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students to be
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just for you)

Snake whisperer leaves rich legacy • Annual awards honor alumni
Salsa is sexy – and fun

SPRING 2020

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

Most stories in this issue were reported and written prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the cessation of on-campus classes and activities in mid-March.

FIRST

UPDATE

COVID-19 wreaks havoc worldwide – and strikes home at FGCU

BY KAREN FELDMAN

COMMENCEMENT. The women's basketball championship and March Madness. The groundbreaking for the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. The sold-out alumni FGCU Fishing Invitational. The FGCU Research Roadshow. Labs and fundraisers and parties and end-of-the-year ceremonies.

All these joyous events and meaningful milestones were canceled or postponed as a result of coronavirus.

COVID-19 drastically impacted the second half of FGCU's spring semester, those of the rest of the State University System and countless other institutions across the world. This invisible menace has affected everyone, changing our lives for an indefinite time.

Although the circumstances were beyond the university's control, how people reacted to them was not. The indomitable spirit of FGCU Eagles quickly became evident as everyone shifted to remote learning and banded together to help one another.

"The FGCU community demonstrated its unity and fortitude during Hurricane Irma and has done so once again during this unprecedented crisis," FGCU President Mike Martin said. "While it is enormously disappointing to have to cancel commencement, we will find creative ways to celebrate the success of our graduates. The most important

consideration at this time is keeping everyone safe."

The university is planning a virtual commencement, with the hope there will be a traditional ceremony for spring graduates later in the year.

On March 15, just a week after students returned to campus from spring break, they were encouraged to return home for two weeks as concern about the coronavirus grew statewide. Two days later, the Florida Board of Governors, which oversees the State University System, declared that all classes would be conducted remotely for the remainder of the semester and traditional in-person commencement ceremonies would be canceled.

Emily Simpson, a senior majoring in journalism, no doubt spoke for many of her 1,966 fellow graduating seniors when she wrote this op-ed published in The

News-Press on March 18: "Since being at FGCU, I have learned more about life and learned more about myself than I ever thought was possible...What has made my college experience so great has been the connections I've made with professors and students, something that can't be replicated online.

"It's a melancholy feeling to send out graduation announcements and take graduation pictures for a ceremony that is not happening. It's heartbreaking that this is how my college experience, the greatest four years of my life, is ending."

Campus housing was open for students without offsite relocation options. Takeout dining service was open along with the residence halls.

Some students – and the staff required to ensure that the university continued to operate – remained, but the campus was noticeably quieter than normal.

"I need not tell you that this is a historically difficult time," Martin said, "not just on this campus, but across this community, across this nation and around the world. But I also want you to know that we are all working hard and that we



FGCU
President
Mike
Martin

**FOR THE LATEST UPDATES
ON COVID-19 VISIT:**

fgcu.edu/coronaupdate



“The FGCU community demonstrated its unity and fortitude during Hurricane Irma and has done so once again during this unprecedented crisis.”



MIKE MARTIN, FGCU PRESIDENT

will come out of this pandemic stronger than we were going in.”

Staff, faculty and students continued to work and study.

The graduate students and faculty who staff The Community Counseling Center conducted telecounseling sessions with about half the clients they normally see in person, according to Alise Bartley, the director of the on-campus clinic that provides affordable counseling to the public.

Telecounseling involves the counselor and client each using a computer and camera and communicating from a distance.

“We’ve had really strong participation,” she said. “We’re excited to be there to support our clients. We are addressing with all clients how to handle change and to continue being positive.

“The students are happy, too. They are very excited about learning another skillset.”

For the Bower School of Music & the Arts, the cancellation of in-person classes also meant that the 22nd annual Student Juried Exhibition would not take place. But Assistant Curator Anica Sturdivant and a group of student workers photographed all the work and created an online catalog that allowed the works to be viewed. Most are available for purchase, with proceeds going to the students.

Obviously, it’s too early to assess the full impact of COVID-19 on the world. But everyone associated with FGCU should take comfort in knowing that the university family united to make the best of a bad situation. ■



“Human Race” sculpture by Raymond L. Lutgert



After treatment for leukemia,
Lisa Hamman has found her voice again.

ON THE
WEB
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WATCH HAMMAN'S
SOLO
PERFORMANCE

STUDENT SUCCESS

Student triumphs over illness with a song in her heart

Music education major overcomes obstacles in her greatest performance

BY KEITH GIBSON

STUDENTS TAKE MANY paths to Florida Gulf Coast University, but few are as frightening as the one that led Lisa Hamman here.

A lifelong Cape Coral resident and 2013 North Fort Myers High School graduate, Hamman originally left home to attend Florida State University and the pursuit of a music degree. Things went great for a couple of years, but fate had a different plan.

A diagnosis of leukemia her junior year would lead Hamman back to Southwest Florida for ongoing cancer treatment and, most of all, support from a close family. As she recovered, a stroke caused by a chemotherapy drug would be another unforeseen health obstacle, as would the chemo-ravaged hips that will require replacement.

But despite all that life threw at her, Hamman had an inner strength she could

fall back on to help lift her spirits:

The songs she carried in her heart, even when she was too sick to sing them.

That's how a talented coloratura lyric soprano deals with a potentially life-threatening situation. And that's what helped Hamman almost seamlessly transfer from FSU back home and to familiar mentors at FGCU and the Bower School of Music & the Arts, where – now cancer-free and returning to peak vocal form –

PHOTO BY JAMES GERCO

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she made a solo performance in November at the U. Tobe Recital Hall.

Technically, that stage appearance was her junior recital to meet requirements for a music education degree. Personally, it represented another big step in Hamman's triumphant comeback from the worst kind of adversity.

Lisa Hamman has been a singer since her childhood. "I remember being in the grocery store with my mother as a young girl, singing up and down the aisles," she said.

She sang with the youth choir at Cape Elementary School in third grade, ascending to soloist by fourth grade. Later, while attending the arts magnet school at North Fort Myers High, she got a chance to work closely for two years with Jeanie Darnell, music professor and head of vocal studies at FGCU.

"She has always been a superb student, and very serious about her preparation and artistry," said Darnell, herself an internationally acclaimed soprano and voice instructor.

It was just before spring break of her junior year at FSU in 2017 that Hamman noticed swelling in her lymph nodes while doing her warmup exercises prior to singing. Ready to embark on a multistate tour with an FSU choral group, she decided to make a doctor's appointment at the campus wellness center. "I was tested for mono, which came up negative, and the lab work all came back normal. The doctor said it was fine to go on the trip."

But during the tour, Hamman's body starting swelling and became painful. "During opera chorus in the spring, I would just crash after rehearsal," she said. "I called my mom and told her I didn't know if I could continue. I felt like I would just fall off the stage."

"Within a week, my blood count had gone from normal to a skyrocketing white-cell blood count and a plummeting platelet count."

Hamman was diagnosed with T-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia, an aggressive form of blood cancer.

Among those supporting her was her older brother, Brian, an FGCU alum ('04, Communication), a part-time member of the Alumni Relations team, and



She is generous as a performer; she gives her whole heart in the moment when presenting. She regularly inspires me, her voice teacher."

**JEANIE DARNELL,
MUSIC PROFESSOR**

chairman of the Lee County Board of Commissioners.

When he learned about his younger sister's illness, he was "devastated."

"We have a very close family, and we just surrounded Lisa with love and did all we could to fight alongside her," he said.

Lisa Hamman went into remission after a month of chemo at Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, and the family decided in May 2017 to bring her home and continue treatment at Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida. "They specialize in pediatric oncology there, and the doctors agreed that as a young adult, I would respond better to pediatric care," Hamman said.

But while she was winning her leukemia fight, Hamman suffered another setback when one of the drugs used to treat her triggered a stroke. After a few days in the ICU, she began to recover, then returned home. At that point, the pursuit of her life's passion was limited to "singing around the house for hours."

"Chemo and steroids gave me bad acid reflux, which destroys the voice," Hamman said. "I had pretty much recovered entirely from the stroke, but when I sang in the shower after I got home, I sounded so wretched. It was awful. I went into mini-depression mode, but managed to calm down, and just

(continued on next page 8)

(continued from page 7)



Hardwork and prayer helped Lisa Hamman in her battle against cancer.

stopped singing. I decided I just needed to rest and take care of my voice.”

By January 2018, Hamman had the OK to resume taking classes, but doctors told her she “might want to stay local, because we need you here every two weeks,” she said.

So she turned to the two Southwest Florida voice professors who knew her best. “I emailed both Dr. Darnell and Dr. (Trent) Brown (associate professor of music), who

had worked with the choir at North quite a bit, because they knew what had been going on with me,” she said. “They took me in like mama and daddy bird.”

While Darnell and Brown made her return to school easier, they could not speed the recovery of Hamman’s voice. The chemo caused nerve damage to her vocal cords and diaphragm. She was hoarse. “There was a lack of control over my singing I had never experienced before. I had to struggle to get my voice under control for the first time in my life. So I

decided to give myself a break. I couldn’t over-sing.”

Eventually, she resumed with shorter practice sessions and rebuilt her muscle memory on breathing technique. “Once I stopped the chemo in August 2019, it got better immediately,” Hamman said. “They tell me it could take up to a year for the effects to go away, but now I can feel it again. It’s coming back.”

At FGCU, Hamman majors in music education, and during her recovery, the faculty has helped her as best they can. “Everyone there has been so very understanding of the medical aspect I’ve been dealing with,” she said.

That included giving the now-senior a slight delay before she made her junior recital performance, until she was physically and mentally ready. That came Nov. 15, when she took the U. Tobe stage.

She plans to graduate after student teaching in fall 2021, and then, “I’ll be seeing where life takes me,” Hamman said. But in the wake of her recital performance, Hamman has earned the admiration of those who know best what she has endured.

“Fighting cancer is not just a physical battle, it’s mental,” her brother Brian said. “Watching Lisa go through that and not give up was inspiring. I’m so proud of the mental toughness and endurance she showed in the face of tremendous pain.”

Darnell, her longtime mentor, applauds a student she calls “special.”

“She is a wonderfully talented singer and actress,” Darnell said. “She is generous as a performer; she gives her whole heart in the moment when presenting. She regularly inspires me, her voice teacher. Regardless of the difficulties she has endured, with all the treatments and damage incurred by the chemotherapy and medications, she consistently has been my most dedicated, prepared and dependable student.”

Hamman’s very thankful for what FGCU has done during her personal struggle.

“FGCU has helped me return from where I’ve been, readjust and put myself back together,” Hamman said. “Here, I feel happy to be home, like I’m working with family. It has been a blessing to come here and rehabilitate myself.” ■

COLLECTIVE WE

If it ain't sexy, it ain't Salseros

Club dances to its own Latin beat / **BY LAURIE D. BABCOCK**

ANY QUESTIONS?" FGCU Salseros president Destiny Disla asks students gathered on a Thursday evening for their weekly meeting in a classroom. Disla has just demonstrated the merengue.

"Basically, you're just marching in place, and you can add as much or as little hip as you want," Disla continues. "How do we feel? Sexy?" the West Palm Beach native and communication major prompts, to laughter from the group.

Everyone here knows the FGCU Salseros club motto: "If it ain't sexy, it ain't Salseros!"

This meeting is not about future dances, the flash mob they're planning with another student organization, or the dance instructions they occasionally give in Assistant Professor Marta Ramos' Spanish classes. This meeting is pure, unadulterated fun, and FGCU

Salseros members are singing along with the music and dancing until it stops.

Next, Disla and club vice president Isabel Fernandez Cardenas, an accounting major from Key West, demonstrate footwork for the bachata. Disla instructs the warmed-up crowd, "Two steps left, touch; two steps right, touch."

"You're getting so much better!" Lady Gonzalez Perez, a biochemistry major, whispers to communication major David Vasquez.

"I've been practicing," the Fort Myers

native replies proudly.

Earlier in the meeting, Perez was chosen for Spotlight Member of the Week.

Embarrassed at first to speak, Perez finally offers that, "This is the first club I've ever joined here at FGCU, and they're so much more than just people I dance with. They're my friends."

"No," Perez, a native Cuban also living in Naples, disputes earnestly. "We have the bachata!"

The final dance demonstration is the salsa, and everyone seems comfortable. "Left side, bring it back to home; right side, bring it back to home; then do it fast," Disla says, again demonstrating

with Benjelloun and club treasurer Austen Colon, a legal studies major from Port St. Lucie.

Veteran dancers encourage newer ones as Disla calls out, "If you feel comfortable, add a turn." Three different replies of "Nope!" again fill the room with laughter.

This particular Thursday, it was announced early that the meeting would end with a conga line, and Disla starts it ("One, two, three, step!").

The line heads out onto the balcony outside the Ben Hill Griffin classroom, then congas back in,

everyone cheerful and laughing.

When the song ends, so does the dance.

"It's official!" Benjelloun shouts as everyone high-fives one another. "Best club on campus!" ■



ON THE
WEB
FGCU360.com
SEE SOME
SALSA

From left, Isabel Fernandez Cardenas and David Vasquez, Destiny Disla and Joseph Cerny, and Nabil Benjelloun and Lady Gonzalez Perez are all enthusiastic members of the FGCU Salseros.

Next week, the spotlight will be on Vasquez.

"You know, humans are one of the few animals without a mating call," says Nabil Benjelloun, a Morocco native, Naples resident and theatre major.

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT
FGCU SALSEROS**

Email fgcusalseros@gmail.com



CUTTING EDGE

FGCU researchers using nature to battle cancer, other pathogens

BY ARTIS HENDERSON

IN THE SECOND-FLOOR lab of Whitaker Hall, past the autoclaves and the microscopes, the neat rows of beakers and funnels, the white lab coats hanging on hooks, researcher Lyndsay Rhodes examines the 96-well plate in her hand. The well plate is roughly the size of an index card and the thickness of a magazine. Each of its 96 clear plastic wells is shaded in varying degrees of violet. In some of the

wells, the violet is a dark purple hue. In others, it's nearly transparent. These almost-colorless wells are the ones Rhodes wants. They're the places where breast cancer cells have been annihilated.

"Cancer is one of those diseases that affects so many people," she says. "It's very difficult to find therapies that are capable of killing the bad cells and leaving the healthy cells alone."

Rhodes, an associate professor and honors fellow in the department of biological

sciences, is one of three Florida Gulf Coast University researchers who are undertaking groundbreaking studies in the use of essential oils in pathogenic disease research. Rhodes' particular study focuses on natural compounds from plants, including food extracts and essential oils. She and her team are trying to determine which of these compounds has cancer-fighting properties.

Natural plant compounds have been used in Eastern and holistic medicine for



**“There are many
natural compounds out there.
We just have to figure out
how to use them,”**

**LYNDSAY RHODES,
ASSOCIATE
PROFESSOR OF
BIOLOGY**



centuries, and some modern anticancer drugs have their roots in nature. Rhodes points to the Pacific yew tree, whose bark was the original source of the now-synthesized compound used in Taxol, one of the most widely prescribed chemotherapy drugs on the market. She gives another example – the death cap mushroom’s potent toxin, amanitin, has been shown to kill pancreatic cancer cells. “There are many natural compounds out there. We just have to figure out how to use them,” she says.

For Rhodes, finding a cure for breast cancer is personal. She grew up in rural North Carolina, where cancer was something people didn’t talk about. Her grandmother struggled with breast disease for years. She had fibrocystic breasts, and often her mammograms showed irregularities in the breast tissue. Each time that happened, her grandmother would have to have the tissue biopsied. “It always came back OK,” Rhodes says. “Until one day it didn’t.”

Rhodes and her team of undergraduate researchers are working with 52 natural compounds like spearmint, peppermint, lavender and eucalyptus, all of which are commercially available. They test each compound against four cell lines that represent two subtypes of breast cancer.

FGCU senior Olivia Romas is in the lab 10 to 15 hours each week. She’s a biology major with plans to attend

medical school after she graduates. Romas’ lab time is part of a two-semester research requirement for biology majors. Each week, she follows a three-day protocol. On the first day, she plates the cancer cells. Then she places them in an incubator to grow for 24 hours. After 24 hours, she treats the cells with the correct dose of natural compounds. The cells are allowed to sit for 72 hours, then she returns to collect the data.



Spearmint, peppermint, lavender and eucalyptus are only a few of the 52 natural compounds Rhodes and her team of researchers are investigating.

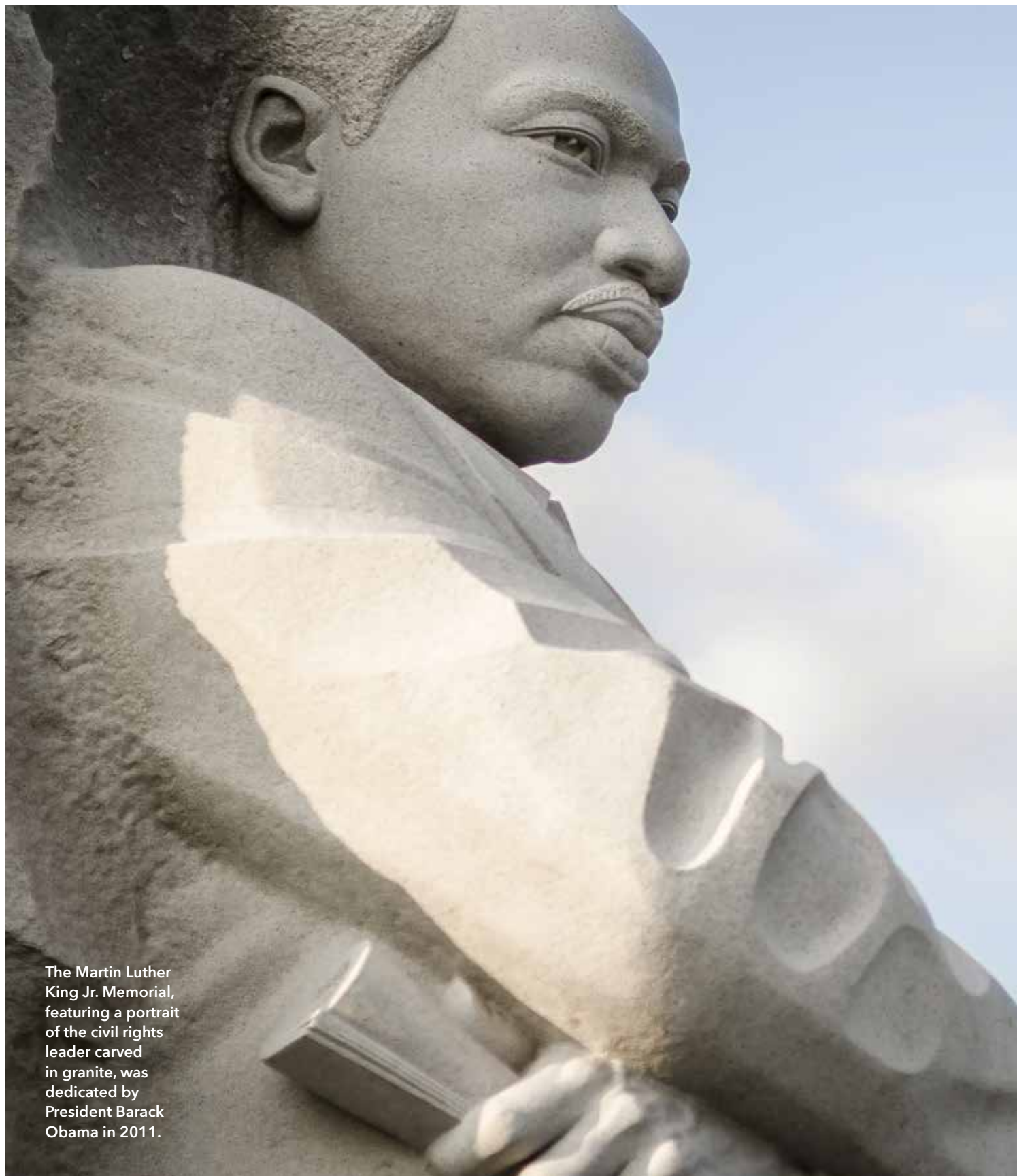
Romas had the opportunity to join Rhodes in presenting some of their findings at the Florida Undergraduate Research Conference, held in February at FGCU. “It was cool to talk to people so interested in the research,” Romas says. “I tell my mom about

it, and my boyfriend and my friends, but they don’t fully grasp it. They’re not cancer biologists.”

Rhodes launched her study in 2018. As with most research studies, the process is painstaking. The researchers screen each of the 52 compounds against four cell lines, and each test has to be duplicated three times to ensure the results are statistically accurate. As if the mechanics of it weren’t complicated enough, the study comes with all the usual challenges of lab work that can slow a project down, like bad luck moments such as an incubator conking out in the middle of the night.

Still, Rhodes and her team have made significant headway. She’s not yet ready to reveal which of the compounds have yielded the best anticancer properties – in the research world, getting scooped is a real threat – but she admits she’s been surprised by the results. “As an empirical scientist, I honestly didn’t know if it would work.” Holistic medicine, she’s finding, may have a lot to teach us about treating cancer.

Rhodes tempers her enthusiasm by saying she’s still early in the research process and admits her team has a lot more research to do. But for now she’s happily at work in her second floor lab, among the smell of ethanol and the low hum of the incubator, fighting breast cancer one natural compound at a time. ■



The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, featuring a portrait of the civil rights leader carved in granite, was dedicated by President Barack Obama in 2011.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

The forgotten King

Remembering the man behind the legend / **BY CHARLES WINTON**

This is Carl Wendell Hines, Jr.'s poem about Dr. King called "A Dead Man's Dream."

*"Now that he is safely dead,
Let us praise him.
Build monuments to his glory.
Sing Hosannas to his name."*

*"Dead men make such
convenient heroes.
For they cannot rise to challenge
the images
That we might fashion from
their lives.
It is easier to build monuments
Than to build a better world."*

*So now that he is safely dead,
We, with eased consciences will
Teach our children that he was a
great man,
Knowing that the cause for which he
Lived is still a cause
And the dream for which he died is
still a dream.
A dead man's dream."*

EVERY YEAR AT THIS time we see snippets of Martin King's speeches on the internet and television. People gratuitously recite his speeches and other works and pay lip service to his dream, the dream for which he died.

The media drags out his "I Have A Dream" speech every January. You may even see his prophetic last speech in Memphis where he rose high above the sanitation strike to tell us that we would get to the Promised Land. But that's about all you will see from 1967 and 1968.

It's as if the last two years of his life have been erased from the annals of our history. Pay close attention and you will notice that rarely will you hear anything about his condemnation of America's involvement in the Vietnam War.

You don't hear anything about his Poor People's Campaign he was planning before his death.

His goal was to take the poor and downtrodden of all races, the poor from the Mississippi Delta, the poor from Appalachia and the poor from the slums of the North, the least of these from all races and drop them on the doorstep of Congress.

His goal was to disrupt the daily workings of our government until America faced the reality of God's children suffering in poverty in our own land.

He wanted to shame our government leaders into committing to an annual

guaranteed income for every adult American. He wanted our government to commit to a plan to eradicate poverty throughout our country.

King had watched his dream turn into a nightmare. He had come to realize what good was it to integrate lunch counters in Birmingham if poor people couldn't afford a cup of coffee or a sandwich. He saw his fight for open housing in Chicago was futile if men and women couldn't earn a fair wage to afford a home.

He watched the money that the government should have been spending on Johnson's War on Poverty being wasted on what he called "America's reckless venture in Vietnam."

You do not hear too much about this King. This was the revolutionary King, the King who had shaken off the label of civil rights leader. The Martin King who had accepted his calling as a 20th-century prophet, commissioned by God himself to be a voice crying out in the wilderness.

History has forgotten the Prophet King and conveniently only wants to deal with the "I have a dream" King.

The poem says:

*"Now that he is safely dead,
Let us praise him.
Build monuments to his glory.
Sing Hosannas to his name."*

History has forgotten the Prophet King. He was too revolutionary. Like all prophets, he was out of step with his time.

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History has conveniently forgotten that he spoke truth to power and called out his own country in a time of war like no one has before or since.

History has forgotten that in 1967 he called America the greatest purveyor of violence in the world.

History has forgotten that he told America, "God didn't call you to be a

turned against him. The NAACP gave him the cold shoulder. The organization he founded, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, issued a statement that his speech was as a private citizen and not as its president.

Worst of all he made an enemy of Lyndon Johnson. Johnson had been a friend to the movement. He personally pushed passage of the Voting and Civil

America could make him into an icon, we had to purify his image.

For like all of us, he was human, imperfect. It's well documented that Martin King was a closet smoker and a skirt chaser. He used to tell his congregation at Ebenezer (Baptist Church) "you don't have go out here and say that Martin Luther King is a saint. Oh no, I'm a sinner like all of God's children, but I

"My earliest memory of Dr. King is from April 3, 1968, the night before his death. I remember my mom and dad scurrying around getting ready to go hear him speak at Mason Temple in Memphis. Even at five years old I knew they were going somewhere special and I wanted to go."

CHARLES WINTON, FGCU FOUNDATION CHAIR EMERITUS

messianic policeman of the whole world."

History has forgotten that he told America, "You are too arrogant and if you don't change your ways, God's going to rise up and break the backbone of your power and place it in the hands of a nation who doesn't even know his name. You better be still and know who God is."

History has forgotten he told America "How can you call yourself a liberator in Vietnam when you are burning little children with napalm?"

His friends and advisors had warned him not to come out against the war. They warned him that peace and civil rights do not mix and that everyone who had supported the movement in the past would turn on him. They were right. Time magazine called his famous Riverside Church speech "demagogic slander that sounded like a script for Radio Hanoi."

The Washington Post warned, "Many who have listened to him with respect will never again accord him the same confidence. King has diminished his usefulness to his cause, his country, and his people."

Even those in the black community

Rights Acts through Congress.

Johnson, the ultimate career politician, saw King's stance against the war as outright betrayal. He was never again invited to the White House and from then on Johnson referred to him as that "n word" preacher.

His only response was "before I was a civil rights leader I was a minister of the gospel. I must tell the truth. And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because his conscience tells him it is right."

The poem says:

*"Dead men make such convenient heroes.
For they cannot rise to challenge the images
That we might fashion from their lives.
It is easier to build monuments
Than to build a better world."*

The King holiday and his monument on the National Mall have come at a terrible price. King's life, his speeches and his challenges to his own government had to be sanitized and purged to make him palatable to mainstream America. Before

want to be a good man."

But to make Dr. King an American icon, America had to clean up her image as well and forget how she treated him. J. Edgar Hoover labeled him a Communist and the most dangerous man in America. He was on a list of subversives to be rounded up and jailed in the event of a national emergency such as 9-11.

From early 1963 to when he died there wasn't a room he slept in that didn't have a listening device to record all his private moments and conversations.

Every phone he spoke on was wiretapped. The FBI and CIA knew every nugget, tidbit of his private life. They shared it with friendly congressmen and reporters to discredit him.

History had to be rewritten and forgotten to purify King's image and to overlook the crimes his own country committed against him.

By the time Martin King arrived in Memphis in late March of 1968 he was exhausted and emotionally distraught about the direction he saw America drifting. Signs of living under constant criticism, signs of living under the daily

threat of death and the constant stress could easily be seen by those around him.

He had developed a tic, a hiccup that manifested itself whenever he was anxious. The doctors who performed his autopsy said he had the heart of a 60-year-old man, yet he was only 39. Yes, by the time Dr. King got to Memphis he had been used up.

My earliest memory of Dr. King is from April 3, 1968, the night before his death. I remember my mom and dad scurrying around getting ready to go hear him speak at Mason Temple in Memphis. Even at 5 years old I knew they were going somewhere special and I wanted to go. And as the baby, I normally could get my way.

So, I threw my best temper tantrum to get my parents to take me with them. I can't remember why, but they didn't take me that night, maybe it was the thunderstorm, the tornado that passed through Memphis that night, maybe it was just the gravity of the moment.

I wish I could have been there. For as a student of Martin King I see it as his finest hour. When you watch that speech, you can see the tears in his eyes, you can see the tension, you can see the pain and even the relief as he reveals what God has shown him.

Like Moses before him, God told Martin King, "I'm going to take you up to the mountain and I'm going to let you look over and see the Promised Land.

"You won't get there. Your job is done. You have done all you can do. Your task is finished. You have done well, thy good and faithful servant. You won't get to the Promised Land; but I want you to know that the poor, the downtrodden, the least of these, the people you have been fighting for will get to the Promised Land."

The poem says:

*"So now that he is safely dead,
We, with eased consciences will
Teach our children that he was
a great man,
Knowing that the cause for which he
Lived is still a cause
And the dream for which he died is still
a dream.
A dead man's dream."*

As I come to a close, I want to you to know that the cause Dr. King fought and died for is the brotherhood of all men. We are all children of a common father.

And since we are all brothers and sisters, we have an obligation to love each other in all circumstances. This is the beloved community he talked about so much.

He used to say that love is the most durable power in the world. Love is the key that unlocks the door to true brotherhood. This was his true legacy. He never gave up on non-violence. He refused to hate his perceived enemy.

He used to say that we should never fight with hate and malice, because when the walls of segregation finally crumbled, we had to live together as brothers and sisters.

We all have an obligation to make his dream a reality. We all know someone who needs a helping hand, someone who may be down on their luck. Every day we are challenged to turn the other cheek and to seek reconciliation with those with whom we disagree.

We can do this if we simply turn away from the status quo and have the courage to love.

Like him we have to shake off the labels of Democrat and Republican, left and right, rich and poor, Christian and Muslim and recognize that we are all God's children.

Like him we have to love those we don't like, we have to love the person and hate the evil deed they may be committing.

Like him we have to have the courage to speak truth to our politicians and tell them to stop all this foolishness, stop demonizing each other

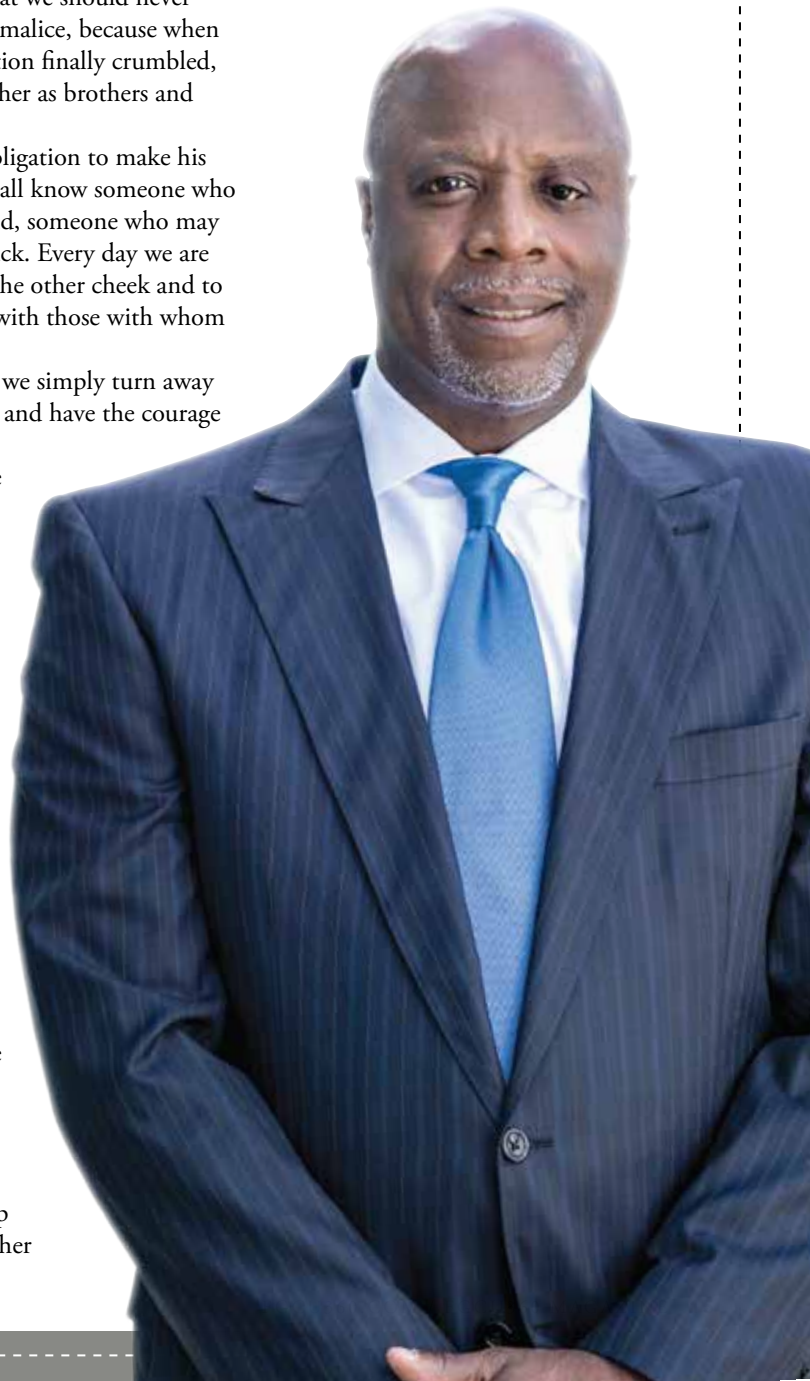
and sit down and do what is right for this country and for this world.

Like him whenever and wherever we encounter injustice we must take a stand.

Like him we must do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with thy God.

This is how we make a dead man's dream become a reality. ■

– Charles Winton, co-owner of Estero Bay Chevrolet and chair emeritus of the FGCU Foundation, delivered this speech at FGCU in January on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day.



WGCU

WGCU's 'Curious Cuisine' takes diners off the usual culinary path

BY DAYNA HARPSTER

“MY DAD TELLS people I started in the restaurant business dusting the floor with my diapers,” says Debbie Klemmer, co-owner of Two Peas Café in LaBelle.

That's the kind of colorful talk that makes a documentary crew happy. And it clearly pleases WGCU videographer Tim Kenney and freelance producer Chelle Koster Walton, who are shooting a segment at Two Peas Café in LaBelle.

This finished feature is now among a series of six short segments on area restaurants that began airing in late March on WGCU TV as “interstitials,” meaning between regularly scheduled programs. They are each about 2½ minutes long. “The criteria for selection was to find unique places that explore culture through food and family,” said Amy Shumaker, WGCU associate general manager for content.

On this February weekday morning, Kenney, Walton and WGCU Director of Production Services Sheri Coleman are meeting with Klemmer and her business partner, Vicki Reynolds. Klemmer's grandmother was Ella, of Flora and Ella's Restaurant, a popular stop for home cooking for 78 years in LaBelle.

If there were a pie hall of fame in Florida, Flora and Ella's definitely would be so honored.

Klemmer said she grew up in Lakeland and spent summers in LaBelle with her grandmother. Summer days from elementary school-age and beyond, she'd get up at 5 a.m. and go downstairs where the

WHERE TO WATCH

"Curious Cuisine" can be seen on wgcu.org
or youtube.com/wgcu.



Debbie Klemmer comes through the saloon doors from the kitchen to the dining area, pie in hand, at Two Peas Café in LaBelle.

pie-making had begun.

When Klemmer was a teenager, Reynolds was hired to work in the restaurant. "And we just hit it off," Klemmer said. "We just started hanging out and having good times and running the roads like teenagers do."

"We grew up here," Reynolds says. "Every second person that comes in the door is Debbie's cousin, probably. We just know everybody."

They must have very large extended families because there are few empty chairs in the 74-seat restaurant even during the odd hour or so between breakfast and lunch.

They opened Two Peas Café seven years ago in August, naming the restaurant for something "Grandma Ella" used to say. "She always called us two peas in a pod," Klemmer said. "And that wasn't really a good thing. Except that I'm the good pea."

"That depends on the day," Reynolds counters with a smile.

Flora and Ella's Restaurant's reputation extended far and wide for more than seven decades. But they were getting on in years by 1989, about the time they sold their restaurant to Klemmer's parents. Then in 2009 her parents sold the business and it closed in 2011.

"When that happened, I thought my life was over," Klemmer said. But then, just as Reynolds was getting ready to move to Texas, she approached Klemmer with an idea. "She came to me and said, 'We really need to open up our own little place.'"

They found a location, and a good friend to invest, another to buy all the Fiestaware and found friends from church to help paint the café-to-be. They use Flora and Ella's recipes for pie and also serve regular breakfast and lunch fare.

"Curious Cuisine" producer Walton says the series features "local food, but off the beaten path," including Havana Café of the Everglades in Chokoloskee, Fify's Caribbean Cuisine in Immokalee and Ephesus Mediterranean Grill in Port Charlotte, and a few others.

But to be sure, Two Peas is a direct route for plenty of people who like Klemmer's idea that visiting the restaurant should be "like going to Grandma's." ■

Podcaster Mike Kiniry created the popular "Three Song Stories."



UPDATES:

MOVE TO INCLUDE

WGCU teamed up with Best Buddies of Southwest Florida last fall for a digital storytelling workshop that launched the station's "Move to Include" initiative, which is ongoing and anticipates the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act in July 2020.

"Move to Include" is a pilot project led by public media station WXXI in Rochester, N.Y. It began in 2014, and was made possible with the support of the Golisano Foundation and Tom Golisano, who also donated \$20 million to build Southwest Florida's Golisano Children's Hospital.

Funded by a \$645,000 grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, this project includes multimedia elements that combine content production, curation and engagement to encourage dialogue about disability issues.

Participating stations in "Move to Include," including WGCU, are planning additional events through next summer and beyond that emphasize ability, rather than disability.

The workshop with Best Buddies turned young people into filmmakers and public media staff into mentors.

"Buddies" with intellectual and developmental disabilities were paired with school-age "peer buddies" for the weekend workshop. Five teams of two each created a short video on a topic of their choice, doing the interviewing, filming and editing themselves with the help of a

member of the WGCU production crew.

They did all of their work on kits consisting of an iPad, a tripod and bracket, headphones and two lavalier microphones. On Sunday evening, they presented their videos for family and friends in the WGCU TV Studio. ■

PODCAST HITS MILESTONE

The "Move to Include" effort reaches to every corner of WGCU, including one of the station's podcasts, "Three Song Stories."

The "Biography Through Music" podcast recently celebrated its 100th episode, which is cause for celebration itself. And so is its 102nd entry. Podcaster Mike Kiniry, with help from colleagues Tara Calligan and Richard Chin Quee, interviews a father and son, Ned and Ethan DuRant, who are partners in a band. Their collaboration in the band Dizygote was the reason for the interview. But at the same time son Ethan, 15, talks about his sensory processing disorder, "somewhat like autism," he says. Even though he can't stand loud music – especially if it's sudden – he digs playing drums, guitar, bass guitar, mandolin and more. The condition actually made learning about and playing music easier, he explains.

Listen in to guests sharing the three songs that most take them back in time at threesongstories.org. You can catch them on Spotify, under the Listen drop down tab on the wgcu.org site or wherever you get your podcasts. ■



COMMUNITY

Business, health colleges team up on degree program

BY KAREN BOOTH

THE FACTS SPEAK FOR themselves. Baby boomers are retiring at the rate of about 10,000 per day, which makes healthcare a smart career choice for today's graduates.

Back in 2018, Derek Thompson, staff writer for *The Atlantic*, reported that “growth in healthcare employment is stemming more from administrative jobs rather than physician jobs.”

This fact is not lost on the powers that be at FGCU. Thanks to a collaboration between Ann Cary, dean of the Marieb College of Health & Human Services; and Christopher Westley, dean of the Lutgert College of Business, FGCU's Master of Science degree is undergoing a refresh with the future of the healthcare industry in mind.

Both educators are relatively new in their positions as FGCU deans. “The wonderful thing about newness,” Cary said, “is you come in with new eyes, see things with new partners. It's very exciting to join a younger institution.”

While it is sometimes difficult for individual colleges to identify areas in which to collaborate, health and business

make perfect sense, and the two are committed to finding ways to best prepare FGCU students for future employment in the growing industry.

Prior to assuming the role of interim dean in April 2019 (and the permanent position in January), Westley was director of FGCU's Regional Economic Research Institute. This gave him a unique overview of the employment landscape. “A recent national study predicts that by 2028, upwards of two million jobs will be in the healthcare industry,” he said. “We must assume that in markets like Southwest Florida, with our demographics, many jobs will come our way. We have to prepare for that eventuality.”

Cary is immersed in the needs of the healthcare industry. “There's not only data to support the gap in today's healthcare industry, but we're hearing the same thing out in the field.”

“The advantage we have in creating this degree,” Westley said, “is FGCU's

connections in the healthcare industry. Educational resources are limited, and we want to use them to maximize the benefit we bring to the public.”

Currently, Marieb College offers a Master of Science in Health Services. Step one on the journey to develop a Master of Health Administration is curriculum adjustments to this existing degree program.

“We are adding three courses from the College of Business,” said Cary, “with the remaining courses stemming from Marieb's healthcare curriculum.”

The joint planning between the two disciplines – business and health – offers a unique opportunity to craft a program that will be most beneficial to FGCU's students now and in the future.

“The strength in both schools will take us someplace we're not even thinking about today,” Westley said.

Quite simply, Cary said, “We are creating our future together.” ■



Ann Cary



Christopher Westley

THE WAY WE WERE

Azul still looks his best in The Nest as the years fly by

BY KEITH GIBSON

WHEN MOST OF US look at photos taken past and present, we see the reality that time stops for no one.

Except Azul the Eagle.

In fact, the feathered fellow frequenting FGCU events as our official mascot has grown better during his 20-year flight of fancy, with a far more expressive look today – not to mention a contemporary uniform that at least matches our colors (where did that yellow shirt come from, anyway?).

Born from a concept created by FGCU students in 2001 and an original costume fashioned by a company in Canada, Azul has more than filled the bill as university ambassador since being given his lofty perch. He's a three-time winner of the ASUN Conference Most Valuable Mascot Award and was ranked No. 6 in the website Yardbarker's 2019 list of Greatest College Mascots of All Time. He inspired a 2015 art contest, Azul's Flight Tour, with beautiful statues of The Taloned One still scattered around campus.

The Alumni Association and Student Government last year commissioned and dedicated an iconic bronze bench upon which Azul presides outside the Cohen Student Union. He has his own Facebook and twitter accounts on social media, and he's a frequent flier at @fgcu on Instagram. He's even cult leader of the Dirty Birds student cheer section, which you know loud and clear if you've attended Alico Arena basketball games.

You get the picture. The word on this bird is that he makes a big flap, wherever he goes. And during the wing span of his impressive reign, this eagle eyes up better all the time. ■



azultheeagle



20,200 likes

azultheeagle Wings up! 2020

#FGCU #FGCU Alumni #Wings up #Awesome School





SPOTLIGHT

How complex research and theater created FGCU's newest tradition, the Research Roadshow

BY KYLE McCURRY

WHEN THE architects of Florida Gulf Coast University's Research Roadshow dreamed up a new way to present undergraduate research, they didn't exactly know what awaited them. It was designed to complement the students' poster projects displayed at Research Day at the end of each semester. While the poster presentations are open to the public, students are there, first and foremost, to present research to faculty in academic ways, which doesn't always lend itself to a general audience.

The University Marketing & Communications department and the Office of Undergraduate Studies took on the challenge, which was prompted by a casual comment from President Mike Martin. He said, "I want to be able to take our students' research with me. I want to take it on the road."

The first Research Roadshow took place in late 2018 and early 2019 and got positive reviews. For the 2019-20 year, the team had a lot to live up to.

The Research Roadshow has been described as "a magical experience" for the audience, but explaining the event beyond the word "magic" is not always

easy. Imagine being a student engrossed in paleotempestology – the study of prehistoric hurricanes – complete with field work involving underwater coring and data collecting. Now imagine you've been asked to take what you do for research and turn it into a performance, akin to a theatrical presentation.

For the second iteration of the Research Roadshow, that's exactly what happened. A team of creative professionals, including writer Drew Sterwald and director Gerritt VanderMeer, took the complex science and created a script and stage presentation that could be easily understood. Add in impressive video work by FGCU alums

Timothy Clark and Hadassa Romero, and everything was in place for the audience to become part of the research. But it takes more than that. You have to get buy-in from faculty and students.

The Water School's Joanne Muller, a paleoclimatologist, and students James Javaruski and Illexis Morales, spent months learning the script and stage presentation related to their hurricane research. They were outside of their comfort zones but delivered in an understandable and entertaining way. Cores from their research and other props about their personal lives placed on stage helped tell the story.

Additionally, massive video screens and surround sound immersed the audience in a world of science. One attendee wrote, "I loved how it brought together the importance of the work these professors and students are doing with insights into their personal lives. It made the FGCU community seem less an ivory tower and more like the rest of the community with real life worries and concerns, but also with a sense of purpose to find answers."

The 2020 Research Roadshow featured two additional faculty/student teams. The Water School's environmental studies Professor Win Everham and recent graduate Taylor Hancock shared the findings of a 20-year-old study that links wetland health to the region's frogs and toads. Recent graduate Jade Gibson, her sister and FGCU junior Sapphire Gibson and Sandra Kauanui, director of the School of Entrepreneurship, shared how entrepreneurship leads to financial success. By the time she graduated, Jade Gibson had linked her musical talent with her entrepreneurship education and generated over \$300,000 in revenue. She also hired multiple FGCU students.

ABOVE LEFT: Alumnus Taylor Hancock, Professor Win Everham and Director of Undergraduate Research Billy Gunnels on stage.

ABOVE RIGHT: Sapphire and Jade Gibson explain their thriving music business, Jade Strings.

RIGHT: Paleoclimatologist Joanne Muller discusses how past hurricanes inform us about future ones.



The show took place in Naples and Fort Myers along with one show held on campus. One attendee shared that the event showed "how dynamic the students and professors were and passionate about setting goals to achieve."

It's not easy creating something new. President Martin has called the Research Roadshow part of the university's "soul." Faculty and students are already recommending projects for the third edition of this new signature event. And the previous participants report that the experience has given them new perspective on delivering complex ideas in ways the general public can understand.

That shouldn't add undue pressure on the creative and academic teams — led by Deborah Wilttrout, associate vice president of marketing and communications; and Billy Gunnels, director of undergraduate research. The challenge now is finding the next group — the right blend of research and researchers who can spend the time refining the message and becoming stage performers. Judging from the first two years, we bet the next troupe will pull it off. ■



HOW TO

Brew beer – as a chemistry project and a home hobby

BY RICK WEBER

IT BEGAN WITH FGCU chemistry Professor John Reilly and some FGCU faculty communing on Saturday mornings in a bid to brew their best beer.

Then they decided to enlist the help of

students. In order to do that, they had to give them something: a research project, some pay or service-learning hours. Last fall, senior biochemistry major Thomas Strauss was awarded credits for creating a research project, “Development and Troubleshooting of a Pilot Microbrewery

at FGCU,” which became a student-friendly process manual that highlighted the fundamentals and techniques for brewing eight types of beer.

By the spring semester, Reilly had brought in a consortium of students from the colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business

and Engineering to refine the process in Sugden Hall's commercial kitchen, financed with seed money from the Whitaker Center, the Office of Undergraduate Research and Reilly himself.

They gave two cases to President Mike Martin, the provost and deans, who sampled the beer – tagged with names like Dunk City Rocket Fuel, The Nutty Professor and, yes, even President Mike Martin Matters.

"The President tasted it and loved it," Reilly says. "They shared it with people, who were like, 'This is pretty good. Can we buy some?' He said, 'Hey, look, let's get a brewery on campus run by students.'"

Now, Reilly is creating a budget of \$100,000 to purchase two 20-gallon systems, but it will only happen if he is granted some of FGCU's year-end funds. The goal is to get the proper permits and licenses, take over a spot at Azul's Brewhouse and start selling the beer.

"We can stick with our five-gallon system, but we only get two cases at a time," Reilly says. "Are we going to do it or not? It's kind of a do-or-die thing now."

On a smaller scale, you can do this at home. Here are Reilly's beer-brewing tips:

BUY A HOME BREW KIT: Northern Brewer is Amazon's choice for best kit between \$100 and \$150. It has everything you need to brew beer at home, including recipe kit, hydrometer, test jar, thermometer, bottle brush, tubing, bottle capper and caps, five-gallon brew kettle and 6.5-gallon fermentor. Cheaper kits are available, but you will need a pot that can boil five gallons of liquid and a bucket for fermenting.

BOIL THE WORT AND COOL IT:

The wort – the malt extract (from grain mash) and water – should be boiled for



ABOVE: Drew Brady bottles the beer while Zack Hutcherson looks on.

LEFT: The beermakers are, from left, Zack Hutcherson, Drew Brady, Syaira (Lexi) Frenchko and John Reilly.

A SIX-PACK OF BEER FACTS

- The study of beer and beer-making is Greek words "zythos" (beer) and "logos" (study).
- Brewing may date back almost 5,000 years.
- The oldest operating brewing company in the U.S. is D.G. Yuengling & Son in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, since 1829.
- Cenosillicaphobia is the fear of an empty beer glass.
- Women were the first professional brewers and were called brewsters.
- The United States and China are the world's top beer-producing countries.

an hour to provide the hop alpha acid isomerization necessary for bittering, and to kill bacteria. Then cool it as quickly as possible, putting it in a sink with ice.

SANITIZE, SANITIZE, SANITIZE:

Reilly has repeated this critical mantra so many times that his students have it metaphorically tattooed on their hands, which he instructs them to spray with the sanitizer bottle after touching anything. "After going through all this work, you don't want to open up one of these buckets and see mold growing. That's when they call it 'skunked.' It smells terrible. If it goes bad and you have spent two weeks on it, you will be really disappointed."

FERMENT IT: Store it in a cool, dry place at room temperature – preferably a closet. The biggest no-no: the garage. The heat will ruin all your hard work. Follow the instructions in your kit. Fermenting times typically vary from seven to 14 days.

BOTTLE IT: "A lot of the solids, the dead yeast, will be on the bottom. So siphon it out into the bottling bucket, add bottling sugar so that when you bottle it, there is secondary fermentation. That gives it the CO₂, the fizz. But not a lot. Just enough so you get the taste when drinking it and it's not flat." Buy your own bottles – a case costs about \$17, and reuse them – then, yes, sanitize the bottles and caps, cap the bottles and let them sit for at least two weeks.

CHILL IT: Unless you're British and like your beer warm.

DRINK IT: "Be honest. Is it too hoppy? Not hoppy enough? Too bitter? Is there too much or not enough alcohol? Is there enough CO₂ in there? You might say, 'Next time, I will do a little bit less sugar when bottling so that when I open it up, it doesn't overflow because I have too much CO₂.'" But save plenty of your carefully crafted creation for others. Ask family and friends to sample it and offer opinions: "Does it taste good? Most people will tell you what they like and don't like." ■

You are
perfect just
the way
you are

You
are
loved!

SMILE


YOU ARE
AWESOME!

You're
fabulous

You are
important

You
rock!

Students in
The Kindness Effect Class
wrote positive messages on Post-it
notes and placed them in random spots
to make strangers happy.

Please use the Post-it note
on the opposite page to write an
upbeat message. Take a photo
and share on social media.

#FGCUKINDNESS

Keep
going!

You are
great

Hello
gorgeous

You
can
do it

You've
got this

It's going
to be ok

You are
beautiful

YOU
MATTER

IT'S COOL TO BE KIND

Students learn
life-changing lessons
about strengthening
their kindness muscles

The Golden Rule is clear cut – treat others the way we want to be treated. Sure, in today's world, the gold may seem tarnished, but it's possible to bring that shine back if we make the effort.

BY KAREN BOOTH



That's where The Kindness Effect comes in. This innovative class taught by FGCU adjunct instructor Francesca Donlan aims to do just that. Those who predicted students would enroll in this class intent on an easy three credits, had it all wrong. Kindness as a way of life is challenging, as Donlan's 35 students soon learned.

"I figured it couldn't hurt to learn about kindness and improve our quality of life," said Maria Roversi, a senior psychology major. "But honestly, this class was even better than I imagined."

Picture 35 college students totally engaged in their weekly three-hour class, disappointed when it's over. Thirty-five students participating in meaningful discussions, sharing poignant stories – about life, daily challenges, how crazy it is that a kindness class is so important in today's world.

"This class is different every week,"

Roversi said. "We talk about projects we've done; we listen to each other. There's a lot of storytelling, sharing of things encountered, things learned. Professor Donlan is high spirited, and her spirit and energy are contagious. Even if you've had a bad day, you feel the energy."

"We, as a society, are suffering a kindness deficit," Donlan said. "Especially in the digital age where a quick text substitutes for a more meaningful face-to-face conversation. People tend to forget they have the power to be kind."

Required reading for the course includes "The War for Kindness: Building Empathy in a Fractured World" by Jamil Zaki, Stanford University associate professor of psychology and head of the Stanford Social Neuroscience Laboratory. Zaki writes: "Through practice, we can grow our empathy and become kinder as a result ... Empathy is not a superpower ... It's a regular old power, like being strong, agile or good at Scrabble. Some people are genetically predisposed to be stronger than others – but strength is also up to us. Live a sedentary life, and your muscles will

TOP: Jonathan Robertson shows a beneficiary of his kindness efforts.

AT RIGHT : From top, clockwise: Madeline Olson, Brandon Villa and Vanessa Miguel share how they spent their \$10.

atrophy. Stay active, and they'll grow."

Donlan has set out to reintroduce the power of kindness to her students, strengthening the kindness "muscle" by teaching kindness techniques and sharing research on how kindness and empathy impact the social, psychological and emotional well-being of those who practice it.

Research supports Donlan's efforts and suggests that human beings are prewired to be kind. Jerome Kagan, emeritus professor of psychology at Harvard University, writes, "Although humans inherit a biological bias that permits them to feel anger, jealousy, selfishness and envy ... they inherit an even stronger biological bias for kindness, compassion, cooperation, love and nurture."

This isn't to say that kindness is an automatic reflex – it's not a 'We're born,

TIPS FOR BEING KIND TO SELF AND OTHERS

It's not hard to find kindness tips. Simply google "Kindness Tips," and you're there. Just to get us started, what follows is a random selection of tips from a random selection of sites.

1. Express gratitude – even for the smallest things – by simply saying "Thank you."
2. Speak words of encouragement to someone experiencing adversity.
3. Be patient if treated unkindly.
4. Breathe deeply.
5. Send a card to a service man or woman overseas.
6. Hand-write a "thank you" note.
7. Forgive a wrongdoing and let go of past resentments.
8. Compliment a stranger.
9. Practice gratitude.
10. Drink lots of water.
11. Exercise.
12. Volunteer your time.
13. Disconnect every now and again.
14. Accept compliments graciously.
15. Don't forget to play.



ON THE
WEB
FGCU360.com
ARIADNE VASQUEZ
TAKES
CHALLENGE



therefore we're kind.' Which brings us full circle back to a class that focuses on strengthening our kindness 'muscle.'

Donlan teaches her students that kindness has many benefits, not only for the recipient but also for the practitioner. In "The Effects of Kindness on the Brain," published on the website ExploringYourMind, the author writes: "Daniel Goleman [Ph.D. Harvard] reminds us that one of the most intense emotions for the brain is compassion. The entire limbic system [brain structures that help control emotions] reverberates when we feel it."

Bottom line: Kindness matters. In Donlan's class, students explore through first-hand experiences if acts of kindness change them. If yes, they ask themselves, "Is that change superficial and temporary, or meaningful and lasting? What are the effects of kindness – or lack thereof – on society and its implications for our collective future?"

Each week, Donlan assigns a kindness challenge. For example: compliment three people face-to-face; write three thank-you notes; place complimentary Post-it notes in random places to surprise people. Be kind to yourself. Sound simple?

"Some students experienced a lot of anxiety with these assignments," Donlan said. "But they found they began to develop more meaningful relationships as a result. For some students, the relationships were life changing."

Abby Kurtz-Lendner, a sophomore majoring in communication, said, "This class definitely exceeded all my expectations. It's really nice to see an entire group of people wanting to make the world a little kinder. A class on kindness is a crazy concept, but it's probably the most important class anyone needs."

"Too often, we think we have to be rich or important to make our voice matter," Donlan said, "but we can all be kind and change people's lives. Students quickly found they had the power to make a difference in someone's life."

But, she said, kindness isn't all about being kind to others. Donlan found that although many of the students perceived themselves as kind, "most are not kind to themselves."



The Kindness Effect class with instructor ① Francesca Donlan and benefactor ② Sharon Arnold.

When charged with a self-kindness assignment, Jonathan Robertson, a senior integrated studies major, was at a bit of a loss. A retired veteran who served in the U.S. Navy for 20 years, he said, “Lots of times we forget to turn inward; we’re too busy. We don’t take the time we need for ourselves, whether simply to relax or to heal.”

Like Kurtz-Lendner, Robertson concedes that a class teaching kindness is a little unusual. “It’s crazy when you think of it. Kindness should be a common-sense thing. Unfortunately, it really isn’t. But the more you look into kindness, and the more you shift your focus to kindness, you

realize there’s a lot of good stuff going on and a lot of good people out there.”

The whole topic of kindness attracts, well, kind people. Sharon Arnold, retired partner in the Southwest Florida public relations firm Gravina, Smith, Matte and Arnold, is one. Over the years, Arnold has been involved in multiple charitable causes, and when she heard that Donlan was looking for a sponsor for one of her class assignments, Arnold said without hesitation, “I’m in. I think the whole concept of a kindness class is wonderful. It’s very exciting to see young people taking kindness seriously.”

Arnold donated \$350 to Donlan, who then distributed \$10 to each student. The assignment: Do something, anything, kind with the money. Students then shared their stories in a class that can only be described as uplifting and inspiring (see sidebar).

Of the class and lessons learned, Robertson said, “The power of giving is interesting. You can take a religious stance, an emotional stance, or something even less connected on a personal level such as a tax benefit. No matter the reason that others may give, for me, knowing that I made a difference, even if it’s a small one, is pleasing to me,” said Robertson. ■



ROOTS OF COMPASSION AND KINDNESS PROGRAM PLANNED IN THE HEART-MINDED CHILD

An anonymous donor has gifted FGCU \$70,000 to develop programming to teach empathy and compassion to elementary and middle school children. Maria Roca, chair of the Department of Integrated Studies, and her colleagues are tasked with designing the program, which will debut in the fall.

"We're in the process of talking with the local schools," said Roca of the department's initial outreach. "Also, the donor is interested in our building a parent component to the project," which, Roca agreed, will add value to the overall project. At the same time, FGCU will train its students to go out into the schools and lead the way. "This type of programming is custom made for the Integrated Studies department," Roca said.

A brief description of the B.A. in Integrated Studies reads as follows: "The program provides flexibility in meeting individual student interests and learning goals and blends existing and new experiences, information and perspectives into the learners' total understanding of their world."



THE "\$10 FOR KINDNESS" CHALLENGE

Sharon Arnold, retired public relations executive, donated \$350 in support of Instructor Francesca Donlan's The Kindness Effect class. Donlan then distributed \$10 to each of her 35 students with the directive to "spend it kindly."

In a class later that month, the students shared their stories. Their enthusiasm was palpable. Students were engaged and inspired – and inspiring.

Senior psychology majors Maria Roversi and Lexi Oakley teamed up to buy baby clothes and maternity outfits for a pregnant friend graduating from FGCU this year. They combined their \$10 and each added some money of their own. Their friend, who didn't show much reaction when presented with the gift, told them later when she wore the outfit, "I felt very beautiful today."

Oakley said she learned, "When you are giving, don't wait for validation. You should do it to make the other person feel good."

Brianna Marshel, a senior communication major, submitted a video of her buying toys at Dollar Tree – sidewalk chalk, mini footballs and more. She then headed to the Golden Gate Community Park to distribute them to the children, who clearly loved the toys. "A lot of kids' parents have to work on the weekends, and the park is their babysitter," Marshel said. "I don't think what I did was groundbreaking, but I hope I improved the day for these kids."

When Jonathan Robertson's daughter came home from school with a note from her teacher asking for a \$3 donation to help fund a field trip, the senior integrated studies major sent his daughter to school with \$6 – three to cover his daughter and \$3 to cover another child. That left him with \$4. "My whole thought was how can I make the most impact with \$10?" he said. "I didn't want to do it in one shot."

As it happens, Robertson is DJing this spring for FGCU's Dance Marathon, a fundraiser for Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital. "I decided to make a donation to the Dance Marathon," he said.

The stories went on and on. Shoes and socks for a homeless man; a bouquet of flowers for a student's grandmother in the nursing home; \$10 for a young man working on the side of the road as a sign spinner.

And, while virtually all the students thanked Arnold for the gift and for the experience, she, too, was moved. "It's the best \$350 I've ever spent," she said.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

Innovative program helps former students complete their college degree

BY KEITH GIBSON

Higher education is the next logical step for high-school graduates who have the aptitude and opportunity to take advantage of it, but sometimes, things don't work out as planned.

Some students get started and progress well along the degree track, only to get derailed by unforeseen circumstances: family issues, job issues, even lack-of-maturity and personal-responsibility issues. Sometimes, maybe years later, when those issues are no longer, well, issues, there may be a desire to get back to that unfinished degree.

In the traditional higher-education model, a full academic comeback for a student who has earned some college credits is sometimes unrealistic. Often, there are too many logistical obstacles to clear and it just doesn't seem feasible.

But with the innovative thinking of Florida Gulf Coast University's Office of Continuing Education, there's now a

convenient way former college students can finish their degrees in a way that fits into almost any busy lifestyle.

It's called FGCU Complete. The program, started in January 2019, offers students who have already earned some college credit access to the same university faculty, privileges and administrative assistance – such as counseling, scholarships and financial aid – as full-time students.

FGCU Complete now features three bachelor's programs – Integrated Studies, Interdisciplinary Entrepreneurship and Child and Youth Studies – along with relevant minors. Once enrolled, students progress at their own pace (at least one class per year is necessary to remain active), with the main requirement being that students complete at least 30 credit hours through FGCU Complete, or about one-fourth the usual undergraduate-degree mandate of 120 credit hours.

Through a combination of on-campus, in-community and online classes that are condensed into eight-week formats and



Jessica Correa took an extended break from higher education to help her husband of 15 years, Richie, get his air-conditioning business up and running. Now, one of the reasons she's earning a degree in integrated studies with a minor in hospitality is to set an example for daughters, Isabella and Sophia, as she pursues her own career in event planning.





taken at your own pace, “you can always go back and do it, no matter how long it takes, at any age,” said one of FGCU Complete’s satisfied customers, south Fort Myers resident and current student Jessica Correa.

Correa, a wife and mother who works full-time as an event coordinator at Fiddlesticks Country Club in south Fort Myers while doubling as office manager of her husband, Richie’s, air-conditioning business, ought to know. At age 38, with two jobs and two girls ages 12 and 10 to raise, it took Correa quite a while to get back to earning a four-year degree after she first attended a medical institute in Denver in 2001 to become a dental assistant, then earned an associate’s degree at the former Edison State College (now Florida SouthWestern) in 2011.

“I hoped to pursue a bachelor’s in

business after I received my associate’s, but life got in the way,” Correa said. “I had to stop and put all my focus on my family, work full-time and help my husband get his business started.”

Now, Correa, whose internship as part of her FGCU Complete experience led to the Fiddlesticks job that enables her to “already do what I love,” will earn a Bachelor of Arts in Integrated Studies with a minor in Hospitality. Even more rewarding for Correa: “I wanted to show my daughters that college is important, and to become the first in my family to graduate from any college or university.

“The FGCU Complete program really has saved my life, with the flexibility to be able to take care of my family, our business, and so much more while pursuing my dream of graduating and doing what I want

Former FGCU student-athlete Michael Suchy left school after his junior year when he was selected in the Major League Baseball Draft, and he’s now finishing up with an integrated studies degree and a minor in education. Suchy continues to pursue his professional baseball dream while coaching baseball at his former high school, Bradenton Southeast.

to,” Correa said. “My experience has been amazing from the beginning. One of the best decisions I have ever made was to go back and finish my degree.”

Today, Correa said her “light is getting brighter than even I could see it.” Now, with her bachelor’s degree forthcoming, the Fiddlesticks job she loves in hand and a future that she hopes includes starting her own event-planning business,

Correa gives much of the credit to Kristen Vanselow, FGCU Complete director of operations.

“She was so supportive, flexible and helpful through the whole process,” Correa said of Vanselow, volunteering that the program director helped her navigate several stressful moments after Correa started FGCU Complete in summer 2019. “I might not have made it without her believing in me.”

For Vanselow, doing whatever she can to smooth the academic comeback for students such as Correa is what her job’s all about. In fact, the personal interest Vanselow takes in the 130 or so FGCU Complete students – she knows most, if not all, of their life stories, where they’ve been and what led them back to finishing school – along with the hands-on help she gives them in navigating their graduation plan, make her the perfect administrator for this type of program. And she totally embraces the role, calling it the “most rewarding position I’ve had in 22 years working in higher education.”

“This is an opportunity for FGCU to help students in a way the university never has,” said Vanselow, who has previously been part of FGCU’s accreditation team among other roles. “We are willing to work with students who don’t present the best academic history. We are willing to work with students who want to finish the most courses in the least amount of time. We work with students who are like me – parents who are working full-time, and can’t drop everything to go back to school.

“There are a lot of different pathways leading people here ... when they started out of high school it wasn’t the right fit, they had other career opportunities, they joined the military. Now, they are coming back for job advancement, or maybe to qualify for opportunities they were left out of because they don’t have a bachelor’s degree. We also have a number of former FGCU students returning, and now they can use all the credits they earned before, and hopefully finish the degree they started here.”

One former FGCU student is Michael Suchy of Bradenton. While it was life’s circumstances that got in the way of

ABOUT FGCU COMPLETE

The program gives students who have previously earned college credits the chance to work toward a Bachelor of Arts in Integrated Studies or Interdisciplinary Entrepreneurship, or a Bachelor of Science in Child and Youth Studies. Select minors also are available.

Depending on the program, students fulfill degree requirements with a combination of on-campus, online and in-community classes taught in a condensed, eight-week format. Students must complete at least 30 credit hours with FGCU.

**For details, contact the
Office of Continuing Education
at (239) 745-4700,
fgcucocomplete@fgcu.edu
or fgcu.edu/ced.**

Jessica Correa’s higher-education journey, it was pursuing a boyhood dream that sidetracked Suchy for a couple years.

A former star baseball player recruited out of Bradenton Southeast High School who won several ASUN Conference honors for the Eagles, Suchy, originally an Elementary Education major, left FGCU after his junior year in 2014 when he was taken in the fifth round of the Major League Baseball Draft by the Pittsburgh Pirates – still the highest selection of any FGCU position player (non-pitcher) in program history.

While FGCU Athletics prides itself on ensuring its student-athletes earn a degree by the time their NCAA eligibility is up, the kind of signing money a high major-league draft pick can get – along with a chance to chase that lifelong dream – can lure top prospects such as Suchy to leave school early.

Today, Suchy is still pursuing his dream – he’ll begin his third season playing independent professional ball with Trois-Rivieres, Quebec, Canada, after spending the winter of 2017-18 playing in Sydney, Australia. But he’s also securing his future by finishing his degree requirements through

FGCU Complete while coaching his former high school team in Bradenton before heading north for his own playing season.

“Education has always been very important to me,” said Suchy, who started FGCU Complete in spring 2019 and plans to graduate this spring with a bachelor’s in Integrated Studies and a minor in Education. “I pride myself on being the best in anything I do. Baseball is still my love, but I understood that in order to be the best contributor to society outside of baseball, I needed to continue my higher education.”

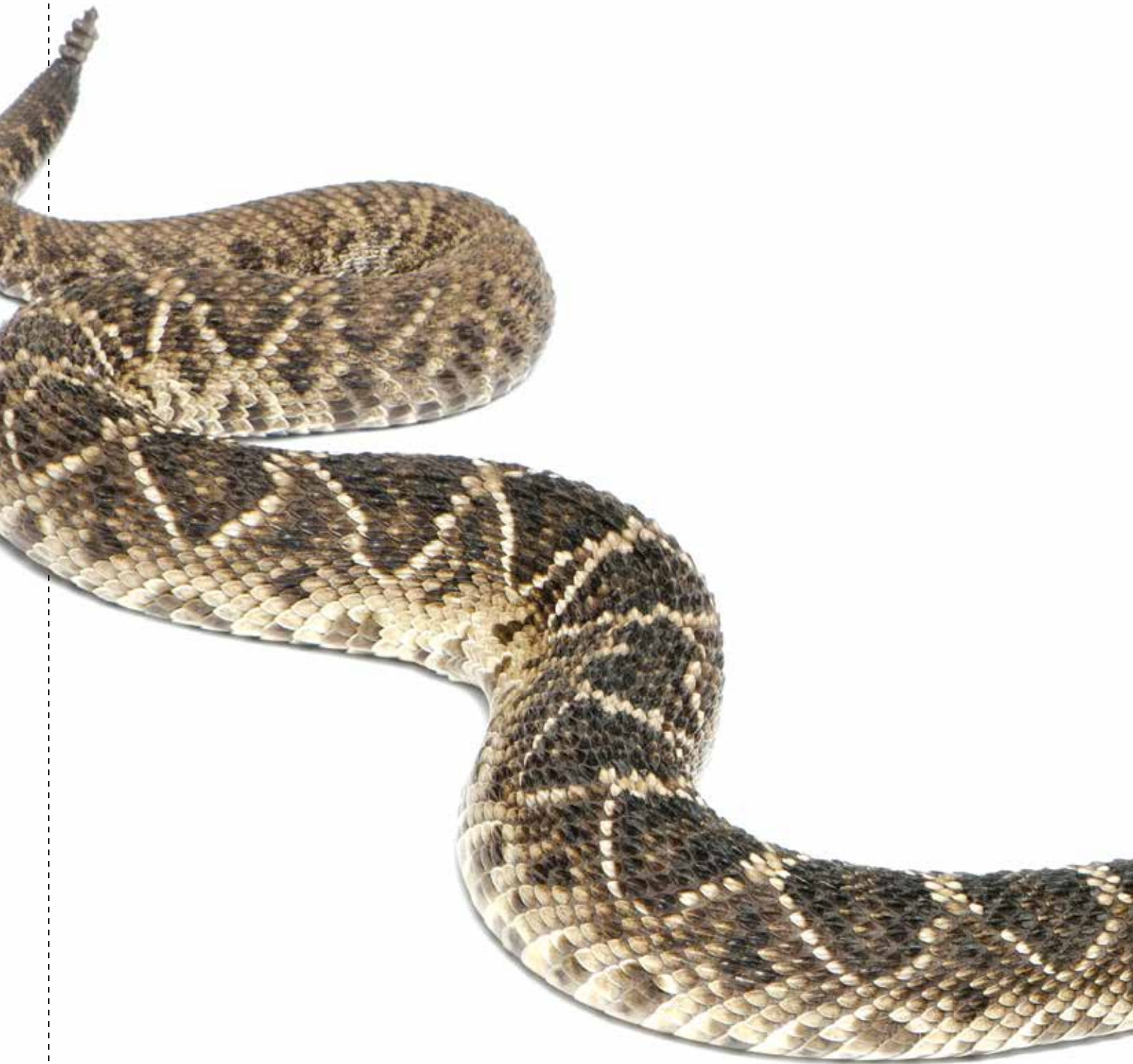
Suchy said while taking classes on campus creates the ideal opportunity for growth and learning because of the interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, “now that I’m in my fourth semester straight of online classes, I’m starting to appreciate them as well. Since I’m on the road a lot playing baseball professionally, I sometimes have less time to work and communicate with classmates, but it’s teaching me great time-management skills and life lessons I can apply when it comes to meeting deadlines in the real world.”

Suchy is most impressed by the “availability of the FGCU Complete staff, which is unbelievable. They make you feel as if you’re the only student they have,” he said.

That feeling is no surprise, considering that Vanselow says the feedback she gets from participating faculty from all of FGCU’s colleges representing numerous disciplines is that they find it “very rewarding, even educational.”

“For instance, you might be teaching a class on immigration, and find that a couple of your students are sheriff’s deputies who deal with these issues as part of their job, and bring real-life experiences into the classroom,” Vanselow said.

It all adds up to an innovative way to reach students who, for whatever reason, drifted off the four-year degree path. “I relocated to Florida in 1999, and saw FGCU form from the ground up,” Vanselow said. “We were created as a commuter institution, and now we’re going back to our roots, really serving our workforce population in a different way. I enjoy knowing that.” ■



The Snake *Whisperer*

Beloved biology professor's legacy ensured through scholarships and continuing reptile research.

BY DREW STERWALD



On July 4, 2018

members of the FGCU community, friends and family gathered in the Food Forest to dedicate a tree to John Herman in one of his favorite places. As they stood in a circle, sharing remembrances and comforting each other in their grief, an **Eastern diamondback rattlesnake** inched into view as if on cue.

"It just rolled up not far from where we were standing," remembers FGCU graduate Jessi Drummond, a Food Forest volunteer and friend and former student of Herman's. "I'd never seen one in there. It was wild – and very appropriate."

Herman, after all, had studied rattlesnakes, handled them, tracked them on campus. Some even called him "The Snake Whisperer." He loved snakes and helping dispel some people's fear of them. One of his last hurrahs occurred in Peru the summer before he died, when he wrangled a rare bushmaster, the largest viper in the world, which can grow 12 feet long.

Herman would fearlessly duck into scrub and emerge with a venomous snake squirming in his hands – all in the name of research. A herpetologist and FGCU assistant professor of biology, his goal was to expand scientific knowledge of the often-misunderstood creatures, although he also studied gopher tortoises and burrowing owls.

Beyond his fascination with Florida's abundant fauna, Herman was admired as that unique brand of teacher who could inspire even non-science nerds to learn about the natural world, to muck about in a swamp, to appreciate the beautiful geometry of a diamondback's skin. Herman touched the lives of countless individuals with his contagious enthusiasm for nature and science and his accessibility as a teacher, colleague and friend.

From the time he was able to walk, John E. Herman reveled in scooping up

frogs and turtles and snakes. Most kids outgrow that phase. Herman clung to it, even as he battled the cancer that ended his life in 2018 at age 41. His curiosity and love for the natural world fueled his life's work, his passion, his mission to inspire the same connection in others.

"There's something people say about field biologists and naturalists – all of the good ones have a quality of a child in them," says environmental science Professor Win Everham. He remembers hearing buzz about Herman when Herman was interviewing for the instructor position he got in 2011. "It's like we're 10 or 12 years old and just excited to be able to run in the woods. John certainly had that sense of wonder, that joy of discovery that's infectious. He genuinely cared about people."

It's no wonder that after his death, interest quickly spread in commemorating and preserving Herman's legacy. From planting trees to seeding undergraduate and graduate scholarships, from establishing a new annual award for general education teaching to supporting the continuation of Herman's research, those closest to him have created lasting tributes to an exemplary educator.

"He so clearly represented what we aspire to be at FGCU," says Director of Undergraduate Scholarship Charles "Billy" Gunnels, a fellow biologist who specializes in animal behavior. "He had some of the best qualities we want from a professor. He was here first and foremost to teach and had a strong commitment to service and research. He always made

himself available to students."

One of the many was junior biology major and Honors College member Alex Marsh, the first undergraduate recipient of the John Herman Biodiversity Studies Opportunity Scholarship endowed by Herman's family. Whenever he spotted a rattlesnake on one of the campus nature trails, Marsh would phone Herman, who had the permits needed for handling venomous snakes, so they could measure them and take scale samples. Like his mentor, Marsh grew up exploring the wilderness and caught his first rattlesnake at 13. After calling, Marsh would sit and observe a snake for however long it took Herman to arrive on the scene. One time, it was an hour and a half.

"He got out of his truck and said 'Where's my baby at?' He was so happy whenever he got to interact with the rattlesnakes," Marsh recalls. "The passion he put into everything made everyone want to be a better person. Working with him definitely made me more passionate about doing research."

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A tribute to biology professor John Herman remains in the FGCU Food Forest.

Junior biology major Alex Marsh says studying snakes on campus alongside Herman kindled his passion for research.

Paul Herman stands at the preserve dedicated to his son in Ohio.

Herman with wife Wendy Brosse, left, and Jessi Drummond, a friend and former student.



“The passion he put into everything made everyone want to be a better person. Working with him definitely made me more passionate about doing research.”

HONORS COLLEGE MEMBER, ALEX MARSH
FIRST UNDERGRADUATE RECIPIENT OF THE JOHN HERMAN BIODIVERSITY
STUDIES OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP ENDOWED BY HERMAN’S FAMILY





Teaching was 'a pleasure and a joy'

John Herman grew up poking around the natural world. Raised on a sprawling farm near the Lake Erie shoreline, he developed a knack for finding bugs and reptiles amid the marshes of a nearby game

reserve, according to his parents, Paul and Terry Herman. The family farm has since been transformed into the John E. Herman Wetland Restoration (see story, page 39).

"He and his brother were in 4-H. Charlie was into crops and John was running through fields catching insects," Terry Herman recalls.

A retired Bowling Green State University professor, she says her son never thought of teaching as a job. It was "a pleasure and a joy," whoever he was sharing knowledge with: his children Sydney, 16, and Garrett, 12, from his first marriage, to Julie Herman; or community members learning about Florida ecology during one of his Strolling Science Seminars at CREW Land & Water Trust trails. Hands-on teaching – that was his forte.

"He was always teaching his children," Terry Herman says. "There was nothing more important to him. They were integrated in his school life and would go on out weekends doing field work with his students. They'd all come back to his house and sit around talking about research

and eating pie. John was an avid pie maker."

His favorite? Coconut cream, according to Wendy Brosse, who preferred his pumpkin pie. A biologist who specializes in botany, she met Herman at a herpetology symposium in her native Costa Rica; they married in October 2015, just a little more than two years before he was diagnosed with cancer. Even as he battled the disease, he found the energy to continue teaching and helping students with research.

"He was a super-strong person who was able to see past the pain he was feeling," Brosse says. "He loved what he did – you could see it."

Kindred spirits were drawn into Herman's familial FGCU network. And like extended kin, their efforts to honor him and continue his legacy have given solace to his relatives.

"It's very comforting to see so many people cared," Brosse says. "It does feel like a big family."

Adds John's father, Paul, "We've had so many people tell us how much they appreciated the help that our son gave them – even parents who said he helped their son or daughter get headed in the right direction. John would give anybody anything – it didn't have to be about biology."

Julie Herman still remembers how excited Herman was the first time a student of his said, "I never liked science before. You made it fun."



TOP: John Herman's enthusiasm for his subject helped make science relatable for a wide range of students.

ABOVE: Herman instilled a love of nature in his children, Garrett and Sydney, from a young age.

“He so clearly represented what we aspire to be at FGCU. He had some of the best qualities we want from a professor. He was here first and foremost to teach and had a strong commitment to service and research. He always made himself available to students.”

DIRECTOR OF UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP, CHARLES “BILLY” GUNNELS

“His motive wasn’t for them to change to a biology major, but he wanted them to learn something and enjoy their time,” she says. “He wanted to show them trudging through scrub or mud or waist-deep water looking for critters could be fun.”

A role model for students

In a message to the campus community, Robert Gregerson, then dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, said at the time of his death: “He cared deeply about his students, both academically and personally. No one devoted more time to helping students succeed than did John. He was a model of The FGCU Effect and will be sorely missed by all who knew him.”

Former students posted tributes on Facebook like this: “I was lost in academia and I wasn’t sure what I wanted to be when I grew up, until I took Dr. Herman’s class,” one wrote. “He inspired me to become a scientist and now I work as an environmental scientist in water quality. Dr. Herman instilled a passion in me for our natural world and lit a fire in my heart.”

Herman became a mentor and friend to Jessi Drummond (’14, Environmental Studies) after she took one of his ecology classes. Beyond teaching, Herman supported students’ research projects, helped them figure out career paths and offered a caring ear to their troubles, Drummond says.

“John provided me with an excellent example of the person I wanted to be,” she wrote in an application essay for the graduate scholarship she received through the Herman endowment, which has helped her complete her master’s degree while also working full time at FGCU. “He inspired me to constantly explore the world and not be limited by a life society creates for us.”

Another grad student, Matthew Metcalf (’17, Environmental Science Master’s), wound up at FGCU because of Herman, and now he’s continuing his mentor’s

research as a visiting instructor. With a zoology degree from Auburn University and an interest in herpetology, Metcalf was looking at master’s programs. Few places are better for studying reptiles than Florida, he says, so he made inquiries at FGCU. Herman invited him to visit and took Metcalf on a 16-hour field day to study Eastern indigo snakes, a non-

RESTORED OHIO WETLANDS FULFILLS HERMAN’S DREAM

In addition to endowing the John Herman Biodiversity Studies Opportunity Scholarship as a lasting legacy at FGCU, the Herman family has realized John’s dream of restoring the family farm as the wetlands it originally was. Part of the Lake Erie Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, the John E. Herman Wetland Restoration is about 20 miles east of Toledo, Ohio.

Completed in 2018, the project restored 53 acres of wetland habitat and 62 acres of native grasses and flowers in Jerusalem Township and was recognized with an award from the local soil and water conservation district. The property borders another preserved wetland, helping to create a corridor for wildlife.

“Since John was little, he always wanted it to be wetlands,” says his father, Paul Herman. “John kept pushing until everyone in the family agreed. He didn’t get to see the final product, but he did his part, talking to the county agencies and working out the plans. They were impressed.”

“It was one of his favorite places, and we are happy that a piece of him will always be there,” adds Julie Herman, his first wife. “John was fearless. Confident. Caring. Supportive. And was always willing to try something new. Those are the qualities I see in our children and hope that when they think of him those are the things they remember.”

venomous native species federally classified as threatened. At one point, Herman dove head-first into a burrow and pulled out a seven-foot indigo. Metcalf was hooked, and they became fast friends.

“It was awesome. I thought, ‘OK, he’s kind of insane but that’s cool, that’ll work,’” recalls Metcalf.

Metcalf joined Herman in his rattlesnake research, taking on more responsibility as Herman underwent chemotherapy. Their work in Southwest Florida is critical because most of the current knowledge is based on research conducted in northern Florida, where the climate, landscape, hydrology and plant life are very different, Metcalf explains. A key aspect of the work Herman started is studying wildlife in urban settings, like the FGCU campus, to see how human development impacts natural ecology. By having transmitters implanted in rattlesnakes they capture, the scientists can use radio telemetry to gather data about the vipers’ range, growth rate, mating habits and more.

Although the campus research is ongoing, it already has yielded at least one newsworthy finding: A parasite common to invasive Burmese pythons in the Florida Everglades appeared in a rattlesnake on campus.

“This was the first time it was documented in an Eastern diamondback,” Metcalf says.

After Herman’s death, Metcalf was hired to teach, continue Herman’s research and “adopt” undergraduates like Alex Marsh whom Herman had been mentoring. This summer, they will join Gunnels for the continuation of a project to measure reptile and amphibian populations in a part of the Peruvian Rainforest that is expected to be impacted soon by human development. To those involved, the work clearly represents the spirit of Herman’s legacy.

“It’s very clearly inspired by the types of things he did and would want to do,” says Gunnels. “If he were here today he would very much be a part of that.” ■

STAR STRUCK

ASTROSCIENTIST FOLLOWS THE LIGHT IN SEARCH
FOR LIFE ON OTHER PLANETS

By Jay MacDonald



ASTRO- SCIENTIST DEREK BUZASI'S MISSION IN LIFE...

is to see the light, even if he has to hunt through the night sky using land-based and orbiting telescopes and technologies to do so.

After all, light is the messenger that may one day enable this groundbreaking astero seismologist and his FGCU team to discover life on other planets – and perhaps identify a planetary refuge should ours become uninhabitable.

What the heck is astero seismology? The fun-loving Buzasi, a Whitaker Eminent Scholar, participated in the late 20th-century breakthrough that uses multiwavelength technology of light's many sources (x-ray, gamma ray, infrared, etc.) to learn about the interior structure of stars by studying their light-rippling oscillations. For stars, astero seismology helps tell us their age and how long their galaxies may be around, while for planets, it may spot so-called "rocky" globes that could support life as we know it.

"Think of oscillations as soundwaves," he suggests. "It's as if you were listening to a bell with instruments and trying to use that information, working backwards, to figure out how the bell is made. That's really what we are doing."

While scientists began using astero seismology in the 1960s to study our own Sun from the Earth, Buzasi kicked it into space in 1999 when he convinced NASA to let his scientific team help salvage its aborted Wide-field Infrared

Explorer (WIRE) satellite mission to study stars and planets in starburst galaxies. To Buzasi, then a research physicist with the Space Sciences Laboratory at the University of California, Berkeley, the tiny two-inch telescope installed on WIRE for navigational purposes presented an unprecedented opportunity to explore the oscillations of a virtually uncharted universe of stars without having to squint through Earth's atmosphere.

Since WIRE was still in orbit, NASA agreed to let Buzasi harvest all the oscillations he could from its \$73 million satellite, having aborted its original mission shortly after takeoff due to premature ejection of the spacecraft's aperture cover. WIRE eventually re-entered the Earth's atmosphere on May 10, 2011, 18 months after the follow-up WISE satellite was placed into orbit. Buzasi and team would harvest galaxies of starlight data from both.

"I was really lucky to be in the right place at the right time. I had a good idea and I was able to make people listen to me enough to let us try it. All of those pieces have to fit together," Buzasi explains. "It was something that no one at that point was going to pay to do, but since we



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already had the spacecraft up there that could be converted to that purpose, we were really in the right place."

Once NASA saw space through his eyes, Buzasi was given the green light as astero seismology pioneer for future missions. His ever-growing CV includes detector scientist for the Cosmic Origins Spectrograph aboard the Hubble Space Telescope, principal investigator for the ongoing WIRE mission and science team member for NASA's planet-finding Kepler mission. The 26 WIRE stars that his team studied between 1999 and 2006 are now the focus of his new project with NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS), which launched in April 2019. Buzasi and his FGCU team are already



Astroscientist Derek Buzasi uses light to probe stars in search for extraterrestrial life.

busy analyzing the data TESS began delivering late last year.

How did a clear-eyed guy like Buzasi get the stars in his eyes?

"I became interested in astronomy when I was pretty little," he admits. "My third-grade teacher's husband was the eighth-grade science teacher and he brought in a telescope and set it up one evening at school, and I was sold and never really gave it up. I did a lot of reading on my own and that got me into it even more. So when I went to graduate school in astronomy (he earned his Ph.D. in

astronomy at Penn State), my advisor took me out to Arizona to observe and be on the telescope, and that was pretty magical and really sold the deal for me."

Buzasi also met and married his wife, Heather Preston, after stargazing with his fellow astronomer in grad school at the National Observatory. Preston now serves as planetarium director at Calusa Nature Center and Planetarium in Fort Myers. They have one son, Grant, a political science major. In his spare time, Buzasi is finishing up his duty in the Navy Reserve, where he serves as engineering duty officer with the rank of commander.

Intrigued by space, was he ever tempted to become an astronaut? "Oh, I applied long ago to be an astronaut," Buzasi says.

"If I had the opportunity, I would go. I was interested, but I'm happy studying space; I don't have to necessarily go there (laughs)."

As things turned out, the several NASA launches he has attended have proven most fulfilling. "My office mate when I was a post-doc(toral), Ed Lu, became an astronaut, so I actually came to his first launch (1997)," he says. "Every launch is amazing and sort of magical in its own way, and even more so when there's someone aboard who you know going up or some instrument or payload that really means something to you. When Kepler and TESS went up, those were personally meaningful to me."

Buzasi's own space journey really took

ONCE NASA SAW SPACE THROUGH HIS EYES, BUZASI WAS GIVEN THE GREEN LIGHT AS ASTEROSEISMOLOGY PIONEER FOR FUTURE MISSIONS.

off when NASA accepted his plan B for WIRE and allowed him to focus on asteroseismology, its systematic observation of how stars age and what those effects can be on the planets that orbit them.

“The first funded expeditions for a spacecraft to do stuff like this was really focused on looking at planets instead of stars,” he says. “WIRE really was a pathfinder. The missions that came after all used the WIRE experience we had to learn how to do, and we all shared data. We speculated that we’d see oscillations in these stars and what maybe we could do with that, but nobody had really done it at that point.”

What was it like to be the first human to receive that mini-telescope’s stellar imagery?

“(Laughs) It was pretty exciting, because you were seeing something that no one else had seen, and you can’t see it from Earth,” he recalls. “It wasn’t as easy as that, because it needed a lot of processing, but still, even the raw data before we learned how to handle all the systematics was better than anything we could do from the ground at that time.”

In September 2019, the National Science Foundation awarded a \$400,000 grant to an Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University project headed by Buzasi and Embry-Riddle professors Tomomi Otani and Terry Oswalt to study Kepler and

TESS data on 3,400 “star pairs” (stars that orbit each other). The project team will use asteroseismology to explore which stars are most likely to host habitable planets and how age affects their rotation.

While the newest stargazing technology has determined that star life lasts roughly 10 billion years and our middle-aged Sun may be 4.6 billion years young, solar age can factor heavily into both climate change and the likelihood of life on other planets. In short, no sun, no fun.

“It’s wanting to know about the universe we live in and how it got to be the way it is. All of the things we do are sort of aimed at that,” Buzasi explains. “Understanding stars is one aspect of that and that’s the aspect I work on, but there are others as well; there are people who do cosmology and other kinds of things who look at the universe on different scales. Most of the work that I do is aimed at understanding more locally, so we look at the history of the Milky Way.”

Like people, stars slow down as they age. What would happen if our Sun’s rotation slowed by half? Buzasi says that while our middle-aged Sun isn’t likely to come to a full stop, learning more about it is a top priority to address climate change.

“What fundamentally drives our climate is the Sun. What we do to affect the earth’s

atmosphere and magnetic fields all have an effect, but what ultimately drives whether the earth is habitable or not is the Sun. If the sun starts flaring like crazy all the time, that’s going to have a significant bad impact on habitability. So when we want to understand the sun – how it might evolve with time, how it might change and how it behaved in the past to make the atmosphere of the earth the way that it is now – that’s the role to which TESS and Kepler and those sorts of missions are relevant.”

The good news is, Buzasi’s breakthrough with NASA will soon fill the astronomer’s plate: where WIRE provided telescopic access from space to observe over 100 stars, the second Kepler mission will unveil up to 1,000 and TESS will provide a bumper crop of 20 million.

Studying stars via asteroseismology will continue to reveal mankind’s options should the Earth one day prove inhabitable.

“How do you make planets? Where do you make planets? Eventually, we want to find potentially habitable planets because we’re interested in finding life now,” Buzasi sums up. “Knowing whether we’re alone or not has been a question for thousands of years and to know where to look, you need to understand not just planets but the stars that they orbit, where planets like ours are likely to form.” ■

ALUMNI



ALUMNI AWARDS

Lee Health CFO honored as Alumnus of Distinction

BY KEITH GIBSON

WITH SOME 14,000 employees, Lee Health is the largest employer between Tampa and Miami, doing \$2 billion in business annually while serving about two million patients in

Southwest Florida. Given those numbers, it's unquestionably a source of pride for Florida Gulf Coast University that one of its alumni is the administrator who manages the finances and operations of the healthcare giant.

But Ben Spence ('10 M.S. Health Science), the FGCU Alumni Association's

2020 Alumnus of Distinction, is equally proud to be recognized by the university.

"I really didn't expect it," said Spence, whose master's degree includes a concentration in health services administration. "It's an amazing honor to be chosen."

Spence, Lee Health's chief financial

and business services officer, and five other alumni designated as this year's Soaring Eagles (one from each college) were honored at the Alumni Association's annual awards ceremony Feb. 7 in the Cohen Student Union as part of Homecoming 2020.

For Spence, earning a master's at FGCU after the Cleveland native had dual-majored in finance and real estate at The Ohio State University, earning a Bachelor

his nomination of Spence for the FGCU alumni award.

"Ben is an incredible individual who ... demonstrates his exceptional value and talent as an FGCU alumnus on a daily basis," Antonucci wrote. "Ben collaborates with organization leaders, medical staff, employees and the patient community in a variety of activities dedicated to ensuring long-term financial viability of the system while improving the health

employer in the county – we are always looking for more employees. We are always challenged in that area."

Lee Health's regional workforce demands are among those FGCU will continue to fill with degree programs designed to get graduates off to a running start in the business world. "I really like how well-rounded the master's program is," Spence said. "They didn't teach us a lot about health finances in business school,

"They didn't teach us a lot about health finances in business school, and FGCU's health services administration concentration really gives you a great overall background. The courses lay out many of the different pieces of the puzzle in healthcare, which is a unique industry, and the curriculum pulled those pieces together for me in a way I wouldn't have been able to otherwise."

BEN SPENCE, ALUMNUS OF DISTINCTION WINNER

of Science in 1992, was another step up the ladder during his career climb within Southwest Florida's premier healthcare provider. After following his retiring parents to Southwest Florida in '92, Spence had "dabbled in real estate, and soon realized my skillset wasn't in sales, but in finance," he said.

He started at Lee Health – then known as Lee Memorial Health System – in 1995 as a reimbursement clerk in the financial services department. "It was a privilege to get a foot in the door, knowing what a great organization it is," Spence said. Since 2000, he has ascended to a variety of management roles in what he describes as a "continuous learning process."

In his current job in charge of finances and business services, Spence's responsibilities are far too numerous to list, but perhaps the best summation of his importance to Lee Health comes from Dr. Lawrence Antonucci, the system's president and chief executive officer, in

outcomes of the population served by Lee Health at the lowest possible cost. ... Ben's great work keeps this hallmark of our community running so that the needs of the community can be served."

Those needs of the community often require figuring out ways to absorb the cost of healthcare for those who don't have insurance and can't afford it. "We don't turn anyone away, so we have to make money from other sources to offset that and continue our mission," Spence said. "It's a real challenge."

Although he didn't have an exact number, Spence said he knows Lee Health employs more FGCU graduates than any other single business, with the Lee County School District second. "The nursing school (in the Marieb College of Health & Human Services) is a great feeder for us, and we've also benefitted greatly by hiring FGCU graduates in areas such as analytics and IT," Spence said. "And as large as we are – the largest

and FGCU's health services administration concentration really gives you a great overall background. The courses lay out many of the different pieces of the puzzle in healthcare, which is a unique industry, and the curriculum pulled those pieces together for me in a way I wouldn't have been able to otherwise."

Spence joined five other FGCU alums honored at the ceremony as Soaring Eagles for their achievements since graduating. The annual celebration of success by members of the university family is special for Kimberly Wallace, director of alumni relations and a proud Eagle herself ('09 M.A. School Counseling; '06 B.A. Communication).

"The Alumni Awards celebration is one of my favorite events that we host," Wallace said. "It honors our outstanding graduates for their achievements both in their careers and in their communities. I'm so proud of all of our nominees and what they are accomplishing." ■

ALUMNI AWARDS

This year's alumni honored as Soaring Eagles are:

Jessica Marcolini

('08, '10 MS)

College of Arts & Sciences

An instructor in the Integrated Studies department at FGCU, Marcolini is a true champion of combining service-learning and civic engagement in her classroom. She has designed a "one class-one project" model that gets an entire class focused on the same objective for a nonprofit agency. She also is behind the Weigh the Waste project on campus to raise awareness of food waste by weighing it. Marcolini stays involved in community sustainability and walkability projects, including as a board member of Streets Alive of Southwest Florida.



Alicia Ciaffone

('12)

College of Education

Lee County elementary school teacher Ciaffone has spent eight years teaching first- through third-graders, but her love and concern for students goes beyond classroom instruction. She developed her school's first National Elementary Honor Society chapter, which inducted its first group of students this year and works on special projects such as "Birthday Bags," which ensure that less-fortunate students have everything they need for a happy birthday. She also helps underserved students with a special closet that contains clothes and personal hygiene items they can take for free.



Maria Elkady

('16)

Lutgert College of Business

Elkady brings joy to hundreds of sick and developmentally disabled children through Heroes Unmasked, a nonprofit she founded and presides over that brings cosplay to hospitals and residential homes throughout Florida. Since 2017, Heroes Unmasked has sent volunteers dressed in superhero costumes to brighten the lives of almost 800 children statewide.



Julia Roscher

('17)

U.A. Whitaker College of Engineering

Whether it's working as a flight-test engineer at the Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division in Orlando or as a volunteer with the Center for Horsemanship and Personal Success, Roscher is either shooting for the sky or staying grounded to make an impact. In her former role, Roscher develops test planning and reporting documentation for the Navy, while in the latter role, she educates, empowers and enriches physically disadvantaged children through therapeutic horseback riding, which she is greatly passionate about.



Darin Hovis

('13)

Marieb College of Health & Human Services

Rated as one of the top 50 golf athletic trainers in the U.S., Hovis volunteers with FGCU's PGA Golf Management Program by conducting Titleist Performance Institute movement screening on incoming freshmen. Since graduating, he founded Par 4 Fitness in North Naples, which strives to help golfers of all skill levels achieve maximum performance. Additionally, Hovis has overseen wellness and performance programs for several professional golf tours.



“

**Stay curious. Don't be
complacent. Always
seek to learn more
about your community.”**

CHRISTINE
DOUANGSOURI

CLASS OF 2016

Meet me in the middle

Social worker helps people see dignity through changing circumstances

BY NINA BARBERO, '16

MOST PEOPLE SEEK to avoid conflict in their professional lives. Social worker Christine Douangsouri ('16, MSW) seeks it out.

Every step of her career has seen Douangsouri comfortably in the middle of conflict – between refugees and angry U.S. citizens, between cancer patients and financial obstacles, and now, at the senior living community, Vi at Bentley Village, between senior residents and the acceptance of their own physical and mental changes.

Douangsouri came to Florida Gulf Coast University to earn her Master of Social Work after an eye-opening internship in her hometown of Philadelphia. It was at the same Nationalities Service Center her family passed through when they emigrated from Laos in 1979.

"I assisted refugees in securing employment, and I taught English classes there," Douangsouri says. "Securing employment and securing that financial stability is really tough, especially with the changing economy."

Douangsouri's charges were mainly refugees fleeing ethnic genocide from Egypt, Bhutan, Myanmar, Ethiopia and Eritrea. She saw xenophobia first-hand one day while taking a group of refugees home after a visit to a food pantry.

"We took a bus back home and we were really happy, we had bags of food in our hands, and someone on the bus was upset because someone was taking their seat. The person who took their seat couldn't really understand what they were saying, and at that point the person just started screaming racial slurs and 'get out of this country,'" Douangsouri says.

She remembers calming the group

down, getting them home, then crying in her office.

"I was so surprised by what I had seen," she says. "It made me want to work even harder for vulnerable populations. It drives me to do what I do on a daily basis."

Now in Southwest Florida, Douangsouri says she sees some of those same negative attitudes toward immigrants.

"The feeling of not being welcomed, I think that impacts their psyche in terms of being able to assimilate, being able to settle," Douangsouri says. "Shifting mentality is what's really going to help this population, because when we are more willing to listen to their stories, we are going to be more willing to help."

Helping students of all ages keep an open mind was part of her role when she worked in FGCU's Office of Community Outreach during her graduate studies. Douangsouri helped bring in speakers on topics such as the Holocaust and the Civil Rights Movement to shed light on social issues. She also gave university tours to students from low-income areas, such as Immokalee.

Now she puts her skills to use with a part-time job at NCH Healthcare System, where she is earning clinical hours to become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and a full-time job at Vi at Bentley Village.

In both jobs, Douangsouri says listening is key to supporting patients and residents.

"When working in the hospital setting, you see the very worst situations, but you also see resilience and the strength of people," she says. "Just being able to listen to their stories and provide them with that emotional support, I think that's a component that needs to be addressed more in the healthcare industry."

Kelley Sullivan, director of nursing at Vi at Bentley Village, first met Douangsouri

at NCH and now works with her at Vi at Bentley Village.

"In all my dealings with Christine at the hospital, she was always the most professional, most friendly, person," Sullivan says. "It can be very crazy and challenging, but she just handles things with such dignity and grace."

That professionalism is what Douangsouri says she uses in conversations with residents of Vi at Bentley Village about their physical or cognitive changes. Douangsouri says these conversations can be difficult for residents who have always been self-sufficient.

"The idea of needing help is not always welcome," Douangsouri says. "My goal is to treat every person with dignity and respect. What that looks like is having a frank conversation with them, but with compassion and kindness and helping them navigate those waters."

Part of Douangsouri's role also includes sensitivity training for new hires, and training on how to have productive difficult conversations.

"It's really a mentality shift," Douangsouri says. "When we think about difficult conversations we think of our anxiety, we think of feeling uncomfortable, but really we need to see that as an opportunity to listen to what the other person has to say."

Douangsouri's advice to students who want to work in her field is to "stay curious. Don't be complacent. Always seek to learn more about your community."

That curiosity fuels Douangsouri, even in her free time. She plans to launch an Etsy shop called @ChristineBrinkertArt to sell her paintings, shortly before her October wedding to Jim Brinkert. Together they have two cats, Nala and Gronk, short for former Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski. ■

A L U M N I



CLASS OF 2010

Communication major doesn't regret trading football for friends

BY LORI FERGUSON

FOR TARIQ 'TQ' HUMES, joy springs from helping others.

While a student at FGCU, Humes ('10, Communication) worked in Campus Recreation and helped to start the football program at the nearby Canterbury School, a private K-12 college preparatory school in Fort Myers. After graduating, he spent five years as Intramural Coordinator at Duke University, facilitating student involvement in extracurricular sporting activities.

Now Humes is back at Canterbury, teaching seventh-grade history and serving as Director of Activities for the Middle and Upper Schools. "I love every aspect of helping students," he says. "Whether it's high school students or college students, I like being an ear for the kids, someone who will listen to them and help them learn and grow."

Humes knows firsthand how powerful a helping hand can be. The Florida native graduated from a magnet school program at South Broward High School in Hollywood, and was offered a football scholarship to Maryville College in Tennessee. He was ready to accept, then decided to make one last school visit – to FGCU. "I came to the university, met a bunch of friendly people, saw the dorms on the beach, and said to myself, 'I think I can be done with football,'" he recalls. It's a decision he's never regretted.

"FGCU was a great fit for me," Humes says. "I'm so glad I decided to give up playing college football and come to this university because I was able to create an educational experience that was uniquely mine."



Whether it's high school students or college students, I like being an ear for the kids, someone who will listen to them and help them learn and grow."

TARIQ 'TQ' HUMES

He credits the university for the flexibility it offers students wishing to try new things and lauds faculty for their supportive attitudes. "The university's size is manageable, and the student-to-professor ratio is great for building relationships," he says. "I got to know my professors well and they got to know me.

Every instructor I had was welcoming and down to earth. They encouraged me to venture outside my comfort zone and try new things like joining a fraternity and taking a job in Campus Recreation."

Humes says Michael Howard, his former boss in Campus Recreation, was particularly supportive. "Michael was a very important mentor – he treated me as a friend rather than an employee. He saw me for who I was and encouraged me to push myself." The two developed a strong relationship that continued when the men found themselves together again at Duke, where Howard is now Managing Director of Recreation Facilities. "We shared Thanksgiving dinner together this past year," says Humes.

"When I returned to Canterbury, I felt like I had come full circle," he continues. "The successes I've realized in my career are a direct result of my experiences at FGCU and my wife (alumna Elizabeth (Miller) Humes, '12) and I feel like we're home again. We're happy to be back near the university – we met in Campus Recreation – our families are nearby, and I have a history with Canterbury."

"In my opinion, FGCU provides students with an educational experience that is second to none in the state of Florida," Humes says. "I refer to the university as 'FGTQ' because I made it my own. FGCU helped me to develop into the person I am today – I'm very grateful to the school for all it's done for me." ■

ARTS



MUSIC

Bower students strike right note with master classes in Immokalee

BY SETH SOFFIAN

MADISON NEILL IS moving quickly now through instructions on tempo, posture, finger position, bow pressure and more as three Immokalee Middle School students mostly keep up.

“Good. That was good,” the FGCU senior says as the students, all seated at cellos, follow her lead on a recent Friday afternoon in Immokalee. “Nice job. Right together. Keep going.”

During a pause for questions, one student lets a small, fatigued yawn escape. The 90-minute after-school session concludes a long day at the end of a long week for everyone.


But so mutually beneficial is the session – part of program that gives teaching experience to students from FGCU’s Bower School of Music while providing free lessons to second-year music students at Immokalee – that no offense is taken, and the lesson quickly resumes.

“The knowledge that the middle-school students take away is amazing,” said program founder and coordinator Judy Evans, a former FGCU adjunct instructor in string instruments and a long-time former public school teacher, including in Collier County.

“But the college kids are right behind them. They’re figuring out class management. They’re learning how to pace the lesson. They create their own lessons.”

The majority of Bower School students

(continued on next page 54)



FGCU student Anthony Claro leads a trumpet class of budding middle-school musicians.



“

The passion is there. They're into it. They're asking questions: 'What else can I do? Who else can I listen to?' It's really fun for me to see how I can help. They see I'm showing them respect and they say, 'I want to be like you. I want to be a teacher.' It's nice to hear."

”

JESUS SEGURA, '16 MUSIC EDUCATION

(continued from page 53)

are on the music education pathway, where the bulk of the jobs and often living wages lie. For some the master classes are their first formal experience as instructors. The program also provides a small stipend.

"I love it here. I love working with the kids," said FGCU freshman James Tsang, a Naples High School graduate who plays the double bass and is working with just one Immokalee student on this day.

"Actually from doing this I was thinking of going into giving private lessons to kids. It's amazing how fast they respond."

FGCU freshman Ericka Gabrielli Velez, a viola player and graduate of Cypress Lake High School in Fort Myers with aspirations to conduct a high school or college orchestra, said, "People think teaching is easy. It's not. Every time you do it you learn a little more about yourself as a teacher."

To participate in the program, which is set in the spring semester, Immokalee students have to have demonstrated a desire to practice and improve over their 18 months in music.

All of the participants, which Immokalee Middle orchestra director Angel Colon said represents about half of his second-year students, also are chosen because they can't afford private lessons. That serves as a nice ancillary reminder to the future instructors, Evans noted.

"Talent knows no zip code," she said, thinking back to students from lower-income families she's taught in past programs. "I had to kick them out of the room to go home at night.

"These kids are so nice, and they're eager and they listen," Evans said of the Immokalee students. "They go home and practice the technique and their scales."

The impact, all parties say, is significant, for the present and future.

"It's been very helpful," said eighth-grade tuba player Jadzia Hernandez, who was among seven students practicing with FGCU's Evin Exposito on the tuba and bass clarinet.

"I feel more confident with my breathing. At times I'll shrink back. My



counting getting back (to playing) is a lot faster than it was before."

"I've gotten better at intonation and tuning," said seventh-grade violist Pedro Jimenez, pointing to upcoming statewide assessments, where Evans said Immokalee Middle's more-established band program has improved considerably following master classes in recent years.

"They're teaching us how to stick together, how to hit the notes we can't hit usually," Jimenez said. "We're getting better."

Because orchestra and band classes are held in large groups, the master classes also give the Immokalee students critical time in smaller groups, organized by instrument.

"When we're in the band room, it's very helpful. But they have all the other instruments in there as well," Hernandez said. "I'm getting a lot more attention to my specific problems."

Beyond their improved confidence and skills, the younger musicians also are having their eyes opened to futures

LEFT: Anthony Claro, an FGCU music student, plays the trumpet with Immokalee middle school students.

ABOVE: FGCU student Pilar Gomez watches as her violin students play.

they never knew existed. Or at least never thought were realistic for them.

"You can go into careers," said Nathan Sinor, joined by fellow eighth-graders Alexis Ayala and Isaiah Casillas in explaining part of the impact from cello instructor Neill.

"She started in sixth grade and she's still playing," said Sinor, who hadn't considered a music career because he "didn't really know how to get into it."

Ayala like others said she's looked into private lessons but hasn't been able to take them.

"I have other important things going on, like work," she said.

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A R T S

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Colon said some of his students have been inspired to the point of seeking out classical music pieces to watch on their own.

Such impacts leave the FGCU students wondering if they're the ones benefitting most.

"We've all been through that struggle trying to learn one part and not getting it, and your teacher somehow solves all your problems and fixes that one mistake," Velez said. "You see that they finally get it. You see them light up because they're so excited."

"It's a gift," said Neill. "It's a gift for the kids and a gift to us."

Perhaps no one knows that better than Jesus Segura. A former member of the Immokalee middle and high school bands, Segura earned his bachelor's degree in music education from FGCU in 2016. He went on to land the job as music director at Eden Park Elementary in Immokalee.

Now he returns with current Bower School students to help inspire the next generation of young musicians in his hometown.

"I sat right up there," said Segura, pointing to the seat where he played trombone in the band room at Immokalee Middle.

"The passion is there. They're into it. They're asking questions: 'What else can I do? Who else can I listen to?' It's really fun for me to see how I can help. They see I'm showing them respect and they say, 'I want to be like you. I want to be a teacher.' It's nice to hear." ■

TOP, from left: Clarinetist Victoria Gupton, saxophonist Peter Noll and flutist Jennyfer Deleon, all FGCU Bower School of Music students, conduct master classes at Immokalee Middle School.

RIGHT: Judy Evans, founder of the program, spends a moment with FGCU alumnus Jesus Segura, who also attended Immokalee Middle School and enjoys teaching the next generation.





“ People think teaching is easy.
It's not. Every time you do it
you learn a little more about
yourself as a teacher. ”

ERICKA GABRIELLI VELEZ

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

FGCU's master class lessons at Immokalee Middle School are a collaboration between the FGCU Bower School of Music, Music Foundation of Greater Naples and Naples Concert Band.

Program founder and coordinator Judy Evans hopes to find a sponsor to cover the small cost to establish a similar program in Lee County.

"It could really affect a lot of students and certainly encourage them to keep playing," Evans said. "I'm very willing to train staff."

Evans, a lifelong music educator and director of outreach for the Music Foundation, first brought Bower School students to Immokalee in 2008 to help

provide violin lessons for 4- and 5-year-olds from lower-income families.

Today, she comes armed with mountains of research showing the developmental and academic benefits for children exposed to music at young ages.

"If you can play the violin or piano for one year before the age of 5, the left and right brain make many more connections," said Evans, founder of a program, MusicScores, that provides free, twice-weekly violin lessons in Collier County pre-kindergarten programs.

"It's not just the academic part. It's the emotional part. Music gets us through the times when we're really low, and it also helps us celebrate the highs. It's amazing."

- Seth Soffian

GIVING

FineMark gift supports new entrepreneurship center

BY DREW STERWALD

FLORIDA GULF COAST University moved closer to turning its plans for the Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation into reality thanks to a \$1 million pledge from FineMark National Bank & Trust – the largest single gift the Fort Myers-based company has ever made.

The three-story, 27,000-square-foot building on FGCU's main campus will house the burgeoning School of Entrepreneurship, the Small Business Development Center and FGCU's Regional Economic Research Institute, all of which engage in community partnerships that benefit economic development. The building is projected to cost about \$9 million.

"FineMark's generous gift puts us within sight of our goal to build a home for the School of Entrepreneurship and other programs that contribute to the economic vitality of Southwest Florida," said Kitty Green, vice president for University Advancement and executive director of the FGCU Foundation. "This investment in FGCU exemplifies FineMark's continuing commitment to community leadership and higher education, as well as the countless individuals who benefit from it."

In recognition of the gift, a business development space on the building's ground floor will be dedicated as the FineMark National Bank & Trust Incubator.

FineMark and its representatives have long been valued community partners of FGCU, volunteering expertise and mentorship to assist faculty, students and alumni, supporting academic and athletics programs, and serving on university boards.



FineMark's Harlan Parrish, left, Adria Starkey and Joseph Catti join FGCU President Mike Martin and Vice President for University Advancement Kitty Green in celebrating the \$1 million gift.

It's all part of FineMark's commitment to community engagement, according to President and CEO Joseph Catti. He has been involved with FGCU for more than 20 years, serving on the Board of Trustees and in other leadership roles.

"Our approach starts with our vision statement: 'to make a positive impact on the individuals, families and communities we serve while being good stewards of FineMark's resources,'" Catti said. "It is who we are as a company and as individuals. We're really proud to be in a position to make this gift."

Placing its support behind building the Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation is especially appropriate, he noted, because FineMark began as an entrepreneurial venture.

"We encourage our people to come up with new ideas," he said. "That is the entrepreneurial nature of what we do."

That strategic focus aligns well with

FGCU's, according to Sandra Kauanui, director of the School of Entrepreneurship, which has earned recognition from The Princeton Review as the top Florida school for undergraduate entrepreneurship studies.

"The school is focused on student success and being a catalyst to grow the entrepreneurial economy in Southwest Florida through creating an entrepreneurial mindset throughout the university," Kauanui said. "FineMark Bank is an entrepreneurial endeavor, so it means a great deal to me to receive its support." ■

HOW TO SUPPORT

For details about how to support the Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation building campaign, contact Bill Rice, senior associate vice president for Advancement, at (239) 590-1077.

“This university holds so many special memories for Brianne and me, we have discussed making this donation for a while. We just want to do what we can to help make FGCU bigger and better.”

CHRIS SALE, MAJOR LEAGUE ALL-STAR
AND FORMER FGCU PITCHER

Baseball star Sale makes big pitch for FGCU Athletics

BY KEITH GIBSON

WHEN YOUR MOST famous former student-athlete steps up to thank you by becoming your biggest former student-athlete donor, the cycle has officially begun.

The “cycle” is part of The FGCU Effect: inspiring those who, in turn, inspire others. In its almost 20-year history, Florida Gulf Coast University’s Athletics department has inspired countless student-athletes to go on and do great things in life, perhaps none more so than Boston Red Sox pitcher Chris Sale. A seven-time major league All-Star who’s well along a Baseball Hall of Fame path – thanks in part to the inspiration he got from FGCU Coach Dave Tollett, his staff and the entire Athletics staff – Sale exemplifies the cycle of inspiring Eagle student-athletes who come after him.

Blessed with a five-year, \$145-million contract extension from the Red Sox that began just before Spring Training was cut short by the COVID-19 outbreak, Sale and his wife, FGCU alum Brianne (’16, Communication), donated \$1 million at the annual Night at the Nest fundraiser in December to kick off Athletics’ new EAGLE Campaign. The announcement was the highlight of a record-setting Night at the Nest that brought in \$675,000 for

FGCU Athletics.

For the record, the gift is both the largest by a former student-athlete (Chris Sale) and by an FGCU undergraduate alum (Brianne Sale) in FGCU history. In the university’s view, the lefthanded, gunslinger-style pitcher who towers over hitters atop a mound at 6 feet, 6 inches has never stood taller.



Chris Sale speaking at the 2019 Night at the Nest fundraiser.

The tall, gangly pitcher from Lakeland High School had exactly one NCAA Division I scholarship offer: from Tollett and FGCU. By the time he left FGCU’s Swanson Stadium wearing the Green and Blue for the last time in 2010, that figurative string bean had grown into the Collegiate Baseball Player of the Year and the No. 13 overall pick in the Major League Baseball Draft, by the Chicago White Sox.

Since his trade to Boston in 2016, Sale – who makes Naples his permanent home with Brianne and their three sons – has come full-circle, getting to spend spring training in Southwest Florida while maintaining close ties with FGCU.

“Chris and Brianne’s generosity is truly amazing,” said Ken Kavanagh, FGCU athletics director. “As we get ready to embark on our third decade as an intercollegiate athletics program, it is imperative that we continue to generate external resources to provide to our coaches and student-athletes.”

Kavanagh credits much of the Eagles’ competitive success to the “tremendous generosity of our local community, who have essentially adopted us.” Sale himself made that same shout-out in announcing his transformative gift.

“There has been a core group of people at FGCU who have really helped the university grow over the years,” said Sale, who, in reflecting upon how much FGCU has meant to his family, called his million-dollar contribution a “no-brainer.” The gift will be used toward The Chris & Brianne Sale Family videoboard system at Swanson Stadium.

“The Swanson family has done so much for the baseball program specifically, and we’re trying to broaden that support overall,” Sale said. “I’m happy to follow in their footsteps to make an impact.”

And so the cycle of inspiration by giving back begins. The “bigger and better” mission to which Sale refers is central to the EAGLE Campaign, which follows an original \$5 million expansion of Alico Arena. Goals of the campaign include updating the Sublett Strength & Conditioning Center and other facility improvements; assisting student-athlete needs in academic success, life skills, mental health, nutrition and competitive fitness; and mentorship and leadership training for coaches and staff. ■

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

To learn how you can make an impact visit: fgcuathletics.com/feature/JoinOurTeam; or contact Graham Diemer, associate athletics director for Advancement, at (239) 590-7117 or gdiemer@fgcu.edu.

Local entrepreneur Brian Rist donates to entrepreneurship, ethics programs

BY KAREN FELDMAN

THE UNIVERSITY'S young School of Entrepreneurship has captured the imagination of hundreds of FGCU

students and area entrepreneurs are stepping up to help them succeed.

Among those supporters is Brian Rist, owner of Storm Smart, who recently pledged \$1 million toward construction of the Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation building, with a portion designated for the Newton Ethical Leadership Initiative, which will help expand ethics-based education.

"We've been lucky," he said. "Southwest Florida has been very good to us. Why wouldn't we give back to make it a better place?"

Three-quarters of the gift will go to the entrepreneurship building while the remainder will benefit the ethics program.

"Brian has been a tremendous supporter," said Sandra Kauanui, director of the School

of Entrepreneurship. "He's been involved as a judge when students competed for seed funding, has been a mentor and speaker and has hired one of our students as an intern. He's fully engaged.

"It meant so much that his donation provided the final \$750,000 we needed to get the \$4 million match that made it possible to construct the entrepreneurship building. It was a lot of validation."

Rist is clearly a fan of Kauanui's work as well.

"To see what Dr. K(auanui) is doing, getting the school ranked in the top 30 in the nation in three years, number one in the state of Florida, was so impressive," he said. Seeing the students' enthusiasm and creativity added to his enthusiasm for the program.

"When I was in college, I know how

naïve I was," he recalls. "I remember that I had no experience. To see these students coming out of her program with all of this knowledge – it's amazing."

The other portion of the gift goes to the ethics initiative.

"Ethics isn't all that sexy. It doesn't get a lot of attention," he said. "But I believe one of our shortcomings of our time is ethics. We don't teach or talk about ethics as much as we should. It would be a much better world if we were teaching ethics."

In appreciation for Rist's commitment, the FGCU High School Ethics Competition will henceforth be called the Rist Family Foundation High School Ethics Competition and a sign honoring the foundation will also be prominently displayed in the entrepreneur building once it is built. ■



Brian Rist

Lee Health partners with FGCU to educate critically needed mental health counselors

BY KAREN FELDMAN

AMONG THE BIGGEST gaps in the region's healthcare network is accessibility to mental health providers, according to a recent report by a county consultant.

This came as no surprise to those at Florida Gulf Coast University, where the Department of Counseling recently established The Community Counseling Center, an on-campus facility for the public. The intent is to help ease that shortage and provide training to advanced counseling students.

Now Lee Health Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Lee Health, has partnered with FGCU to provide scholarships to high-achieving students



enrolled in FGCU's mental health counseling master's program.

"There's an overwhelming shortage of pediatric behavioral and mental healthcare," said Chris Simoneau, chief foundation and development officer for Lee Health. To help allay this shortage, the Lee Health Foundation created the Kids' Minds Matter Restricted Scholarship Fund, and plans to award 10 \$5,000 scholarships annually to full-time students enrolled in the master's program at the Marieb College of Health & Human Services.

"With a partnership with FGCU's new counseling center and graduate program, we hope to recruit people and retain them while providing the resources for them to graduate with little debt so they can afford to stay and practice in the region," Simoneau said.

Alise Bartley, the director of The Community Counseling Center and a clinical assistant professor in the Department of Counseling, said, "We are excited that our students, who work so hard and sacrifice so much to help others who are experiencing mental health issues, have an opportunity to defray some of the cost of going to school. We have a strong candidate pool that has expressed an interest in working with children and families that will begin school in the fall." ■



Robbie Roepstorff was a major force in securing funding for the new FGCU Recreation & Wellness Center.

Edison National Bank creates scholarship fund

BY KAREN FELDMAN

WHILE FLORIDA Gulf Coast University's students are certainly pleased with their new nearly 50,000-square-foot Recreation & Wellness Center, they likely aren't any happier than Robbie Roepstorff, the former chair of the FGCU Board of Trustees and president of Edison National Bank.

She's also known as the head cheerleader for the fitness center, which she stressed was a necessity for keeping students physically and emotionally fit.

"It's the best feeling to walk in there," she said. "It feels so good because I know the students have been embracing it and loving it."

Throughout her years on the FGCU Board of Trustees, Roepstorff was a very vocal supporter of the fitness center, lobbying the state legislature and governor hard for funding to replace the 9,000-square-foot facility at Alico Arena

that was built when the school had about 3,000 students. It now has five times that number.

Roepstorff credits the students for making it happen. The \$18-million building was funded by the university's capital improvement fund, which includes student activity fees, as well as donations and a loan from the FGCU Financing Corporation.

Several years ago, students voted to increase their activity fees in order to provide funding for the center.

"They had the perseverance to continue to pay, believing it would come one day," she said. "They had far more patience than I did. I felt so bad that so many who were paying into it would never get the benefit of it. They were paying in for the future. They are my heroes."

In honor of the opening of the center for which she worked so hard, Roepstorff's husband, Geoff, Edison bank's CEO, surprised her by creating an endowed scholarship fund.

"Robbie was a tireless champion of the

university Recreation & Wellness Center and her perseverance ensured the project was completed," said FGCU President Mike Martin.

The Edison National Bank Scholarship Endowed Fund will be used to award scholarships to prospective student populations deemed to be underfunded. At the moment, the need for merit-based aid is needed to attract high-performing students.

The vice president for student success will determine each year where the need is greatest.

Roepstorff is happy about the new fund, too.

"Everybody in the bank has a passion for this university," she said.

In honor of her efforts to bring the center to reality, the group fitness studio will bear her name.

"I love the university campaign, The FGCU Effect," Roepstorff said. "It says so much about everybody's passion when they make a decision to be a part of this campus. They all live it and breathe it." ■

SPORTS





I feel like we had a chance to get into the Sweet 16 and maybe further. We could match up with any team in the country.



KERI JEWETT-GILES,
SENIOR GUARD, FGCU WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Nationally ranked women cope with bittersweet season of victories cut short by COVID-19 outbreak

BY SETH SOFFIAN

THERE MAY COME A day when the members of the 2019-20 FGCU women's basketball team are able to look back on their achievements without feeling a pit in their stomachs for what was lost.

But they may never stop wondering "what if?"

After rolling to the program's 10th ASUN Conference regular-season title in a dozen years and garnering its earliest-in-a-season ranking in a national poll, FGCU, like so many other teams, was left feeling empty by the early termination of the season because of the coronavirus.

But with a senior-dominated rotation that featured four players with at least 1,000 career points – putting FGCU alongside national power Oregon as the only teams in the nation with four 1,000-point scorers – the Eagles felt they were poised for a historic postseason.

That possibly could have included the perennial mid-major juggernaut's eagerly anticipated first appearance in the Sweet 16.

"We talked about this from the beginning of the season: 'Could we make history?'" said senior guard Keri Jewett-Giles, a Fort Myers native who graduated

last summer but made a last-minute decision to return for one last season because of the strong returning lineup.

"I feel like we were just on our way. We were just at our peak. We're not ever going to be able to show that. I feel like we had a chance to get into the Sweet 16 and maybe further. We could match up with any team in the country."

The day after the NCAA canceled the remainder of the season on March 12 because of concerns about COVID-19, FGCU held an impromptu net-cutting ceremony in Alico Arena to commemorate its ASUN regular-season title and being voted by league presidents as the conference's representative to the NCAA tournament.

The Eagles, 30-3 to that point and ranked 24th in the USA Today coaches' poll after reaching No. 22 earlier in the year, had already breezed through two rounds of the ASUN tournament. They were slated to face third-seeded Liberty, swept by FGCU in the regular season, in the ASUN final.

But even with championship rings coming their way and title banners waiting to be unfurled at the start of next season, the Eagles still wanted to settle matters on the court themselves.

"Knowing that we were going to do a lot of damage in the NCAA tournament is gut-wrenching," senior Ashli O'Neal, who came to FGCU from Indiana State as a



The FGCU women's basketball team had their own net-cutting ceremony to celebrate their stellar season.

graduate transfer specifically for a chance to play in the NCAA tournament, said after the ceremony.

"It felt like a funeral, honestly. It was so sad and so many tears. But at the end there was a lot of joy and a lot of celebration of what we've done. It was fun at the end."

Relying mostly on a six-player rotation that featured five seniors, FGCU also saw four-year program stalwarts Nasrin Ulel and Tytionia Adderley and redshirt senior guard Davion Wingate miss out on their last chances to play in the NCAA tournament.

Joined by redshirt junior starter Kerstie Phills in the main rotation, the veterans led FGCU to a historic November defeat of Notre Dame in Cancun along with non-conference defeats of top-75 RPI programs Duke, UCF, USF and South Dakota State.

On Dec. 31 – more than a month better than its previous best – the program made its earliest entry into the AP or USA Today poll.

And as the NCAA tournament neared, the Eagles were projected by ESPN as a No. 9 seed opening the tournament against No. 8 Michigan, with No. 1 South Carolina likely awaiting the winner.

That would have been FGCU's second-highest seeding ever, trailing only the seventh-seeded squad that beat No. 10 Oklahoma State in the first round in 2015 before falling to No. 2 FSU.

"This team was probably our most explosive offensively," said program-founding coach Karl Smesko, who took FGCU to the NCAA tournament six times in its first eight years eligible and also led the Eagles to the second round in 2018 as a No. 12 seed.

"We had so many different weapons and versatile players who could shoot the 3 and also drive the basket and make decisions. Our big players shot the 3 well and were good post defenders. They helped spread the floor. I thought we had a team capable of beating really good teams."

Senior guard Keri Jewett-Giles goes up for a basket against University of North Florida for a win of 76-65.

The reason for the season suspension and gravity of the situation weren't lost on the Eagles.

But on the day they would have been playing for their seventh NCAA tournament berth and fourth in as many seasons the emotions were still heavy.

"I want to earn everything I do," said Jewett-Giles, who also saw her enrollment in a coaching convention at the Final Four erased with that event cancelled.

"I really don't know how to feel about it. I'm starting to accept it. I've got to figure out my life without college basketball, because that's all I know."

FGCU has faced major graduations before – particularly after the 2012 and 2016 seasons. But neither saw quite as high a percentage of on-court productivity depart as with this bittersweet campaign.

"You definitely hurt for the players, because they put in a lot of effort," Smesko said. "But things are out of your control, and you can help players deal with their disappointment."

"I'll always remember that (the season) was cut short by this extraordinary circumstance. But there were a lot of high moments in it, and we got to experience winning a championship. I'll probably remember the good moments more than anything." ■



MEN'S BASKETBALL

With roster stability ahead, men's team looks for rebound season

BY SETH SOFFIAN

AN HONEST APPRAISAL of any season that doesn't go the way the home faithful hoped can't ignore harsh realities, and for the FGCU men's basketball team there were plenty in 2019-20.

But the collection of people who share optimism for the future of the once – and still – proud program is arguably just as meaningful after a second consecutive rough rebuilding year. Those include one of the battled-hardened former veterans the Eagles so clearly missed this season and a former rival coach who recently turned lean years into March riches.

"The more you win, the more patient people are," said FGCU head coach and long-time former assistant coach Michael Fly, whose second season in charge of the program resulted in a second consecutive losing record and first-round defeat in the ASUN Conference tournament.

"Nobody wants to hear this because of all the success that we've had. But this is not the same situation we've ever been in before," Fly said. "It has been a complete rebuild. We have had to turn the program over from a personnel standpoint for a variety of reasons."

Outside the FGCU locker room shortly after a 78-73 overtime loss at home to North Alabama in the regular-season finale – one of 10 losses by nine points or less during the 10-22 campaign – former Eagles stalwart Zach Johnson had a reassuring reminder for Fly.

"He said, 'You're close. You just don't have the experience you're used to



having,” said Fly, who started two juniors, two sophomores and one freshman in FGCU’s 68-63 loss at Lipscomb in the ASUN tournament, another game in which FGCU held a late lead it couldn’t secure. “That’s what I’ve tried to explain to people: my family, friends, fans. For years and years we had the most-veteran team in the league. And for the last two years we’ve had one of the most inexperienced teams in the league. We’re just fighting an uphill battle. Next year going forward we won’t be returning (just) three guys that played the previous year.”

After going 23-12 in 2017-18 – the last of Joe Dooley’s five seasons at FGCU and the program’s sixth straight with at least 20 wins – the Eagles have faced major roster turnover and playing rotation upheaval each of the last two seasons due to graduations, transfers and injuries.

The Eagles slid to 14-18 in what was expected to be a transitional year in 2018-19. That squad lost its top three scorers, four of its top five scorers and its top four rebounders from the prior campaign, then saw four starters or rotation members

Head Coach Michael Fly goes over plays during the men’s game against North Alabama.

sidelined by major injuries during the year.

Then after FGCU entered this season losing seven of the 10 players who saw significant minutes a year before, injuries impacted at least four primary contributors during the season. FGCU again ended up having to turn to untested newcomers or youngsters with little experience together.

While the roster instability showed itself in the number of narrow defeats, the Eagles are optimistic about having a sizable young nucleus returning for the first time in Fly’s tenure.

“The two years I’ve been here we’ve had two completely different teams,” said sophomore guard Caleb Catto, a Cape Coral native who led the Eagles with 12.7 points a game this season and was the only FGCU player to start all 32 games. “If you have the same lineup guys feel more comfortable in their roles. It’s easy to say that by game 30 they should have

everything figured out. But I think with a bunch of new pieces and a bunch of young guys it’s a growing process all year long. This thing is a process. It takes time.”

After this season, four players announced they are transferring. But three – senior wing Christian Carlyle, junior center Brian Thomas and redshirt sophomore guard Malik Hardy – were limited or didn’t play at all because of injuries after being expected to play major roles. The fourth is sophomore guard Zach Scott, who was third on the team with 10.8 points a game.

That leaves a promising returning core that includes Catto, rising senior point guard Jalen Warren, rising senior center Justus Rainwater, rising sophomore forwards Dakota Rivers and Qwanzi Samuels, and rising sophomore guard Cyrus Largie, a late-season starter.

“My hope is next year for the first time since I’ve been the head coach it won’t be, ‘Hey let’s get a roster sheet out to figure out who everybody is.’ And that’s what it’s been the first two years,” Fly said. “Unlike year one or two, we don’t have to hit reset.”

Late in the season, even as FGCU was still struggling to win close games, former Lipscomb coach Casey Alexander was among those calling to acknowledge the Eagles’ progress. In his first three seasons rebuilding a Bisons program that had lingered in the bottom half of the ASUN, Alexander’s teams were a combined 41-53 without a top-three finish in the league. In his last three seasons before he left after the 2018-19 season for another Nashville school, Belmont, Lipscomb was a combined 72-31. The Bisons won at least 20 games each year, finished second or better all three years in the ASUN and earned the school’s first NCAA tournament bid.

“He said, ‘Hey man, you’re doing things the right way. It’s going to turn out the way you want it to. You just have to continue to build it,’” Fly said. “He said, ‘Remind all those people that we were not very good at Lipscomb for a long time, then all of a sudden we were the best team in the league. But it took years and years of building that program.’” ■

With 600 wins, baseball coach Tollett one of FGCU's greatest catches

BY KEITH GIBSON

WHEN FLORIDA GULF Coast University baseball coach Dave Tollett won his 600th career game in a 2-0 victory over Kent State at Swanson Stadium on Feb. 21, the milestone victory added yet another clutch hit to his personal stat line.

Besides the overall wins, the man known affectionately as “To” (pronounced “toe”) inside and outside the FGCU family was on pace for his 200th ASUN Conference win this spring before the season was suspended, to go along with six league titles, five ASUN Coach of the Year plaques, almost 20 wins over nationally ranked teams and a roster of more than 40 players drafted by Major League Baseball clubs.

That’s a darn impressive composite box score for a collegiate coaching career now in its 18th season. Coming to FGCU after 10 years and almost 200 wins as Charlotte High School baseball coach, Tollett is one of four program-founding coaches – and the only one of a men’s team – still on staff, joining Karl Smesko in women’s basketball, David Deiros in softball and Jim Blankenship in women’s soccer as Eagle sports pioneers still bleeding green and blue.

But even for Tollett, the night his Eagles presented him with win No. 600 was “special.”

“My kids were here, my friends and former members of my staff were here, and we had some former players back, including Chris Sale,” Tollett said. “I remember when we started this program and we didn’t even have baseballs. But we knew we could build something special here. Now, having had the players that I’ve had and the seasons that I’ve had ... it just feels surreal.”

Those players include five who ascended to the pinnacle of the sport, four of whom were still in major-league camps entering spring training (Sale with the Boston Red Sox, Richard Bleier with the Baltimore Orioles, Jacob Barnes with the Los Angeles Angels and Jake Noll with the

Washington Nationals). But while those guys are the diamond studs on the coach’s resume – especially seven-time All-Star and potential Hall of Famer Sale, who along with his FGCU alumna wife Brianne (’16, Communication) recently presented a \$1 million gift to FGCU Athletics (see related story, page 58) – the Tollett tree of successful former student-athletes branches into all walks of life.

That’s why when Tollett is trying to sell a baseball recruit’s parents on why the student-athlete should attend FGCU, he’s proud that he can “look them in the eye and tell them that I can promise them that the son will graduate, and that he has a chance to develop both as a player and a person,” he told FGCU 360 for a previous story.

“We have had the National Player of the Year (Sale in 2010) and the National Freshman of the Year (Noll in 2014) and four All-Americans, but we also talk about our alumni from the academic side,” Tollett said. “We have produced doctors, engineers, MBAs, sports agents and many other successful young men.”

That kind of dedicated interest by Tollett in his student-athletes as people first isn’t lost on the young men who proudly play for him.

“He’s more than a coach to us ... he’s such a great person,” said Richie Garcia, a senior infielder from Davie, at a postgame press conference after win No. 600. “He cares more about us developing as great men. We (the senior class) were with him for his 500th win, and to be here for his 600th is really special.” ■

RIGHT: Coach Dave Tollett and pitcher Nikolas Bitner get doused after Tollett’s 600th victory, 2-0 over Kent State in February.

INSET: Dave Tollett and Nikolas Bitner after the dunking.







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