8.

The music will be recorded by professional musicians, who were hired with part of a \$5,000 FGCU Scholarship-Research Venture Capital Fund grant VanderMeer and Bahr secured to help run the course.

“Any creative project is a journey, so you very quickly get into uncharted territory, you very quickly get out of your comfort zone.”

GERRITT VANDERMEER

composition that will be used in a theatrical performance, instead of writing music for a traditional concert performance.

“It’s really interesting writing for more of a narrative style, rather than just having ideas,” Grubb says.

Peter Noll is another composition student who says he is learning a lot from the collaboration.

The third-year music performance major



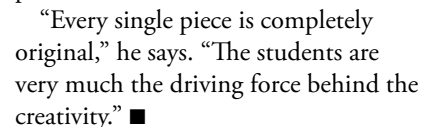
Student Romina Combe created this illustration for the Bower School's season brochure.



Some of the grant funding has also gone to purchase special theatre equipment, such as lighting gels, shadow screens, costumes and other items VanderMeer says will improve the production value of the performances.

Purchase: Online at fgcu.edu/cas/bsma

"We're learning so much this first time,"



UPDATES:



SOUNDS OF THE SEASON

The students of the Bower School of Music present "Joyful & Triumphant," with selections by classical and modern composers, as well as traditional holiday favorites, at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 3, at Moorings Presbyterian Church, 791 Harbour Drive, Naples.

The Chamber and University Choirs under the direction of Trent Brown, associate professor of music, will perform with the Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Kyle Szabo, associate professor of music.

The concert is free. Please RSVP by registering at fgcu.edu/joyful2019. ■



BODIES OF WORK

Art majors present their senior projects Thursday, Dec. 5, through Friday, Dec. 13, in the Wasmer Art Gallery on the FGCU campus.

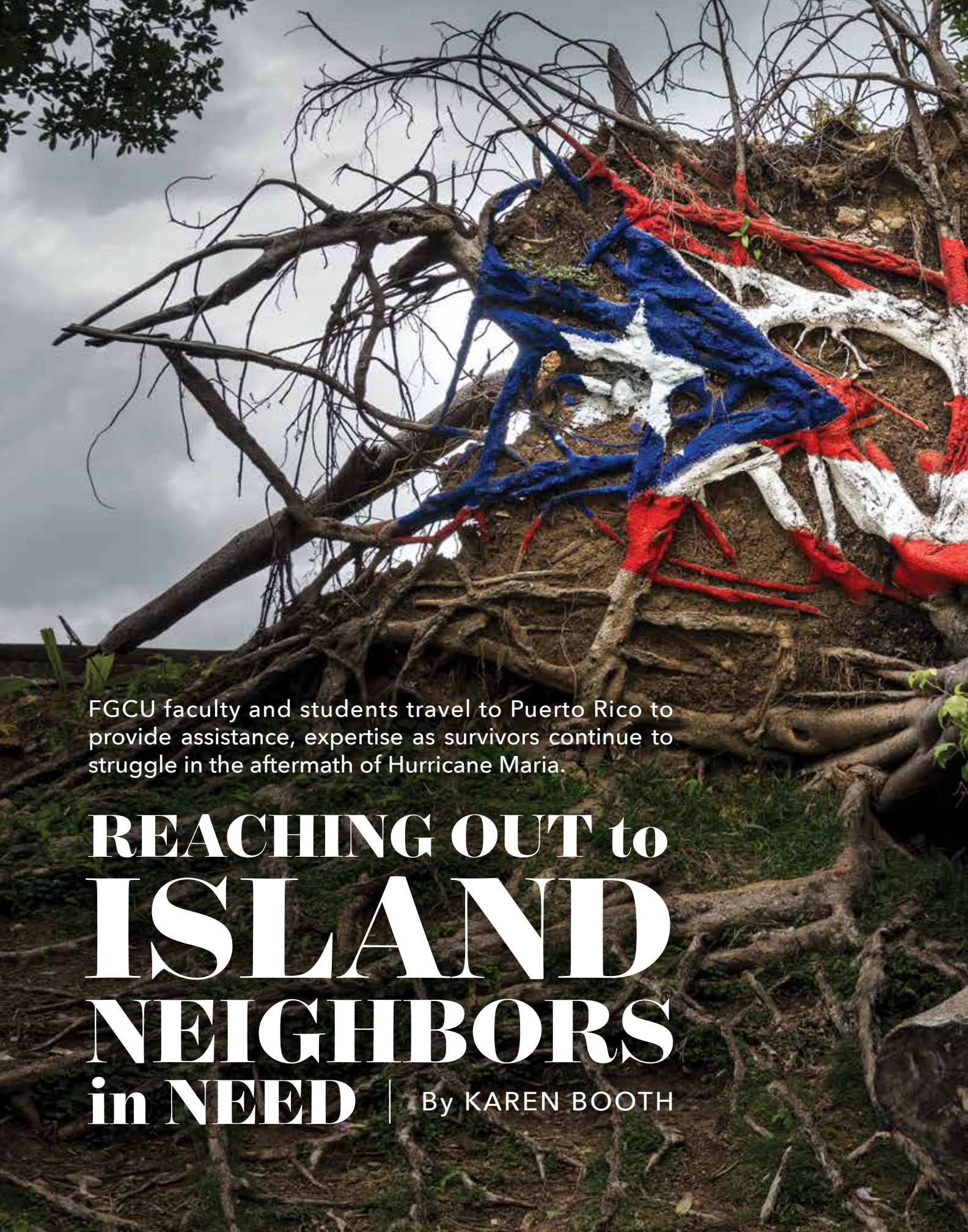
The exhibit features each senior's body of work aimed at demonstrating their knowledge of techniques and concepts while drawing on research of historical and contemporary artists. Each participant designs and creates a unique installation that combines their technical skills and conceptual vision.

The opening reception takes place from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 5. The gallery is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday except during university holidays and breaks. ■



Theatre students rehearse their original projects with Associate Professor Gerritt VanderMeer (front right).





FGCU faculty and students travel to Puerto Rico to provide assistance, expertise as survivors continue to struggle in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

REACHING OUT to ISLAND NEIGHBORS in NEED | By KAREN BOOTH

Painted Puerto Rico state
flag on uprooted tree
from Hurricane Maria in
San Juan, Puerto Rico





Hurricane Maria makes landfall in Puerto Rico in September 2017.

It's been two years since Maria slammed into Puerto Rico as a Category 4 hurricane, the 10th strongest Atlantic hurricane on record.

Maria destroyed roughly 80 percent of Puerto Rico's agricultural industry, killed nearly 3,000 people, and wiped out electricity to the majority of the island's almost 1.6 million customers. Schools closed; hospitals lacked the resources needed to treat the sick and injured.

Islanders continue to struggle to rebuild their lives, their communities and their country.

Last summer, several FGCU professors and students journeyed to Puerto Rico to learn firsthand about the island's challenges and lend a helping hand. Three more FGCU professors conducted a survey of members of the Puerto Rican diaspora here in Southwest Florida. What follows is a look into their collective passion, their commitment and the work they have done, and continue to do, for our island neighbors.

Students see Puerto Rico's journey back through study-abroad course that offers insight into disaster-relief efforts

RECOVERY AS SEEN THROUGH A SOCIAL WORK LENS

In the summer of 2019, Lirio Negroni, associate professor of social work, and Tom Felke, associate professor and chair of social work, and eight FGCU students traveled to Puerto Rico as part of the elective course, "Social work practice with Latinos/as coping with the impact of natural disasters."

Their objective was two-fold: to explore contemporary issues and needs of families and communities dealing with the impact of hurricanes Irma and Maria; and to use the insights gained to positively impact their work with Latinos/as in Southwest Florida. The trip was a partnership with the University of Connecticut School of Social Work and the University of Puerto

Rico Beatriz Lasalle School of Social Work.

Research trips of this nature typically are open only to graduate students. Negroni and Felke, however, welcomed eight social work undergraduates, all at the end of their junior year and each of whom performed admirably. "Our students are ethical, responsible and committed," Negroni said, "and interested in personal and professional growth."

A brief overview of their journey can't begin to capture the depth of experiences shared by the students who met with professionals and community leaders, visited various agencies and interacted with the local people. The students learned about Puerto Rican history, culture, ecosystems and colonialism; attended social work practice conferences; learned about the social work response in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria – and that's only for starters.

One of these many meaningful experiences involved a one-day service project in the central mountain municipality of Orocovis at Casa Solidaria

(Solidarity House) that has been helping with housing recovery post Hurricane Maria. This is a community where practically all homes were destroyed.

"Solidarity House focuses on agricultural capabilities," said Hannah Arteaga. "They aim to make communities aware of how to grow their own crops, so they are not dependent on spending money elsewhere and, also, to teach the youth of the importance of agriculture."

"There were many tasks including gardening, and clearing and creating pathways. I devoted most of my time to pulling weeds around the crops and tying strings around branches to help crops grow straight up rather than to fall when they reached a certain height. I also raked up leaves and trash."

It was, perhaps, the day of service that brought together all the elements of the journey, in an academic, social and practical sense. "To be able to go on a study-abroad trip and not only gain so much perspective and knowledge, but also to give back and contribute is what made



Faculty and students from FGCU's Department of Social Work at the University of Puerto Rico. From left: Tom Felke, department chair; students Hannah Arteaga, Caroline Briones, Karina DeVale, Maria Jimenez-Sebastian, Sam Ackerson and Mariana MacKinnon; Lirio Negroni, associate professor; and students Alana McFadden and Andell Napoleon.



this day of service so special,” Arteaga said.

Negroni further pointed to the students’ opportunity to observe the differences in social work as practiced in Puerto Rico vs. in the mainland United States. “In Puerto Rico, students saw first-hand how to work with communities and critically evaluate the impact of social policies. As a result, these students have come back with ideas of how they might better work with Latinos/as here in Florida.”

Maria Jimenez-Sebastian would agree: “I believe the knowledge and experience I gained from this trip will help me in my future career. When working with Puerto Rican clients here, I will be able to understand their background and, more importantly, their culture.”

Exposure to the big picture also made a lasting impression on Samantha Ackerson,

who experienced macro social work, or large-scale advocacy and policy practice, first-hand for the first time. Prior to this, Ackerson’s attention was focused more on micro social work, or practice with individuals, families and groups. “This

LEFT: FGCU students participated in a one-day community service project in the mountains of the municipality of Orocovis at Casa Solidaria (Solidarity House), a program of Proyecto Matria (Matria Project) that helps with housing recovery due to Hurricane Maria. From left: Sam Ackerson, Alana McFadden, Hannah Arteaga, Maria Jimenez-Sebastian, Andell Napoleon, Caroline Briones, Mariana MacKinnon, Karina doVale.

RIGHT: Destroyed houses from Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.







trip enhanced my understanding of how important macro social work is,” she said. “I had the textbook’s understanding, just not the first-hand experience. Though I plan to pursue a career in micro social work, I will keep tabs on, and be more active in, macro social work.”

Summarizing her experience, Ackerson shared a well-known parable, but with a twist. “There is the phrase, ‘If you give a man a fish, he will eat for a day. If you teach a man to fish, he will eat for a lifetime,’” she said. “A professor from the University of Puerto Rico challenged this phrase and explained to us that its meaning is way deeper than that. We must ask the ‘social questions’: ‘Where are the fish? Do the people want fish? What if there are no fish? Why are there no fish?’

“By thinking critically about circumstances, we will help our clients more.”

After losing so much, many people left the island. Others stayed, determined to rebuild and recover. An interdisciplinary team of professors and their students wanted to capture their stories. The result: Voices Boricuas.

TALKING IT OUT IN THE AFTERMATH OF PAIN AND SUFFERING

In light of the criticism of the government’s response in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, the resilience of the Puerto Rican people is described as epic – their tremendous courage in the midst of unthinkable devastation; families and individuals somehow finding the strength to carry on; strangers helping strangers;

FGCU faculty and students conduct an interview at the University of Puerto Rico. From left: Assistant Professor Marta Ramos (seated in hat), student Paola Reyes-Serrano, Assistant Professor Jon Braddy, alumnus Gunnar Gibson, students Lina Ramirez and Sylver Layer and student Calvin Price interviewing Professor Raul Figueroa-Rodriguez of the University of Puerto Rico.

entire communities tackling the cleanup and rebuilding together. But that’s only a fraction of the story.

Jon Braddy, assistant professor of communication and philosophy; Marta Ramos, assistant professor of language and literature; and Win Everham, professor of ecology and environmental studies, together with six of their students, traveled to Puerto Rico to assess the devastation of Hurricane Maria, the efforts to rebuild lives, homes and communities, and the resilience of the islanders.

In the end, the students’ experiences

together with face-to-face interviews with islanders – some prearranged and some spontaneous – would be woven together into a documentary, “Voices Boricuas,” which the team will share with the FGCU community and region as a way to bring continued awareness and understanding of Puerto Rico’s ongoing challenges.

Paola Reyes-Serrano, a junior majoring

“Could this be the new Roswell?” asked Braddy and his team, referring to the widely held conspiracy theory that a UFO landed in Roswell, New Mexico, back in 1947. “A lot of Puerto Ricans are believers,” Braddy said, “from mayors to tourism professionals, fishermen ... Could Puerto Ricans capitalize on the mythology embedded in the island? Could this

sustainable practice would work well on the island? What does the future of Puerto Rico look like to them?

“We tried to be intentional in our conversation, listen and be engaged. Community members were telling us their truths and their perspectives.” Knowing that many more isolated communities do not have access to fresh food, the team

“Being able to go back and help so that the voices of my people are heard was life changing ... this opportunity opened my eyes and created a path for me to serve Puerto Rico, little by little.”

PAOLA REYES-SERRANO, STUDENT

in biology, said the intensely personal documentary will include an exploration “of the relationship between the Puerto Ricans who left the island and the Puerto Ricans who stayed after Hurricane Maria.” Though their challenges differ, the strength of their heritage binds them together and is woven into the very fabric of who they are to each other and to their homeland.

“Voices Boricuas” is an interdisciplinary project. Three teams of three – one professor and two students – investigated not only how islanders cope with unimaginable challenges, but also explored initiatives that might alleviate some of the difficulties inherent in the rebuilding process. Gunnar Gibson, (’17, Communication), joined the team as documentary director. “Gunnar added a modern visual lens to our academic research,” Braddy said. “Edgy, fresh and crisp – yet remaining true to the moment.”

Indeed, the challenges are overwhelming. “How do people recover from the worst hurricane ever,” asked Braddy, who, with his team, narrowed down economic recovery as one of their prime areas of research. New types of tourism for Puerto Rico seemed a good place to start. What bubbled up was Puerto Rico’s prior brush with marketing “extraterrestrial” tourism. And while this may seem farfetched to us on the U.S. mainland, the mythology surrounding aliens and UFOs is alive and well in Puerto Rico.

mythology spawn an industry?”

In the meantime, Ramos and her team focused on learning how the Puerto Ricans who opted to remain on the island following Maria felt about those who chose to relocate to the United States.

Reyes-Serrano approached this subject with a unique perspective. Brought up in Puerto Rico, she moved to the U.S. at age 21 in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. “For me, ‘Voices Boricuas’ was personal,” she said. “Being able to go back and help so that the voices of my people are heard was life changing ... this opportunity opened my eyes and created a path for me to serve Puerto Rico, little by little.”

The investigation of the relationship between the Puerto Ricans who left the island and those who stayed was of particular interest to Reyes-Serrano. “We achieved our purpose by interviewing locals and visiting some tourism places on the island. And now we plan to continue our work by interviewing Puerto Ricans in Florida, specifically in our community.”

Everham and his team took a different approach, looking at what the future of Puerto Rico could be in terms of sustainability.

Lina Ramirez (’19, Environmental Studies and Communication) explained: “We were looking at building with nature as opposed to against nature,” she said. “We asked interviewees what kind of

discussed farm-to-table as not only a sustainable practice, but also a necessity.

The feeling of those Puerto Ricans who opted to stay on the island vs. those who left was revealing – overwhelming guilt vs. feelings of abandonment. But even then, Ramirez pointed out that islanders who stayed said that “because of those who left and who talk about their island communities, smaller towns are benefitting from more tourists.”

Life changed dramatically after the hurricane, and again when some survivors moved to the mainland. While they left some problems behind, they discovered new ones they hadn’t anticipated.

STARTING OVER IN THE PUERTO RICAN DIASPORA

Hasan Aydin, Tunde Szecsi and Debra Giambo, professors in the College of Education, opted to pursue research locally, with the goal of positively impacting members of the Puerto Rican diaspora, regionally. To that end, they conducted a qualitative study that focused on collecting and analyzing the oral



histories of a select number of Puerto Rican university students and families with children who relocated to Southwest Florida in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

What were the experiences of these displaced islanders? From a distance, we can easily imagine that fear of the unknown, concern for the children, and anxiety over language and cultural barriers loomed large. But our imagination pales in comparison to the challenges actually faced by those Puerto Ricans who chose mainland America and the hope of the unknown vs. the devastation of the known.

The numbers are one thing: approximately 50,000 Puerto Ricans

moved to Florida after Hurricane Maria, including approximately 12,000 students who transferred to Florida schools. The human emotional, psychological and physical toll is yet another: “The purpose of the study,” Aydin said, “is to document the experiences of displaced students and families. Our goal is to offer constructive recommendations to schools, colleges and community agencies regarding effective integration after the trauma.”

In gathering their data, interviewers asked interviewees to respond to 15 open-ended questions dealing with their experiences during and after Hurricane Maria; their decision to relocate to Southwest Florida; and their experiences once here.

Puerto Rican students (from left) Kiana Feliciano, Phabiolah Cardona, Lani Molina, Jose Ruiz, Diego Sepulveda, Paola Reyes-Serrano and Jamie Cumba outside the Outdoor Sports Complex on campus in Spring 2018. They are among 14 students from Puerto Rico and two from the U.S. Virgin Islands who came to FGCU after Hurricane Maria uprooted their lives.

The analysis of the survey data gathered by the team identified five major themes: trauma immediately following the hurricane; limited formalized assistance in Southwest Florida; families’ self-reliance; the need for mental health services for children; and challenges associated with language barriers.



HURRICANE MARIA SURVIVORS GET HELPING HAND FROM FGCU

Beginning in the spring 2018 semester, FGCU waived out-of-state tuition for each of three semesters for students who moved to Southwest Florida in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

"These are challenging times for millions of people striving to get back on their feet after their communities were shattered," said FGCU President Mike Martin. "With educational institutions unable to operate as usual, those trying to better their lives through learning could easily have their dreams derailed. As partners in higher education, we believe it's our duty to provide this avenue in the hope that it helps students stay on the path to success while their communities heal."

Junior Jose Rivera relocated to Southwest Florida in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria and was able to enroll in FGCU thanks, in large part, to the tuition waiver offered to displaced Puerto Ricans. "Once I heard I would not have to pay out-of-state tuition," Rivera said, "it was the biggest thing for me. FGCU is incredible. Students at the university have so many more opportunities here."

Junior Paola Reyes-Serrano lived in Puerto Rico for 21 years. She, too, moved to Southwest Florida in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. "I was the first Puerto Rican to approach FGCU to ask for a transfer," she said. "However, since my parents already lived in the U.S. prior to the event, I was already eligible for a tuition waiver." Reyes-Serrano's original plan was to return to Puerto Rico, but after talking with her parents, she decided to enroll in FGCU.

"I couldn't have made a better decision," she said. "FGCU has given me so much."

For example, Aydin said, "Parents are concerned with how to go about finding a job, a house, a school for their children. The children might be facing bullying in the classroom. They need counseling; teachers need training."

Armed with the knowledge as shared by interviewees, the FGCU team made the following recommendations, which will be shared with educational and community agencies to help displaced students and families effectively integrate in their new home:

- For the university to provide support for students in similar situations (e.g., orientation, assign a point person or identify an office for when issues and needs arise, training for faculty and staff);

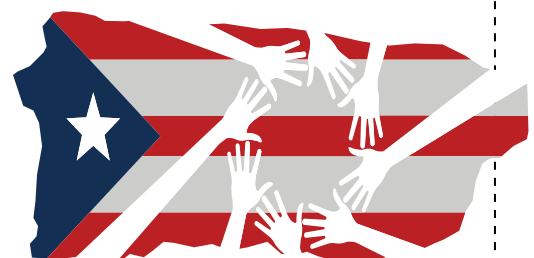
- For structured support by local government and community agencies to include help finding housing, jobs, food, socialization opportunities;

- For psychological counseling for students in school;

- For training for public school teachers so support can be provided, including working with native students so bullying can be avoided;

- For sufficient support in English language for both university and school-aged children.

The goal is that these recommendations will be integrated into the process by which community leaders and educators welcome members of the Puerto Rican diaspora into life in Southwest Florida. ■







'Superbug'

LEADS RESEARCHERS STUDYING FISH POISONING IN NEW DIRECTION

\$5.9 million federal grant funds more study of **toxic algae** in food web

BY DREW STERWALD
Photos by James Greco





Three research assistants in scuba gear plunge into the water off Lower Matecumbe Key one steamy summer morning on the trail of a newly discovered superbug that sickens people who eat fish carrying the toxin. They're part of an FGCU team that has found the microscopic menace before in samples taken from this mangrove-protected site, spreading over seagrass on the bottom about 7 feet below the water's surface.

The divers are pursuing *Gambierdiscus silvae*, a single-celled microalga that causes ciguatera fish poisoning. It's not as well-known as other harmful algae like the one behind red tide, but ciguatera is the main source of seafood illness that's not caused by product spoilage.

"We want to gather it to do cultures and keep it alive back at the lab so we can see what conditions make it thrive," explains FGCU alum Adam Catasus ('15, Marine

Science; '17 Environmental Science Master's), who stays aboard FGCU's 27-foot Grady White, scribbling notes on weather and water conditions, while the divers gather samples about 7 feet below the surface. "It's very temperamental. It only grows in a 3- to 4-degree temperature range and in low concentrations – very low and slow."

Once the bug and its range are better understood through this five-year, grant-

funded study, the plan is to develop a warning system for fishers and consumers to avoid harvesting and eating seafood from affected areas.

This isn't FGCU's first foray into ciguatera poisoning, which affects people all over the world who eat fish. FGCU marine science Professor Michael Parsons, the principal investigator on this \$5.9 million project, previously led a five-year, \$4 million NOAA-funded study on the



1. FGCU researchers spear barracuda in the Florida Keys so they can test tissue samples for ciguatoxin.

toxin causing fish poisoning. In fact, that project led to the discovery of the “superbug” that has steered Parsons’ research in a new direction.

“Our efforts now are really zeroing in on this particular species of *Gambierdiscus*,” Parsons says. “It’s a thousand times more toxic than other *Gambierdiscus* species. We’re learning more about when the superbug is out there, under what conditions, when to expect the most toxic load on reefs and how to better predict when the toxin is moving into fish. Ultimately, we want to be able to safeguard people against eating the toxic fish.”

To achieve that result, Parsons and his team first have to address a number of questions: What sustains the toxic algae? How is its development affected by coral reef health, warming sea temperatures and disturbances like hurricanes? Do crabs and other invertebrates ingest the toxin while munching on seagrass? And which fish higher on the food chain, like

“Our efforts now are really zeroing in on this particular species of ***Gambierdiscus***.

It’s a thousand times more toxic than other ***Gambierdiscus*** species.

We’re learning more about when the superbug is out there, under what conditions, when to expect the most toxic load on reefs and how to better predict when the toxin is moving into fish. Ultimately, we want to be able to safeguard people against eating the toxic fish.”

MICHAEL PARSONS,
PROFESSOR, MARINE SCIENCE

grouper and hogfish, in turn consume those tainted critters?

“It’s really hard to measure toxins,” Parsons says. “We’re collecting samples so we have a baseline to measure how these other factors change toxin levels. It looks like when ciguatera events occur it’s not really a bloom like red tide or blue-green algae.”

Traveling down to the Middle Keys every three months to take samples at the same seven sites helps the team document how seasonal changes affect *Gambierdiscus silvae*. In July, research scientist Catasus was accompanied by alums Nick Culligan (’18, Environmental Science Master’s) and Ashley Brandt (’12, Environmental Studies & Marine Science; ’16, Environmental Science Master’s); and graduate students Katie Ribble (’15, Marine Science) and Andrea James (’19, Environmental Science Master’s).

They emerge from their dive off Lower Matecumbe with containers of water and emerald-green turtle grass coated with oatmeal-like clumps of epiphytes, another kind of algae, which thrive in summer’s



Ashley Brandt, above, processes samples at Keys Marine Lab, while Andrea James, right, shows a piece of *Halimeda incrassate*, one of the algae they collect.

warmer waters. After they boat back to the Keys Marine Lab on Long Key at the end of the day, the team will sift their samples through multiple filters and end up with a sediment that resembles a Frosty from Wendy's. Specimens are later examined in labs and tested for toxins that cause ciguatera poisoning.

When they're finished diving off Matecumbe, the team pulls anchor and motors south under a causeway bridge to reach the Tennessee Reef southeast of Long Key, a part of the Florida Reef with an area open only for researchers. The teal-green water runs about 25 feet deep where they dive, somewhat less successfully than earlier in the morning.

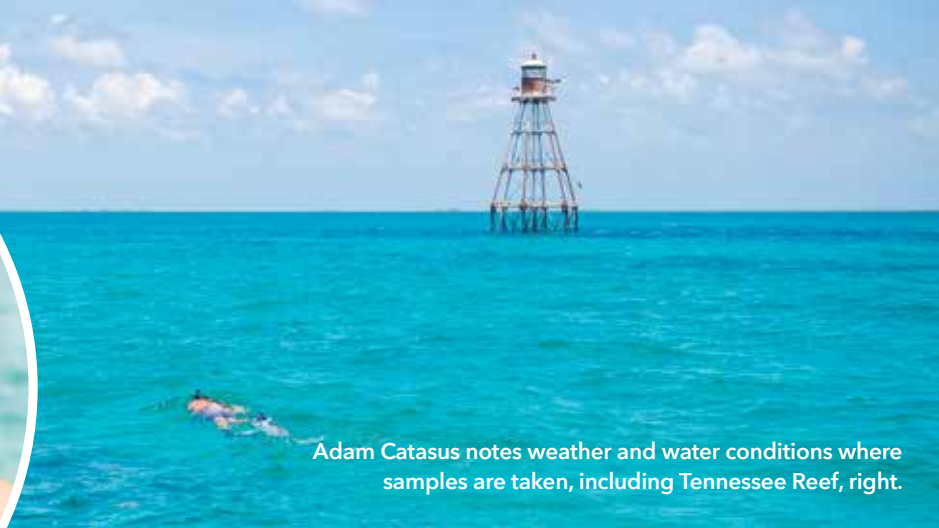
"We don't usually have trouble getting samples, but the current's strong today and I could feel myself moving with it," Andrea James says while peeling off her scuba gear back onboard. "There's a lot of fish down there, but I had my nose in the sand. I'm so focused on getting the algae I need that I wouldn't know if a shark came up behind me."

The team decides to shift focus to spearfishing near the historic Tennessee Reef light tower. Built in 1933, the 49-foot skeletal structure provides refuge for a

"It's really hard to measure **toxins**. We're collecting samples so we have a baseline to measure how other these factors change **toxin levels**."

MICHAEL PARSONS





Adam Catasus notes weather and water conditions where samples are taken, including Tennessee Reef, right.

convoy of frigatebirds resting their expansive wings. The superbug has been documented around here, too, and the porkfish and barracuda they reap today will offer clues to its impact. Like many marine toxins, ciguatoxins biomagnify – they become more concentrated in the fish tissue as the toxin moves up the food web. In general, the larger fish that eat the smaller reef fish store higher levels of the toxin, and therefore are more likely to pass on ciguatera to people.

“Barracuda are at the top of the food chain,” Catasus says, after carefully extricating a toothy 3 1/2-footer from a spear. “They usually have a high likelihood of being toxic from eating smaller fish.”

While barracuda aren’t commonly eaten in the United States, sometimes fish are misidentified or mislabeled, Catasus explains, and end up in markets or restaurants. In the past, ciguatera was primarily a concern in tropical and subtropical areas, but fish from those waters are exported to markets across the globe, making the illness a worldwide concern.

“People get exposed to ciguatera a lot in the Caribbean,” Catasus says. “Over 15-20 years, what are the effects? It’s a neurotoxin, and we have no data on long-term exposure.”

The work they’re doing today, the sampling and the processing, is just a small step toward compiling data that will help scientists, fishers and consumers

better understand ciguatera poisoning. Back at the FGCU campus, they will do tissue extractions on the fish speared today that will be sent elsewhere for analysis.

Algae samples will undergo several time-consuming processes as single cells are isolated and grown in a campus lab.

Parsons’ latest research is funded by the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, part of the National Institutes of Health. The grant funds the Greater Caribbean Center for Ciguatera Research at FGCU, which also involves researchers from the University of South Alabama, Mitchell Cancer Institute, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, University of Texas Marine Science Institute, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute and the University of the Virgin Islands.

Parsons, director of FGCU’s Vester Marine and Environmental Science Research Field Station, hopes the five-year project will help him create forecasting abilities that can guide the fishing industry to avoid harvesting fish that are likely infected. Ciguatoxins are

heat-stable, meaning they remain dangerous even after the fish has been cooked. An estimated 50,000 people around the world become sick with ciguatera fish poisoning each year.

“We have a working model right now, and the next step would be to use it to say there is a greater chance of getting ciguatera if you eat fish caught in this location,” Parsons says. “We have to partner with the local fishery managers and commercial fishers on how to work with those advisories.” ■

ON THE
WEB
FGCU360.com
PHOTO
GALLERY

CIGUATERA 101

WHAT IT IS:

Ciguatera fish poisoning comes from a microalga called *Gambierdiscus silvae*.

WHERE IT’S FOUND:

In fish such as hogfish, barracuda, snapper, grouper and other species eaten by people. However, the toxin isn’t always present.

SYMPTOMS OF CIGUATERA:

abdominal cramps, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, headaches, muscle aches and numbness. Some victims experience strange sensations, like loose teeth, intense itching or confusion between hot and cold temperatures. The illness can last weeks or linger for years.

GIVING



Jubilee Scholarships provide four-year full ride

Gift enables students to 'get invested' in FGCU / **BY ED SCOTT**

ALEX AMADOR IS one of dozens of Collier County students who have received the Jubilee Scholarship at Florida Gulf Coast University during the past five years.

The anonymous donation covers tuition, books, room and board and incidentals during recipients' four-year careers at FGCU.

Students must maintain a 2.5 GPA and

live on campus with the goal of becoming immersed in the college experience without the burden of commuting from home or working long hours to pay their bills. Jubilee Scholars agree not to work in the fall and spring semesters so they can devote time to volunteering with student organizations, complete service-learning hours and explore careers.

The benefactors understand that typically many FGCU students must work several part-time jobs to make ends

meet and that students from middle-income families don't often qualify for grants reserved for lower-income families but might not earn enough to pay for college out of pocket with room and board running \$10,000 to \$14,000 in addition to tuition. The goal is to provide students with a rich on-campus college experience.

"The purpose of the scholarship is to

ABOVE: Thanks to an anonymous donor, all of these students are Jubilee Scholars.

PHOTOS BY JAMES GRECO



I knew I would have an incredible college experience thanks to this scholarship, but I had no clue how profoundly this scholarship, your generosity, was going to affect my life.



ALEX AMADOR, '19



help students with families of lower- to middle-income means come to college and have the full college experience (i.e. live on campus),” said Dolly Farrell, director of major gifts and stewardship at FGCU. “It is a full ride, amounting to about \$20,000 a year.”

Two students are selected each year from the AP Leadership program at Grace Place for Children & Families, a Naples-based nonprofit organization. “Two other students (sometimes more) are selected by FGCU,” Farrell added.

There are 19 Jubilee students on campus this year. FGCU 360 caught up with Amador and five other current students and graduates who are recipients

to see how the scholarship impacted their lives.

‘TREMENDOUSLY GRATEFUL’

Rebecca Paul, 18, a freshman from Naples majoring in biology, says the Jubilee is a dream come true. Neither of her parents attended college, but they always stressed the importance of an education. FGCU was always her dream school.

Paul is an outstanding student who aspires to become an orthodontist. She graduated last May from three schools: Lorenzo Walker Technical High School, the Dental Assisting Program at Technical College and Florida SouthWestern State College, with an associate’s degree. Her weighted GPA in high school was a 6.01.

“Thanks to your giving spirit, I will be able to attend my dream school without a single worry about how I am going to afford it,” she wrote to the donors. “With the Jubilee Scholarship, I will be able to graduate from my 4-year university debt-free. Without the Jubilee, I would’ve had to work part-time, while taking my upper-level 17 credits of biology coursework.



“Working while taking those difficult courses would’ve greatly affected my academic performance. Now I can afford my tuition costs, get the on-campus experience, study abroad and get invested in the FGCU community.”

‘FIND MY PASSIONS’

Lesley Cruz, a senior psychology major from Naples, says the scholarship has had a big impact on her life by “providing me with the opportunity to obtain my bachelor’s degree without a financial constraint.

“With this scholarship, I never had to worry about having a job or commuting to campus,” said Cruz, who is majoring in psychology with a concentration in neuroscience. “All of my time at FGCU has been devoted to my personal and professional growth. Not having to pay for college allowed me the freedom to find my passions and use them to help various communities.

“Due to my involvement, I have been able to advocate for lives in Washington, D.C., provide hurricane relief in Puerto Rico and support FGCU students’ success through the various executive leadership positions I have held.”



AIDAN GORMAN



ALLOWED 'SUCCESS'

Amador, 22, of Naples, says the scholarship allowed him to do more than just attend college.

"It allowed me to be successful at FGCU," said Amador, who majored in biology with concentrations in ecology and microbiology. "The financial burden that was removed from me and my parents was immense."

Amador credits the scholarship for giving him social opportunities and the chance to study abroad for a semester.

"The ability to live on campus and be so involved with FGCU life is amazing," he said. "Having the free time to join clubs, organizations, or sports clubs is incredible and enhanced my collegiate career in a multitude of ways. The Jubilee Scholarship transformed my experience from something potentially average to something extraordinarily meaningful and life-changing."

Amador is now pursuing a graduate degree in botany. He credits the scholarship with helping him discover his love of plant life.

"Thanks to the support of these anonymous donors, I was able to realize my passion for plants and the

environment. I would have never had this realization if I did not have this support."

'EXTRA HELPFUL'

Aidan Gorman, 19, of Naples, a sophomore, says a unique family situation made receiving the scholarship extra helpful.

"I'm a triplet, meaning I have two siblings the exact same age as me who are all going to college at the same time," said Gorman, who is majoring in marketing. "Unfortunately for my parents, putting three kids through college all at once is quite a daunting task. But thanks to the financial support of this scholarship, so much weight has been lifted off both me and my parents' shoulders, and for that I am forever grateful."

'ACHIEVE MY GOALS'

Evan Lountchenko, a freshman from Naples, says receiving the scholarship enables him to concentrate on service and academics. His mother is a teacher and his stepfather is an assistant principal in a local school district. Their blended family includes six children, of which Evan is the second oldest. He had planned to live at home and commute

to save money. That is, until he was interviewed for the Jubilee Scholarship.

"I am thankful to be a recipient, as it is helping me achieve my goals that come with going to college," said Lountchenko, who is majoring in bioengineering. "Now I can focus more on studies and serving the community, without the financial worries associated with college expenses. As a bonus, I can start looking into summer internships or travel opportunities that would enhance my career path."

'PUSH MYSELF'

Abigail Sanjuan-Santiago, a junior from Naples and first-generation student, said the scholarship "has led me to push myself to better my family and to be a role model for my sister."

Majoring in social work, Sanjuan-Santiago says she "dealt with my aunt being detained last year and my family was going through an economic hardship at that time, but thankfully I had this scholarship to help me pay for my classes and books. With the support of the Jubilee Scholarship, I am able to fully immerse myself in the FGCU community by being a university ambassador, peer educator from Prevention & Wellness, an honors senator and president of the Student Farmworker Alliance."

As they were intended to do, the Jubilee Scholarships have eased recipients' stresses, allowing them to focus on their college educations. ■

FIND OUT MORE

To know more about Jubilee Scholarships, contact Dolly Farrell at (239) 590-7638 or dofarrell@fgcu.edu. **To apply for other FGCU Foundation Scholarships**, visit fgcu.edu/foundationsscholarships. The application period opened Oct. 1, with priority deadline Jan. 1. The application remains open through March 1.



Grateful for the assistance they received early on, couple help first-generation students realize dreams

BY KAREN BOOTH

FOR SOME, PAYING IT forward is a vague concept; for others, it's a steadfast commitment. Meet Joe and Lee Vumbacco, for whom paying it forward is not only a steadfast commitment, it's also a way of life.

It all started in the late 1960s. The Vumbaccos married young, had their first child and, like so many young couples, struggled financially. Joe dreamed of becoming a lawyer; Lee enthusiastically supported that dream. However, as the son of working-class parents of little means and no formal education beyond high school, Joe would be a first-generation student whose family could not provide financial support. Nevertheless, he applied to, and was admitted to, Syracuse Law School. But, at the end of year one, Joe saw he would have to withdraw from Syracuse.

Not one to give up, he popped into the office of the dean unannounced but was graciously invited in – and explained his plight to Dean Robert W. Miller. Joe's plan was to work fulltime for one year and save enough money to return; he was asking only that the dean hold his spot.

"Much to my amazement," Joe said,

"the dean looked at me and said, 'You're not going anywhere. I just looked up your grades, and we want you here. As of this moment you are on full scholarship, books paid and all.' Dean Miller then went on to call a local law firm. He got me a job where I worked throughout my law school years. The dean understood my situation, made no demands of me and, frankly, changed my life."

An experience like Joe's makes an impression that can – and did – last a lifetime. Thanks, in large part, to this early financial jumpstart, the Vumbaccos' life journey began an upward trajectory. Joe began his career in a high-profile law firm on Wall Street. He retired as CEO and president of a Fortune 600 Corporation, Health Management Associates in Naples.

"My wife and I are partners in every way," he said. "She is, and has always been, an amazing support and shrewd advisor. We shared the raising of our two children, and we both worked hard. I couldn't have grown in my career without her. And we

The Vumbaccos (center) with some of their scholarship recipients.

wouldn't have been as successful as we've been as a family."

Which brings us to paying it forward. As soon as they were able, the Vumbaccos began giving back. Once in Florida, the couple were immediately impressed with the "phenomenal growth record of FGCU. "However," he said, "it wasn't until I joined FGCU's Board of Trustees and had an up-close look at the administration, the professors and the programs that Lee and I knew we wanted to offer support to FGCU's first-generation students."

The Vumbaccos endowed the First-Generation Scholarship fund, administered by FGCU, which matches their contributions. To date, the couple has championed more than 40 students and enjoys meeting many of them at an annual luncheon.

"We've never forgotten what Dean Miller did for us, and Lee and I have spent many years doing whatever we can to give back," Joe said. "Certainly, some of our scholarship recipients will have life-changing experiences and, perhaps, they, too, will be inspired to pay it forward." ■

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

For details on giving, visit fgcu.edu/support



Local construction industry helps build sound foundation for new engineering program

BY KEITH GIBSON

IF YOU BUILD IT, they will come. The actual quote from the movie, “Field of Dreams” is “If you build it, HE will come.”

But for the purpose of describing the great reception FGCU’s new Construction Management program has received, we’ll use “they” in reference to Southwest Florida’s builders – the regional construction-industry leaders who have “come” to support the newest Bachelor of Science degree “built” by the U.A. Whitaker College of Engineering.

With Wright Construction Group of Fort Myers securing naming rights for the Construction Methods Laboratory outside Holmes Hall, 32 local construction executives volunteering their time and

expertise on FGCU’s Construction Management Advisory Committee, industry leaders helping to organize and support fundraisers that have raised money for the program, and several other individuals and companies sponsoring student scholarships, FGCU truly is building “it” – an academic program that produces skilled graduates in great demand.

And the regional construction industry – “they,” if you will — has come behind “it” big time, rallying behind the program introduced in the 2019-20 academic year.

“With a founding freshman class of more than 40 declared students this fall, we are well on our way to providing the industry with high-caliber, highly educated and experienced (through required internships) workers for the future of construction in

Southwest Florida,” said Craig Capano, professor and department chair.

“We already have students receiving part-time employment opportunities, have a multitude of scholarships established, formed an industry advisory board, coordinated multiple fundraising events, and have had faculty invited as guest lecturers for local construction association events,” said Capano, who joined FGCU in January as the program’s founding director, bringing an extensive

TOP: Students in the Construction Management program are in the perfect region for industry growth.

RIGHT: Fred Edman, president of Wright Construction Group, predicts a big payoff from the program.

PHOTO BY JAMES GRECO

academic and professional resume in the construction field. “These gestures of industry involvement with this program are evidence of the need for this new major.”

Industry statistics back up Capano’s statement. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Florida ranks third nationally (behind California and Texas) with the highest employment level of construction managers, with the metropolitan markets of Collier and Lee counties ranking third and eighth, respectively, in the U.S. The forecast through 2026 is for about 45,000 new construction-management jobs to be created to add to more than 400,000 that

in Southwest Florida will benefit greatly and almost immediately from the students entering this program,” Edman said. “Competition for quality graduates from major universities is high. A local program creates numerous internship opportunities that will allow local companies to build long-term relationships with students. The benefit is twofold. First, local contractors get the benefit of part-time or summer interns in a time when manpower is at a premium. Second, this will translate into a higher number of graduates staying right here in Southwest Florida.”

Howard Wheeler, president of Chris-tel Construction in Fort Myers, one of the signature hosts of the Eagle Eye Shooting



Howard Wheeler

firm, but every other construction firm in the area benefits from,” Wheeler continued. “With the creation of the Construction Management program, the university not only understands the growth impact on our region, but the opportunity to increase the likelihood that these talented graduates will stay in our area, and have an abundance of job opportunities for internships and eventual permanent employment in an industry that is challenging and fruitful.”

“We (Wright Construction Group) and numerous other contractors in Southwest Florida will benefit greatly and almost immediately from the students entering this program.”

FRED EDMAN, PRESIDENT, WRIGHT CONSTRUCTION GROUP

existed as of 2016, with that 11-percent industry growth way above the national average for most professions. And these are lucrative jobs – the mean annual wage for construction managers in 2017 was estimated at \$101,000, with the top 25 percent earning an average of \$121,570.

Fred Edman, president of the laboratory-sponsoring Wright Construction Group, sees quick impact and payoff from the program for both FGCU and his industry.

“We and numerous other contractors

Clays Tournament fundraiser for the program, says the region’s growth dictates the necessity for qualified construction managers. “Our region is growing at an unprecedented rate, and the demand for adequate infrastructure to handle the increased number of full- and part-time residents must be met,” Wheeler said. “In addition, the amount of retail, healthcare, educational and residential construction projects have to follow suit.

“Being able to hire and retain local talent is a prime advantage that not only our

The Construction Management program benefits greatly from the generosity, input and expertise of regional executives such as Edman, Wheeler and Gary Griffin, president of B & I Contractors of Fort Myers, who chairs the Construction Management Advisory Committee.

“We’ve already had 32 companies volunteer to be part of the advisory committee and our goals are to provide support and improve the program with strategic input,” Griffin said.

Besides Wright, Chris-tel and B & I, other local companies and their executives who have funded scholarships are Liz Perez Lavin and Service Contracting Solutions; Tommy Heuther and Gulf Point Construction (also hosted the benefit Contractor Cup Golf Tournament); Robert and Matt Johnson, R.D. Johnson Construction; Lisa Swinto, Associated Builders and Contractors, Gulf Coast chapter; Southwest Florida Roofing Contractors, liaison Tammy Hall; and Skanska Building Company, liaison Bob Kramer. ■





Student inspires city to create diversity panel, bank to support College of Education

BY KAREN BOOTH

MAKING A difference doesn't necessarily require large sums of money. It doesn't have to originate in a think tank with high-powered executives. A simple question by a discerning college student can spark change, too – in this case in the city of Fort Myers.

Sophomore Hailey Countryman asked a simple question of Fort Myers Mayor Randy Henderson when Peter Ndiangui, visiting assistant professor in the College of Education, invited Henderson to address students in his Intro to Diversity for Educators class.

The question: “Mr. Mayor, do you have a diversity advisory committee for the city of Fort Myers?” The answer: “No.” The response: “I think you need one.”

The result: Henderson, with assistance from Ndiangui and Beth Countryman, Hailey's mother and vice president of Treasury Management at Sanibel Captiva Community Bank, formed the Diversity and Inclusion Council of Fort Myers.

“The council's mission is all about empowering people economically and encouraging community engagement,” Ndiangui said.

Thinking back to the class and what prompted her question, Countryman said, “Mayor Henderson was sharing information about the city and his job as mayor. He said he felt like one of the reasons he was elected was because he makes a special effort to reach out to everyone, making him a better representative of all the people. But when I asked my question, I think he could see how his administration could make more

of an effort. He welcomed the idea.”

Hailey's mother, Beth, proud of her daughter and a friend of the mayor, was also instrumental in getting the idea off the ground. The council is divided into two pillars, said Countryman – the Socio-Economic Pillar, of which she is vice chair, and the Community Outreach Pillar, headed by vice chair Kathy Bruno, principal in Bruno & Prado, a Fort Myers law firm.

Good ideas often spawn more good ideas. In this case, Ndiangui and Elizabeth Elliott, professor and chair of the Department of Teacher Education

TOP: Fort Myers Mayor Randy Henderson with the Intro to Diversity for Educators class at FGCU.

RIGHT: Henderson, FGCU student Hailey Countryman and visiting Assistant Professor Peter Ndiangui.



in FGCU's College of Education, visited the bank to meet with Beth Countryman and her colleague Amy McQuagge, vice president and director of marketing.

The result: The bank made a generous donation to the College of Education.

"The bank likes to get involved in things that are important to the community and, especially, things their employees are involved in," said Beth Countryman.

On behalf of the College of Education, Elliott expressed her appreciation of the gift. "Sanibel Captiva is a community bank," she said. "The primary purpose of this gift is to develop future educators and educational leaders within our local community."

In recognition of the bank's generosity, Merwin Hall's courtyard has been renamed the Sanibel Captiva Community Bank Courtyard. It will be used as a common space for community events.

"We are very proud of what is happening in our classrooms at FGCU's College of Education," said Dean Eunsook Hyun. "Our students, faculty and community members together are making a difference for the community, with the community and in the community. That is the FGCU Effect."

Hailey Countryman is proud of her part in the process. She credits the things she's learned in Ndiangui's class as being a real eye opener for her. "Dr. Ndiangui is very upfront about the fact that our conversations can get uncomfortable at times," she said. "I haven't experienced hardships and disadvantages as others in my class have. I want to be a teacher, and this class has changed my perspective to include equity in the classroom in ways I wouldn't have thought of before."

Ndiangui, Hailey Countryman and others now want to create an FGCU chapter of the international organization, Youth for Human Rights International.

"Essentially, the organization focuses on providing educational materials to communities," said Countryman. "These are your human rights, no matter who you are, where you live. The idea is to teach members and encourage others to get involved in equality, equity and human rights."

Not a bad return on a simple question. ■



ALUMNI

CLASS OF 2015

Engineering is a team sport: FGCU alum encourages strong social connections

BY NINA BARBERO, '16

IF THERE'S ONE MYTH Angel Hernandez (Environmental Engineering, Civil Engineering, '15) wants to bust about his industry, it's the image of a solitary engineer.

"If you think you're going to go into engineering and work by yourself, you're mistaken," Hernandez says.

As a civil analyst with Kimley-Horn, Hernandez relies on team members – and they rely on him – to complete roadway projects across South Florida. A civil analyst is an engineer who has not yet earned a professional license, which requires four years of full-time engineering experience.

Hernandez credits the connections he made at FGCU with helping prepare him for his career.

"I have a lot of contacts professionally because of the student organizations I was a part of," he says.

One of those contacts is C.J. McFarlane, a former supervisor for FGCU's Academic and Event Technology Services who now works at Babcock Ranch, and calls Hernandez a good friend.

"He's a leader," McFarlane says of Hernandez. "There are few people who work as hard as he does."

In his role at AETS, Hernandez was responsible for being customer-service

focused and helping faculty and staff solve technology challenges they were facing. McFarlane says Hernandez helped the team develop lecture capture technology, create simulation mannequins for nursing students and more.

Now Hernandez is using those professional experiences to help him succeed in two Kimley-Horn offices: Fort Myers and Sarasota.

"I am being a sponge right now," Hernandez says, "learning as much as I can from the project managers. Kimley-Horn does roadway work in the Fort Myers area, but the department is not yet established, so I'm hoping to become the person that helps bring all the business into the company in that area. It gives me an opportunity to become a better engineer."

Hernandez says having a locally based department is critical to helping any firm win business in Southwest Florida.

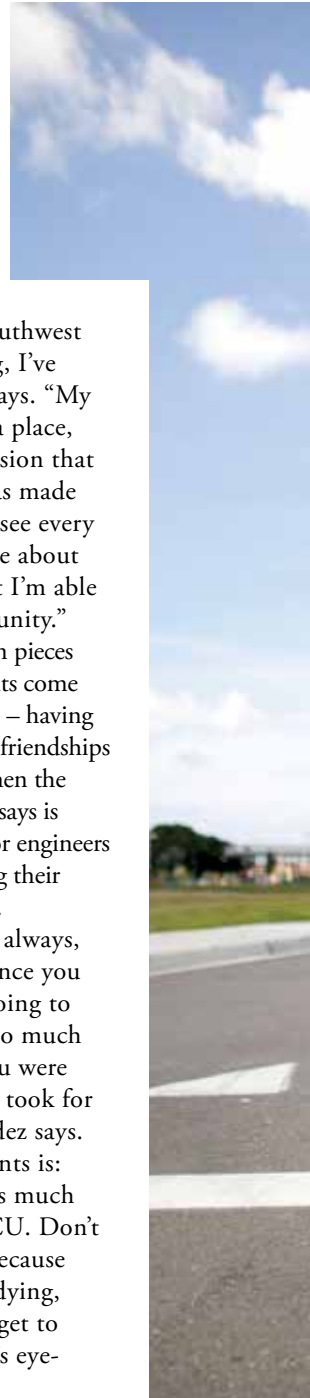
"Companies that have offices based out of the Fort Myers area have an advantage over national companies," he says. "Whoever the city or county hires, they want them to spend the money locally – the businesses, the restaurants, the beaches."

Hernandez was born in the Dominican Republic, and has since lived in Miami, Lehigh Acres and now, Fort Myers.

"I've been in Southwest Florida for so long, I've seen it grow," he says. "My favorite part isn't a place, it's more a progression that the community has made and the changes I see every year ... What I love about engineering is that I'm able to help the community."

Hernandez's main pieces of advice for students come back to being social – having hobbies and strong friendships to fall back on – when the workday, which he says is longer than most for engineers who are just starting their careers – has ended.

"We're so eager, always, to graduate, but once you graduate, you're going to find out you had so much free time when you were in school that you took for granted," Hernandez says. "What I tell students is: Enjoy your time as much as you can at FGCU. Don't rush the process because you're tired of studying, because once you get to the 'real world,' it's eye-opening." ■



“

I've been in Southwest Florida for so long, I've seen it grow. My favorite part isn't a place, it's more a progression that the community has made and the changes I see every year ... What I love about engineering is that I'm able to help the community.

”

ANGEL HERNANDEZ



PHOTO BY BRIAN TIETZ

CLASS OF 2013

Marketing major makes swift climb to success with Allyn International

BY RICK WEBER

COREY HOSCH graduated from FGCU in December 2013 with a bachelor's degree in marketing, but he is now logistics manager for Allyn International, a supply chain consulting firm that provides professional logistics services, customs compliance and tax management worldwide in more than 20 languages.

His career trajectory has been one of the fastest ever seen at the Fort Myers-based company, starting with his hiring in September 2017 as an entry-level logistics specialist and progressing to team leader then project manager. In his current role as logistics manager, he manages the team's profit and loss, client relations and day-to-day logistics for new clients as well as helping them improve current processes to increase productivity.

Even now, he can hardly believe how he has transformed his life since leaving FGCU.

"I fell into it," he says. "It wasn't anything I ever expected to get into.

"I just feel lucky and blessed to be in the situation I'm in. A lot of opportunities have arisen just because people have left. In that, a lot of it is luck. But a lot is work ethic, trying hard, doing my best and having it show. Am I surprised? Not entirely."

That's because he has remembered

and applied something his FGCU sales management professor, Norman Stern, told the class one day. Stern, asked for real-life business advice, said: "Get along with all departments. Go out of your way to help them because there will be a day when you need them, too."

Allyn International Chief Operating Officer Michal Svoboda isn't surprised. To him, Hosch has qualities that radically transcend the piece of paper on which his marketing degree is printed.

"In the current business environment, character of an individual plays a more important role in determining success as a leader than the field of study," he says. "Corey's situation is a perfect example. He has been gradually exposed to various company functions. Learning new tasks and gaining wider experience helped him to understand the organization holistically. Good leaders are learners."

After leaving FGCU, Hosch was hired by Default Consulting Group and handled administrative work in the firm's Orlando office. After two months, he moved to the firm's Dallas office and took on an analytics position, studying for his Law School Admission Test (LSAT) on the side.

But when the firm closed its doors in May 2015, he moved back to Florida and took a sales job with Penske, ultimately progressing to sales operations

and then branch rental manager before leaving for Allyn.

And now that he's back in Fort Myers, he's dedicating some of his time toward providing FGCU students with something he never had: supply chain expertise. Hosch is working with Elias Kirche, associate professor in the Department of Information Systems & Operation Management, as FGCU formulates a supply chain management degree program.

"It will be huge for FGCU and Lutgert College of Business as a whole," he says of the program. "There is going to be an increased need for logistics and supply chain professionals in the next five to 10 years. We're currently a part of a booming industry that's noticeably becoming mainstream and offering a number of high-paying jobs. This program is going to open doors for students to get into a field they traditionally wouldn't think of pursuing.

"Most tenured logistics professionals will tell you they fell into supply chain and logistics as a career. The supply chain degree will provide students the opportunity to seek it on their own. Supply chain is a dated industry that is slowly becoming more progressive. There is a need for new, young graduates. It's perfect timing for this degree program to kick off." ■



PHOTO BY BRIAN TIETZ



“

In the current business environment, character of an individual plays a more important role in determining success as a leader than the field of study.

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MICHAL SVOBODA, COO, ALLYN INTERNATIONAL

CLASS OF 2018

Service-learning inspired alum to find herself and her true calling

BY TIERNEY SADLER

YOU DON'T HAVE to sell Kaya Lee on the idea of volunteerism. Her service-learning experience at FGCU helped her discover her passion and her career.

Since graduating in 2018 with a psychology degree, Lee has worked at the Children's Home Society, which works with foster children in Southwest Florida. But she has been working with children all her life. Her mom assisted homeless families and substance abuse recoverees, so Lee helped out. She also became a Sunday school teacher at age 14.

Coming to FGCU changed things. Until then, volunteerism felt like "helping mom out." They were mom's projects under mom's leadership. And they were gratifying. But at FGCU, Lee became the driver of her own service experiences – choosing the agencies she volunteered for and taking leadership roles in service-oriented groups. This shift inspired her passion and, as she says, "helped her find herself and her true calling."

Her current story began freshman year when a friend encouraged her to join the Students for Children organization on campus. Students for

Children volunteers with agencies to give disadvantaged children resources and experiences they otherwise would not have. Since students brainstorm the programs themselves and approach agencies to serve, it helped her enhance her creativity and learn how to do a lot with a little.

One organization they served was the Children's Home Society. Students for Children devised a program where kids come to the campus, take a tour, meet students and talk about college and life. But there was one key fact that nobody told her at the time that would inform Lee's professional future: Foster children in Florida receive free tuition waivers for the state's universities and colleges.

So there was deeper import to these tours than she knew. College wasn't just an abstract idea for these children. It was a reality – if they knew about it and wanted it to be. She also didn't know that only 2.5 percent of eligible teens use their waiver.

Lee stayed with Students for Children throughout college, eventually becoming the group's president. As she moved toward graduation, she saw that the Children's Home Society was looking for a part-time family support worker. But the job required two years of experience, leaving Lee thinking, "There is no way I'm going to get into that agency." She

applied anyway. She documented every minute of her volunteer experiences. In the end, it added up to two years of full-time work. She got the job.

Today, Lee works on the other side of the Children's Home Society equation as an independent living counselor, helping foster children learn interviewing skills, secure a bank account and develop other "adulting" tools. She makes herself present for FGCU's initiatives, because she remembers running programs with little agency input. She makes it known that her agency seeks volunteers through FGCU's Office of Service-Learning.

With her student-led tours thriving, she has now begun focusing on setting up a mentorship program between foster children and college students. The program is coming to speed gradually, but already sees results. One child, who has lived in five homes in the past year, found a welcome and consistent source of support from her student mentor.

Lee's service experience has created great success in her life. Her message to FGCU students today: "Do service-learning not because it's required, but because it opens up new doors for you and helps you discover who you are. I would have been cheated out of this amazing opportunity if I hadn't done so much volunteering. It has shaped the life I live today." ■



A L U M N I

“

Do service-learning not because it's required, but because it opens up new doors for you and helps you discover who you are. I would have been cheated out of this amazing opportunity if I hadn't done so much volunteering. It has shaped the life I live today.

KAYA LEE

”

PHOTO BY BRIAN TIETZ

CLASS OF 2015

Exercise science grad finds career at Babcock Ranch a great fit

BY SETH SOFFIAN

HE WAS BORN AND raised in Southwest Florida and went to Florida Gulf Coast University on a full scholarship the school offered at the time to high school valedictorians.

His wife is a former FGCU basketball star beloved by Eagles fans.

And he rides his bicycle to work in the progressive new solar-powered community, Babcock Ranch.

Mathieu Knapp ('15, Exercise Science), a Cape Coral native, is indeed the type of alumnus university founders had in mind when establishing the school not long before he was born: ambitious, accomplished, tied to the community and a proud representative of his hometown school.

"I was very pleased with the program," said Knapp, 26, wellness and program manager for the Health Life Centers at Babcock Ranch, the burgeoning community on the Lee-Charlotte county line where he and his wife, Taylor (formerly Gradinjan), built a home. "It was very rigorous. It was all worth it. Not to mention there was the beautiful campus and everything else."

Knapp, tops in his graduating class of 28 at Cape Coral Christian School in 2010, always loved sports but entered FGCU intending to study business or engineering.

It wasn't until he took a sports science course that he found the career path that would make him a fast-rising member in the health and wellness arm of Lee Health.

"You were learning about the body and how it moves," he said. "From there on out I was like, 'This is it.'"

After interning with Lee Health's wellness center in Cape Coral, Knapp was hired upon graduating as an exercise specialist.

He was promoted to lead exercise specialist in Cape Coral a year later, then was promoted to supervise Babcock Ranch's new wellness center. The position includes oversight of the exercise specialists at Lee Health's Cape Coral and Fort Myers locations as well. In August, he was promoted to wellness and program manager.

"I feel accomplished," he said, "but to be honest, I was just doing the best I could do. It came down to hard work and doing the best I can at my job."

In work and at home, life couldn't be any better for Knapp.

The Knapps moved into the house they built in Babcock Ranch in October 2018 and married last April. He hopes to start working soon on a master's degree in business at FGCU.

Meanwhile, he's on the Leadership Next Committee for the Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce and he and his wife remain active at the university.



"We're both part of the alumni association. We try to come back and hang out and give when we can," Knapp said. "We are proud of FGCU and everything the school has become."

His wife, who earned her master's degree in health administration in 2018 and works for Sport and Spine Chiropractic in Fort Myers, became the rare collegiate athlete to have six seasons of eligibility after twice tearing the anterior cruciate ligament in the same knee in her first two years at FGCU.

While an unfortunate link, it's one more thing that connects the active, visible FGCU couple, whose union delights Babcock Ranch wellness members.

PHOTO BY BRIAN TIETZ



"If I say her name anywhere, someone's going to know it, which is quite impressive," he said. "It makes me extra proud and honored to be her husband."

Given the young couple's career ambitions, Knapp can't say Southwest Florida will be their permanent home. But with everything they have here, he expects to remain part of FGCU's ever-widening local influence for some time.

"Since she's from Wisconsin and the cold, she's not going anywhere near it again. So she says," Knapp said of his wife. "I've never actually touched snow. I have an inkling to try it out. But that could be just as a visit rather than to live. I'm getting a little tired of the heat. But we'll be around for a while." ■

“

I feel accomplished. But to be honest, I was just doing the best I could do. It came down to hard work and doing the best I can at my job.

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MATHIEU KNAPP

CLASS OF 2009

For Meghan Schuman, animals are much more than pet projects

BY RICK WEBER

MEGHAN SCHUMAN has come full circle. She grew up on a 35-acre spread in north Cape Coral that's essentially a hobby farm. And for the past 2 years – ever since being named associate veterinarian at Viscaya-Prado Veterinary Hospital in Cape Coral – she has lived on that spread.

This is where she first dreamed of becoming a veterinarian. In a place like this, you are allowed to dream.

"When I was little girl, I remember standing on the gate and watching the cows graze in the morning," she says. "I grew up with that lifestyle. Not too many people have that, especially in Cape Coral.

"People come out and say, 'I didn't know this existed. I've never seen anything like this.' It's a little nook in Cape Coral that's a wooded area. We can kind of do whatever we want out here, which is nice."

She lives there with assorted farm animals and her housemates – two dogs, a cat, a guinea pig and a bird.

Schuman took the necessarily long and winding road to becoming a veterinarian: She served as a kennel technician at Coral Veterinary Clinic in Fort Myers for four years while attending FGCU, graduating in 2009 with a biology degree. She then spent two years as a veterinary technician

in Orlando before earning her doctorate of veterinary medicine from Western University of Health Sciences in California in 2017. Then she returned to take the job at Viscaya-Prado.

It's a 24-hour facility, and Schuman is there at some odd hours.

"I do a lot of emergency C-sections," she says. "That happens in the middle of a Friday night and they have nowhere else to go. Those are pretty exciting.

"I am one of the doctors who sees pocket pets – considered exotic animal medicine. I really like treating guinea pigs and rats that come in, often for pneumonia. They come in pretty sick and we hospitalize them and do nebulization treatments on them."

Her job has frustrations, just like any job. But she finds powerful intrinsic reward in being a trusted ally of people who consider their pets to be family members and anxiously seek to have them restored to full health.

"You see an animal turn around and become more like themselves because of the kind of care we can give them – that's one of the cool parts of my job," she says. "People bring in a pet that can't speak for itself. The animal might be all they have left in their life. That is everything to them. They trust me to take care of that and make them better."

One recent surgery that really excited her was operating on a 16-year-old, 16-foot-long pet python whose tail had become necrotic, exposing her spinal cord. With the help of veterinarian Gary Nelson – who came out of retirement to assist – she successfully amputated the offending portion of the tail.

"She was 115 pounds and she was so beautiful," Schuman says, adding that it gave her a lot of satisfaction to be able to take part in such an unusual procedure.

It won't be long until she adds another service to those available at Viscaya-Prado: In October she expected to earn her certification in acupuncture and plans to begin offering it by the end of the year.

"I believe in Western medicine," she says, "but I also think there's a place for non-drug therapy."

And, as if that's not enough good news, she became engaged to her boyfriend, an emergency medical technician, in September. They expect to marry next fall.

She says FGCU gave her a well-rounded education that prepared her for vet school, and now her goal is to make it easier for others aspiring to be veterinarians.

FGCU has asked her to mentor students, and she welcomes the opportunity.

"I think that would be cool to talk to students if they want to come shadow



me or want to know what's going on in veterinary medicine," she says. "I'd love to educate them while they are in their undergraduate field of study and want to get more of an awareness for vet school and the things you need to do to prepare for it." ■

“

People bring in a pet that can't speak for itself. The animal might be all they have left in their life. That is everything to them. They trust me to take care of that and make them better.

”

MEGHAN SCHUMAN

ALUMNI SURVEY

Alumni survey finds most Eagles successful, satisfied with college experience

BY KEITH GIBSON

THOSE OF US currently learning, teaching and working at Florida Gulf Coast University know it's a great place, but don't take our word for it.

How about an endorsement that comes from a representative sampling of 29,418 people who already have been here, done that?

In fact, if you look at the Alumni Research Findings compiled by the firm SimpsonScarborough in a survey that was commissioned earlier this year by FGCU Alumni Relations, it seems FGCU grades out as more than just great.

It's transformative.

With 9 in 10 alums who were surveyed not only employed, but convinced that their FGCU experience has made their overall lives better, it appears that the university creates a higher-education environment that fosters student success and postgraduate satisfaction.

That's great news to Kimberly Wallace, director of Alumni Relations and an Eagle alumna herself. She wanted the survey done "to learn about our graduates' interests, their career

achievements and preferred way to communicate with FGCU."

"We wanted a snapshot of the FGCU alumni population – where they are, what they're doing, and how they've maintained their relationship with the university," said Wallace, who earned a master's in School Counseling ('09) and bachelor's in Communication-Public Relations ('06) at FGCU, and is married to fellow alum Darrin Wallace ('05, Liberal Studies).

"We also wanted to gather information about the return-on-investment of an FGCU education, to better understand and quantify the economic and social impact of our alumni in Southwest Florida and beyond," Wallace said. "It's also important to know how alumni feel about their FGCU experience and their perceived level of engagement with us, and how we can strengthen that engagement and communication."

SimpsonScarborough – a higher-education marketing, branding and research agency with offices in Washington, D.C., and Oakland, Calif. – conducted the online survey in November and December 2018. Of the 29,418 alums the firm tried

to reach, 1,089 responded – a 4 percent response rate that is considered a valid, representative sample, with a 2.9 percent margin of error.

"The results will guide future events and programs," Wallace said. "For instance, alumni are most interested in attending educational conferences and trainings, so we will start hosting online webinars."

Of all the facts and figures the survey gleaned, one in particular surprised Wallace most. "That our graduates have such a strong entrepreneurial spirit," she said. "One in five of our alumni have started their own business, with a majority of those businesses headquartered in Southwest Florida."

"This survey will help us better understand our constituents," said Michael Nacheff ('10, Political Science), chair of the FGCU Alumni Association Board of Directors and director of government relations for Lee Health. "Knowing that roughly half of our alumni remain local and engaged in our community tells us that FGCU is doing a great job as a regional university providing an employment pipeline for Southwest Florida." ■

We wanted a snapshot of the FGCU alumni population – where they are, what they're doing, and how they've maintained their relationship with the university.

KIMBERLY WALLACE

ROI OF AN FGCU EDUCATION

- 90 percent of alumni work full- or part-time or are self-employed
- 70 percent work in their field of FGCU study within six months of graduation
- 65 percent say that their FGCU degree has retained its value or is more valuable today

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACT

- 90 percent of alumni agree FGCU has had a direct positive impact on their lives
- More than 80 percent see FGCU playing pivotal roles in the local economy and in providing a skilled workforce
- 70 percent maintain sustainable lifestyle practices because of their FGCU experience

HOW ALUMNI FEEL ABOUT FGCU

- 90 percent of alumni have very positive opinions about FGCU and are optimistic about the university's future
- 85 percent would choose to attend FGCU again
- Collectively, alumni say business, hospitality, sustainability and nursing are top academic strengths

ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

- More than 80 percent of alumni want to have moderate to high engagement with FGCU
- Half feel a strong connection to the university, with recent and Florida alumni most connected
- Half of alumni business owners would like to hire an FGCU student or graduate



SPORTS

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Fly ready for a fresh start in his second season

Eagles' coach grows along with his program

BY SETH SOFFIAN

NEW LIFE IS everywhere in the second season of the Michael Fly era with the Florida Gulf Coast University men's basketball team. And we don't just mean the roster.

In taking yet another page from the playbook of former Dunk City boss Andy Enfield, Fly anticipates his infant son becoming a regular at Eagles activities.

Enfield, now in his seventh season at Southern California after engineering FGCU's famed NCAA tournament debut in 2013, also liked having his wife and three young children around the team in part for the bubbly joy and family atmosphere it lent to the program.

"I hope it feels similar in a lot of ways," said Fly, 36, whose wife, Heather, gave birth to their first child, Jack Archer Fly, on June 19. "It just changes your life, your perspective, your priorities. It changes everything."

After a sometimes disappointing, sometimes thrilling campaign in Fly's rookie season, season two will be defined by great change – and great opportunity – as well.

Gone are eight scholarship players from last year's team that started dreadfully,





Whenever a coach takes over at any level at any place, there's always a transition. It's really hard to win. I think people don't always understand that."



MICHAEL FLY, HEAD COACH, MEN'S BASKETBALL

surged late, but ultimately had the program's worst record and ASUN Conference result in seven seasons. That was due, in part, to what Fly called the greatest adversity he's ever seen a team face.

"Our biggest expectation is, let's get better every day," the Kentucky native said of this season. "I don't want to talk about March, championships, any of that. I want to talk about, are we getting better? Are we better than last year? And are we building a foundation?"

Expectations, of course, are a big thing at FGCU. March Madness big. Even Sweet 16 big.

So Fly, now in his ninth year at FGCU after spending his first seven as an assistant to Enfield and Joe Dooley, is careful to make it clear that winning will always be high among program expectations while still explaining that, frankly, they might have been a bit unrealistic last year.

"Fans want to always see that there's never a break in the program, that things keep rolling," Fly said. "Whenever a coach takes over at any level at any place, there's always a transition. It's really hard to win. I think people don't always understand that."

Indeed, no fewer than eight players were unavailable for all or parts of the season due to injuries, the transfer of Zach Johnson to Miami and a program dismissal.

Despite a strong finish, FGCU went just 14-18 and tied for third in the ASUN. It was the team's first result outside the top two since Enfield's debut year in 2011-12.

Gone from that team are four seniors, including leading scorers Schadrac

Casimir and Dinero Mercurius. Three more interior players also transferred: Troy Baxter to Morgan State, Brady Ernst to Drake and RaySean Scott to D-II Humboldt State in his native California.

The upside to the adversity last year was the unexpected head start its young players got.

Junior forward Brian Thomas and sophomore guards Zach Scott from Miami and Caleb Catto of Southwest Florida Christian Academy form the nucleus of a revamped roster adding eight players to the mix: three freshmen, three junior college transfers, one D-I transfer and one D-II transfer.

"We've got a really good group from a depth standpoint, but we don't have a lot of guys who are proven at the D-I level," Fly said.

FGCU's schedule won't make the adjustment to so many newcomers any easier. The Eagles opened the season Nov. 5 at reigning Atlantic 10 conference champion Saint Louis, one of at least seven teams FGCU faces this year that advanced to postseason tournaments a year ago.

A strong non-conference slate includes the return of fierce former ASUN rival Mercer to the schedule, visits to Alico Arena from 20-win teams Campbell and Georgia Southern in the Hilton Garden Inn FGCU Classic, and the first game in a three-year series against Enfield's USC squad.

A year ago, injuries and roster

limitations kept FGCU from playing the open-ended, high-flying style Enfield ushered in years ago and Fly sought to recapture.

But targeted recruiting and extensive time this offseason studying other programs has Fly confident the Eagles will be able to infuse exciting new life into the team for the long haul.

"There's stuff we can do that realistically last year we couldn't," Fly said. "A little more freedom in running a little motion offense is something we haven't done since Andy was here. If we're healthy, we've got depth, we've got pieces that fit."

There's no guarantee on the latter, of course.

Senior wing Christian Carlyle, who started 24 games last year, will miss all of his final season after needing surgery for a shoulder injury suffered playing summer pickup basketball.

And the 6-foot, 9-inch, 255-pound Thomas – who shot a team-best 67.2 percent last year, led FGCU with 44 blocked shots and was second with 4.7 rebounds a game – was held out of most summer activities as a precaution following surgery last year for a stress fracture in his leg.

Still, with plenty of new arrivals – and one vacant scholarship FGCU might keep open or use on a midseason transfer if the right player surfaces – the Eagles like their options.

"I'm excited," Catto said. "We have a lot of new pieces. I just look forward to the challenge of competing each day, worrying about ourselves and letting the rest take care of itself." ■



Zach Scott



Caleb Catto

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WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Women's basketball team faces toughest ever non-conference schedule in effort to excel

BY SETH SOFFIAN

IN ITS PERENNIAL EFFORT for excellence, the Florida Gulf Coast University women's basketball team always lines up as rugged a non-conference schedule as it can.

But this year's schedule is mind-boggling.

Headlined by a Thanksgiving week meeting with reigning national runner-up Notre Dame in Mexico and prized home dates with major attractions Duke and LSU, FGCU's schedule shows how good the Eagles believe they can be this season.

Mostly, though, as FGCU coach Karl Smesko puts it, it reveals how good the rest of the basketball landscape thinks the team

can be – deep, talented and experienced.

And dangerous enough to perhaps stand a chance of reaching the NCAA tournament Sweet 16.

"It's always a two-way street," said Smesko, who led FGCU last season to its sixth ASUN tournament title and accompanying NCAA tournament berth in 8 years of eligibility.

"When you're supposed to be pretty good, a lot of times the only teams that will play you are the teams that also think they're going to be really good," he said. "When those are the only games available, you start to have a schedule like we have."

FGCU loses only two players from last

season's rotation, and they're critical ones in fifth-year seniors Lisa Zderadicka and Destiny Washington.

But six upperclassmen return to the rotation. And four are seniors, including leading scorer Nasrin Ulel, leading rebounder Tytionia Adderly and ASUN tournament MVP Keri Jewett-Giles.

The latter, from Dunbar High School in Fort Myers, even changed her mind late in the summer – opting to return for a fifth year of eligibility – in part because of the strength of the team.

"I feel like we have a chance to do great things," Jewett-Giles said. "Especially with more people coming back (and) the



chemistry we built last year. You never want to give that up.”

With fellow fifth-year senior guard Davion Wingate also back, and former Indiana State guard Ashli O’Neal transferring to FGCU as a graduate student, the Eagles have three starting-caliber point guards able to provide constant pressure and pace.

“They’re all super-quick athletes,” Smesko said. “Having two or even three of them on the floor at the same time just makes us even quicker.”

Washington’s versatility – she was third on the team in scoring, second in rebounding and first in blocks and field-goal percentage – is irreplaceable.

But junior Kerstie Phills returns from the front court rotation and will be joined by sophomores Tanner Bryant and Emma List and junior Alyssa Blair in trying to fill that void.

Junior guard Chandler Ryan, who shot 41.1 percent on 3-pointers last season, and sophomore guard Tyra Cox, who played well after Zderadicka was injured

in February, also give FGCU depth and experience to potentially start the season fast, and perhaps finish even faster.

“We have so many returning players that know how we’re supposed to do things,” said Smesko, in his 18th season as FGCU’s program-founding coach. “Hopefully that moves things along quicker so we can be a little better in the early part of the season than normal.”

The team opened the season at FIU on Nov. 5, then faced its first major test in its home opener Nov. 13 against UCF. (Both games took place after the magazine went to press.) The Knights reached the NCAA tournament last year and finished the season with a record of 26-6 and RPI of 15.

Three more NCAA tournament qualifiers from last year – not even including December Alico Arena visitors Duke and LSU, perennial powers both forecast to rebound from down seasons – further pepper a non-conference slate Smesko agreed is the program’s toughest ever.

Also of significance this offseason, longtime Eagles associate head coach Chelsea

The Eagles celebrate after their win against Liberty last March to clinch the ASUN Championship.

Banbury left for her first head-coaching position, at D-I High Point University in North Carolina.

Assistant coach Jenna Cobb also moved on from the team. But former Eagles point guard Shannon Murphy returned to the program as an assistant coach, one more point of encouragement for a program potentially looking at a historic campaign.

“We’re lucky to have Shannon rejoin us, somebody that knows our style of play very well,” Smesko said. “I like the fact that despite some changes in the coaching staff we were able to keep a unit that gets along great together and works well together.” ■

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ON THE
WEB
FGCU360.com
VIDEO HONORING
CARMEN PAEZ

Softball star inducted into ASUN Hall of Fame

Carmen Paez becomes third Eagle to receive honor / **BY TOM HAYDEN**

A PHONE CALL FROM FGCU softball coach David Deiros changed player Carmen Paez's life. Twelve years later, another call cemented her improbable journey from school dropout to Hall of Famer.

In just two years, Paez ('08) became one of the most decorated softball players in the 17-year history of the Eagles program, earning All-American and Atlantic Sun Conference Player of the Year honors and setting several school records. For her achievements, the ASUN inducted her into its Hall of Fame on Oct. 7. She joined Chris Sale (baseball) and Brooke Youngquist Sweat (volleyball) as the only Eagles to earn enshrinement.

The Paez way is to be humble and that is how she accepts the honor and her career. "I felt like there were so many better

players out there, but somebody thought I deserved this," said the now-35-year-old. "I do stuff and don't expect anything in return."

But there was a time when an All-American honor and a Hall of Fame induction seemed unfathomable for Paez, who grew up in the Lake Okeechobee community of Belle Glade.

Paez earned a full scholarship to play softball at Indian River State College, a junior college in Fort Pierce. But academics took a back seat to friends and partying. She failed class after class and dropped out of school. "I basically dug a hole I could not get out of," Paez wrote in a lengthy letter about her life, which she hopes will help inspire young women. "I ruined the best thing I had worked for my entire life over wanting to go out and doing things that were so temporary. I caused my parents a lot of disappointment

ABOVE: Carmen Paez throws out the first pitch against Jacksonville April 13.

RIGHT: Paez during her playing days with FGCU.

and sadness."

Happiness returned with the birth of her son, PJ, who is now 14. "No longer did I feel my life was ruined," Paez wrote. She went to work as a substitute teacher and girls' softball coach at Glades Day School. She also took a job at a local convenience store called Norman's Drive Thru.

Then came the surprising news from Deiros. He had called Dale Atkinson, Paez's former coach at Indian River, asking if the college had any current players who could fill FGCU's need for a power hitter. Atkinson gave a few names, but "not what we were looking for," Deiros said. The next day, Atkinson called back with another name: Paez. "Dale didn't have to do a lot

of convincing. We had competed against Carmen (while she was at Indian River), and we knew about her from her high school days at Glades Day, where she was coached by her mom.”

Paez met with Deiros, who offered her a full scholarship if she completed the necessary academic work to enroll at FGCU. She refocused on school and getting back in shape after not playing softball for two years. She passed an exam to graduate from Indian River and made the Dean’s List. “I decided I wanted a better life for my son and myself and made it a point to pass that exam,” Paez wrote.

Her softball workouts were intense. Paez ran the Herbert Hoover Dike, which borders Lake Okeechobee, up to 20 times during training sessions with her dad. She ran in the sugar cane fields, chasing rabbits. She hit bucket after bucket of softballs.

During her first game against Palm Beach Atlantic in 2007, she went hitless in four tries. In the second game against Palm Beach

Atlantic, Paez hit a two-run home run in her first at-bat. “That is what changed everything for me,” she wrote. “I knew I still had it in me.”

On her first day on campus, Deiros recalled, “Then Athletic Director Carl McAlouse was passing by my office after she left and asked, ‘How good is she?’ I said she would hit 25 home runs and drive in 60 runs. I was wrong.”

She went on to set NCAA Division II records with 28 home runs and 80 RBI that season and was named national player of the year.

But there was more to overcome. Paez played third base that year and hated it. She developed a fear of hard-hit ground

balls off aluminum bats. She felt out of control. She wanted to play in the outfield but needed to increase her speed to chase down fly balls. She lost 40 pounds between her junior and senior seasons, cutting out ice cream and sugar, and improving her fitness routine.

In 2008, the Eagles’ first season in NCAA Division I, Paez was named the ASUN Player of the Year, hitting 22 home runs and helping the Eagles to a share of the league championship.

She remains the Eagles’ record holder in batting average (.430), slugging percentage (.934) and OPS (1.521), is second in career home runs (50) and fourth in RBI (148).

In her Oct. 7 induction speech at the ASUN 2019 Hall of Fame banquet and ceremony at the Cohen Center ballroom, where she joined Lipscomb’s Ann Mullins (volleyball, 2005-07) and College of Charleston’s John Kresse (men’s basketball head coach, 1991-98) in this year’s class, Paez thanked the coaches and schools who helped turn her life in a better direction.

“Thank you to FGCU for letting me finish my college career here and giving me a second chance,” said Paez, who graduated in 2008 with a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice. “Also to my coaches, Dale Atkinson and

David Deiros. Having Coach Deiros believe in me and put his name on the line for me changed everything for my son and my family, so I appreciate it so much.”

Today, Paez lives in Port Charlotte with her husband and three children. She works at the Walmart Distribution Center in Arcadia and is attending medical school at Suncoast Technical College in Sarasota, where she is studying to be a surgeon’s assistant. ■



UPDATES:

WHAT WINNING REALLY LOOKS LIKE

The investment in FGCU Athletics’ Hartley Academic Resource Center is paying off, as evidenced by these stats from the Spring 2019 semester:

► **A cumulative grade-point average of 3.32**, with 40 Eagle student-athletes earning 4.0 GPAs.

► **Some 109 of the 259 FGCU student-athletes made the Dean’s List** with a 3.5 GPA or higher. A total of 186 scored at least 3.0 to make the Athletic Director Honor Roll.

► **Four Eagles made ASUN Conference All-Academic Teams** in the Spring, bringing the number of FGCU all-conference academic stars to 13 for the past academic year: Kohl Gilmore and Keith Stevens (baseball), Maggie Rick and Cortney VanLiew (volleyball), Destiny Washington and Lisa Zderadicka (women’s basketball), Amanda Carroll (beach volleyball), Madeline Marck-Sherk (women’s golf), Holly Fritz and Lindsey Patton (women’s soccer), Julia Ascua and Maja Ornberg (women’s tennis) and Carley Lutzow (women’s cross country).

► **Of the student-athletes cited above, Rick, Ascua and Fritz were ASUN Scholars of the Year** in their respective sports. Fritz had an especially fruitful year, also being named ASUN co-Female Athlete of the Year, and first team Academic All-American by both the College Sports Information Directors of America and U.S. Soccer Coaches Association.

► **In swimming and diving, Christina Kaas Elmgreen, Cassidy Fry and Gracie Redding all made honorable mention on the Scholar All-American Team** selected by the College Swimming and Diving Coaches Association.

Not a bad showing for “head coach” Kelly Jean Brock, FGCU associate athletics director and director of the Hartley center, and her academics team. When you consider that FGCU sports teams also racked up eight more ASUN regular-season and tournament titles in 2018-19, the cumulative numbers tell a tale of twofold success in the classroom and competition. ■

THE FGCU EFFECT

The FGCU Effect: Sitting on tradition

ONE FLORIDA GULF Coast University tradition is to immerse oneself waist-deep in the fountain outside Lutgert

Hall for a graduation photo.

But thanks to the FGCU Alumni Association and Student Government, students and alums can now create lasting memories without getting wet.

The Azul Bench was introduced Sept. 12 to Eagle Nation. Perched outside the Cohen Center among the commemorative, personalized bricks in Alumni Legacy Plaza, the bronze statue of FGCU mascot Azul the Eagle sitting on a stainless-steel bench is the new picture-perfect place to preserve memories.

Commissioned by FGCU's Director of Alumni Relations Kimberly Wallace ('09, School Counseling Master's; '06 Communication), and supported by co-funding from Student Government under the leadership of 2018-19 president Jalisa White ('18, Political Science), the 800-pound Azul Bench came from the imagination and creative studio of Utah sculptor Virgil Oertle to forever mark a spot on campus where the grandest Eagle of them all holds court.

Wallace said that in addition to being "where seniors bid farewell to campus as they transition to alumni," the Azul Bench can be a "place where freshmen tell Azul what they hope to accomplish as a student, or a spot where couples get engaged."

White, who's pursuing a master's in Public Administration at FGCU and is on the Alumni Association Board of Directors, said, "This statue symbolizes The FGCU Effect on students because of the history that will be built upon it ... a permanent and lasting legacy on campus that will make students feel like FGCU is their home." ■



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PAYING TRIBUTE The university honored its fourth president, Wilson G. Bradshaw, by naming the library after him. A dedication took place Oct. 21 to recognize the former president and the contributions he made during his 10-year tenure. He served as president from 2007 to 2017.

