

FGCU 360

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FOLLOWING HER DREAM

Aysegul Timur's journey
to the presidency

FGCU grads make news ■ Art meets science at reef ■ Queen of the court

FALL 2023

CONTENTS

VOLUME 17 / NUMBER 1

FEATURES

24

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

"Hello, Eagle Family!" is how President Aysegul Timur often begins campuswide emails. Throughout two decades in higher education, family has always been important to her.

BY KYLE McCURRY

30

BROADCAST NEWS

Sarah Mankowitz rose from Eagle News Television to local TV news producer then on-camera reporter in just a year. She's part of a pipeline of journalism grads jumping right into careers with Hearst Broadcasting.

BY KYLE McCURRY

ON THE COVER:

President Aysegul Timur

PHOTO BY JAMES GRECO





DEPARTMENTS

6 STUDENT SUCCESS

Learn how national fellowships and scholarships enhance Eagles' future opportunities.

10 COMMUNITY

The Mandela Washington Fellowship Institute brought two dozen young African community leaders to FGCU.

14 SPOTLIGHT

Digital badges can be a competitive advantage.

16 ARTS

Science and ceramics meet at Kimberly's Reef, FGCU's new underwater classroom.

20 GIVING

A new scholarship fund honors conservation advocate Charles Dauray; learn about one couple's impact on FGCU Athletics.

36 ALUMNI

Adam Catasus has a fun and occasionally risky job at Vester Marine & Environmental Science Research Field Station; Seminole artist and teacher Jessica Osceola was recently featured in a Sarasota museum exhibition.

40 SPORTS

Sha Carter is a star on the basketball court and off.

UPFRONT

ICYMI

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GOOD READS



Remote research

FGCU researcher flips the script on perceptions of parents working remotely.

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Eagle entrepreneur

FGCU grad Jakub Adamowicz's direct buyer-to-seller real estate marketplace was recognized for business innovation.



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real-estate](https://fgcu360.com/real-estate)



On the R.I.S.E.

Eight participants in Southwest Florida's first university program for adults with intellectual disabilities graduated this year.



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RISE](https://fgcu360.com/RISE)



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draft

Triple play

Three Eagles were selected in this year's Major League Baseball draft — FGCU's first draftees since 2019.



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music-therapy

Cultural connections

Music therapy and music education majors spent six weeks in Bangkok as part of a clinical and study abroad program.

FGCU Homecoming is Feb. 7-10

Florida Gulf Coast University will amp up Eagle pride and honor students past and present during Homecoming festivities Feb. 7-10. Activities will include:

- **Feb. 8:** FGCU After Dark tasting of the new FGCU Wine Collection
- **Feb. 9:** Alumni Awards reception
- **Feb. 10:** Homecoming 5K and tailgate party

For more details or to register, visit **FGCUHomecoming.com**.

MUST-SEE VIDEOS



bit.ly/46olonI

The good fight

Meet the FGCU Medieval Combat Club. They practice a full-contact sport known as Belegarth.



bit.ly/49ADLZD

Outstanding Eagles

Hear the inspiring stories of the FGCU Hall of Fame's newest inductees.



bit.ly/3T3WJIF

Getting wild

Campus naturalists help peers explore FGCU's wild side.



STUDENT SUCCESS

Students gain life-changing experiences through national fellowships, scholarships

BY BILL STUDENC

A FLORIDA GULF COAST University senior who is a first-generation Muslim American will be pursuing a career in the medical field thanks, in part, to valuable experiences gained through the university's Office of Competitive Fellowships (OCF).

Born after her parents moved to

the U.S. from Pakistan, Anusha Malik will graduate this fall with a major in biochemistry and minor in biology. She received a prestigious Goldwater Scholarship in March in recognition of her undergraduate research on ionic liquids — used in anti-cancer and anti-diabetic drug delivery systems.

Malik is among many FGCU students benefiting from the assistance of the

OCF. The office works to help students identify professional and personal goals and achieve them through high-impact experiences, made possible by national scholarships and fellowships.

Another FGCU student who credits OCF-supported activities as pivotal to her undergraduate career is Josie Lorea. She graduated in May with a degree in biology and a pre-

LEFT: Josie Lorea completed two prestigious national academic programs at the same time while studying abroad in South Korea.

BELOW: Anusha Malik received a prestigious Goldwater Scholarship in March in recognition of her undergraduate research on ionic liquids.

professional concentration. A native of Charleston, West Virginia, Lorea began medical school this fall.

Part of the Honors College, the duo was inducted into FGCU's Hall of Fame last spring. Although Malik and Lorea are grateful for the opportunities arising from national honors, they agree going through the application process was integral to their educational journeys.

Malik called learning of her successful Goldwater application

"the most unexpected thing" in her undergraduate career.

"I was convinced I was not going to get it, considering it's one of the top research scholarships in the U.S. I literally screamed in class when I opened my acceptance letter," she said.

"The application process was honestly the biggest learning experience on its own. Every single moment of writing the personal statements was a ton of introspection, thinking about why I was doing what I wanted to and the best way to articulate it," Malik said. "I learned so much about the art of presenting your most-unique self in a statement."

Receiving a Goldwater opened doors to opportunities she might not otherwise have, especially as a first-generation student, said Malik. She hopes to begin medical school in fall 2024.

"I am beyond excited for the next step of my journey, and none of it could have happened without the support and experiences I had at FGCU," she said. "Being a first-generation American and the oldest in my family means I was the first to go through this process, and I could not be more thankful for all the love I received from my family, friends and professors."

In 2022, Malik also received a Millennium Fellowship, which provides an on-campus internship through the United Nations designed to help students make an impactful change on their campuses. The fellowship enabled her to continue her work on the Food Options Project she previously founded to raise awareness of FGCU students with dietary restrictions.

While Malik chose FGCU because it was close to home, West Virginia classmate Lorea said she always



PHOTO BY TIM CLARK

wanted to attend college in a warmer climate. She enrolled at FGCU after being admitted to the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine Early Acceptance Program in Bradenton.

Upon arriving at FGCU, Lorea quickly discovered the OCF, which helped her nab national academic honors including the Gilman Scholarship and the Summer Health Professional Education Program (SHPEP) at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. She received the Gilman in 2020, but because of the global COVID-19 pandemic was unable to use it until spring 2021 — the same semester as her SHPEP award.

“The Gilman enabled me to study abroad at Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea, while simultaneously completing the SHPEP online,” Lorea said. “I would go to school during the day in South Korea, sleep through the evening and attend sessions at University of Nebraska starting at midnight Korea Standard Time.”

Despite the demands of completing two prestigious national academic programs at the same time, Lorea said she is appreciative of the opportunities that doing so provided.

“Without the Gilman, I would have never been able to study abroad. Being alone in a foreign country with language barriers was one of the hardest things I have ever done, but also the most rewarding. Without the financial assistance from the Gilman Foundation, my undergraduate journey would not be the same,” she said. “And, without the experience of SHPEP, I do not know if I would be as interested in health care as I am now.”

The opportunities enjoyed by Malik and Lorea are representative of the assistance OCF provides. The staff has helped students obtain experiences including being a teaching assistant in South Korea through a Fulbright Scholarship and conducting groundbreaking hate-crime research at the University of Arkansas-Little Rock through a National Science Foundation grant. ■

STUDENT SUCCESS

FGCU Complete ‘a lifeline’ for students seeking degree completion

BY LAURIE D. BABCOCK

ALISSA PERRY wanted to finish the college degree she started when she was pregnant with her first child. But she didn’t know how to make it happen. Twenty-one years later, with her fourth child starting college, Perry graduated from Florida Gulf Coast University thanks to her hard work and one innovative program.

“I absolutely would not be in the position to graduate without FGCU Complete,” she says of achieving her lifelong goal.

Earning a college degree is a significant milestone for many, but circumstances can sometimes interrupt the path to graduation. Recognizing the importance of providing opportunities for students to finish their degrees, the university introduced FGCU Complete. The degree-completion program offers anyone with previously earned college credits at FGCU or elsewhere the chance to pick up where they left off and work toward a degree in one of six fields.

A supplemental instruction support specialist at the State College of Florida Collegiate School, Perry has worked in the K-12 school system for much of her adult life. But without a college degree, she felt she was passed over for promotions and opportunities. “I had the same work experience as the new teachers coming in, and I had the

same amount of credits, if not more, than my co-workers. I knew I was educated, I knew what I had, but I was struggling not to feel inferior.”

What kept Perry from finishing her degree?

“Money,” she says simply, noting there were several semesters over the years where she could not afford to continue her studies. “I had to ask myself, ‘Do I take this class, or do I support my family, pay the rent?’”

A year ago, when her youngest child looked at colleges, Perry was in a better financial situation. She contacted FGCU to find out how she could pay off a past-due balance and resume her academic journey. To her surprise, she discovered she no longer owed the university money.

“Alissa only needed two courses to graduate but did not have the finances to pay off her remaining balance and additional tuition,” says Kristen Vanselow, assistant vice president in Innovative Education and Partnerships at FGCU. At the same time Perry was looking to come back, Vanselow and her team were trying to contact her to give her some good news: “We were able to remove her debt with the generosity of the Elsa and Peter Soderberg Charitable Foundation award and support her return to the Nest.”

“I feel so extremely blessed,” Perry says. “I have no clue how that award found its way to me. It has changed everything for me. I am beyond grateful.”

"I feel so extremely blessed. I have no clue how that award found its way to me. It has changed everything for me. I am beyond grateful."

ALISSA PERRY

Perry's debt was forgiven because she was part of a special program for adult learners. A few semesters after she started at FGCU, Perry went to sign up for classes and found the seat she needed was reserved for the FGCU Complete program. Curious, she checked it out online.

"I learned a few seats are reserved for people who need certain classes at times that accommodate work schedules," she says. "I thought, 'But that's me.' It was like the program had just been sitting there for me."

Combined with debt forgiveness made possible by the Soderberg Foundation, the Industrial Development Authority of Lee County and additional university funds, FGCU Complete is designed to help adult learners leap the final hurdles to graduation. Through the program, more than 120 students have completed degrees since 2021.

FGCU Complete courses are available to earn a bachelor's degree in entrepreneurship, integrated studies, child and youth studies, criminal justice, legal studies or forensic studies. Students can also minor in management.

Perry says everything about the program is

designed to help adult learners like her graduate. She valued having a dedicated academic counselor to navigate the course schedule, not to mention the seats reserved for FGCU Complete students. "FGCU Complete has been my absolute lifeline," she says.

Perry officially graduated with a bachelor's in integrated studies the day after her August birthday.

"It's my gift to myself," she says of the degree over 20 years in the making.

"I have pictures from when my kids were little when I got my associate degree. You couldn't tell me then that I wasn't going to get my bachelor's. Just like you can't tell me now I won't get my master's — or my doctorate if I decide to. My kids will see in those pictures, from them being little to being young adults now, that their momma never stopped."

Perry tears up as she adds, "I literally owe FGCU my dream." ■



RIGHT: Alissa Perry graduated with a bachelor's in integrated studies through FGCU Complete.



COMMUNITY

Young African leaders build on civic engagement skills at FGCU

BY DREW STERWALD

CORINA WORNEE described her experience participating in the Mandela Washington Fellowship Institute at Florida Gulf Coast University as nothing short of “a new era” dawning for her.

A registered nurse and educator in Liberia, Wornee was one of 25 young African leaders chosen for the institute who are civically engaged and serving the public through nongovernmental

organizations (NGO), community-based organizations or volunteerism. What she learned about leadership and community partnerships while at FGCU June 21-July 30 gave her hope and inspiration to build more educational opportunities for children in Liberia. She established a four-room school there last year.

“Interacting with world-class teachers here and improving my leadership skills has been mind-blowing,” she said. “It has helped

me see beyond where I am. It tells me that as a young leader, there’s so much I should look forward to when developing my country, and it has challenged me to be a better person. It has challenged me to make my country the way I see other countries. It takes time, but we will get there.”

Wornee works for the Luminos Fund, an international organization that recruits children and adolescents who have never attended school and prepares them to transition to



LEFT: Two dozen African community leaders were welcomed by faculty and staff.

BELOW: Nestor Andrade came to FGCU from Cabo Verde, an island off Africa's west coast.

every country in Sub-Saharan Africa have participated.

"Each one of us here have our own communities that we are busy developing back home," said Nelao Emmanuel, who works to promote education for adolescents with disabilities in Namibia. "At FGCU, our shepherds have been so good in helping us on our leadership skills because they understand where we are coming from. I got to really understand that my voice matters, that I have a lot of other people

attached to my voice. We are like small catalysts making an impact."

With the knowledge she gained through the institute, she hopes to expand the scope of her vision and push it forward more strategically, she said.

Bezawit Fantu Woldeyesus works for the nonprofit Girl Effect, which supports education, health and livelihoods for adolescent girls in Ethiopia. She was similarly inspired by FGCU's service-learning model.

"Nothing like that exists back home," she said about service as part of the university experience. "It amazes me how much the U.S. has been able to accomplish with people willing and able to give time or resources, making use of people who have skills and experience to help those who have

public school. People in Liberia live on less than a dollar a day, she said, so it is difficult for families to prioritize sending children to school when they are searching for food to feed them at the same time.

The two dozen African community leaders who came to FGCU attended workshops and seminars on building technical and leadership skills in areas such as advocacy, strategic planning, organizational development and the intersection of civil society with business and government.

The Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders is the flagship program of the Young African Leaders Initiative, a program of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. It is administered by the nonprofit International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX). Since 2014, nearly 6,500 representatives from



UPFRONT

RIGHT TOP: Tariba Traore came to FGCU from Mali.

RIGHT BELOW: Mandela Washington Fellows shared their diverse cultures with each other and FGCU faculty and staff.

less. We need to inculcate that culture of volunteering. Giving back is not always about giving money.”

Seeing how these young leaders absorbed information and networked with their peers and FGCU faculty and staff impressed Ally Zhou. The director of FGCU’s Center for the Study of Race, Gender, Ethnicity and Culture, she served as the institute’s academic director along with Precious Gunter, FGCU’s chief equity, ethics and compliance officer and Title IX coordinator.

“I’ve seen how quickly they are applying the leadership skills they’ve learned here to their practice back home,” Zhou said. “We’re so glad they’re here. It’s a great opportunity to allow our community to share cultures and knowledge.”

FGCU President Aysegul Timur echoed the sentiment.

“We were so honored to host the Mandela Washington Fellows at FGCU,” she said. “It was a mutual learning experience that we will continue to build on so we can share and learn from each other’s transformational experiences. We have built incredible ties with them, and I know they will carry FGCU’s commitments to the community and our best practices for civic engagement back home with them to Africa. They are now part of the Eagle Family, and we will always be in touch.” ■

The Mandela Washington Fellowship is a program of the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government and administered by IREX. Florida Gulf Coast University is a sub-grantee of IREX and has implemented Leadership Institutes as a part of the Fellowship since 2023.

LEARN MORE AT:

► mandelawashingtonfellowship.org



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NEWS FROM THE NEST



FGCU Foundation board led by alum for first time

Florida Gulf Coast University reached a new milestone with the selection of Samantha Scott ('05, marketing) as the FGCU Foundation board's new chairperson. The first FGCU graduate to hold the position, Scott is president of Pushing the Envelope, a Fort Myers marketing and public relations firm. According to Kitty Green, vice president for University Advancement and executive director of the FGCU Foundation, "Samantha's election shows our evolution to a more balanced board with both community members and alumni." ■

Microsoft grant sparks collaboration in Immokalee

The U.A. Whitaker College of Engineering is joining forces with The Immokalee Foundation and the Collier County Industrial Development Authority to provide digital skills training to underserved students in the rural Immokalee community. Christened TechSpark Immokalee, the project was made possible by a \$50,000 grant from Microsoft with a dollar-for-dollar match from the Collier County Industrial Development Authority. Through the initiative, more than 150 middle school students will participate in a four-week training program in data processing, robotics, augmented and virtual reality, and generative artificial intelligence. ■

Professor honored nationally for work for crime survivors

Sandra Pavelka, a professor of political science and public administration at FGCU, received national recognition for helping marginalized and underserved youth, including crime victims in Southwest Florida. Founding director of FGCU's Institute for Youth and Justice Studies, Pavelka received the Lois Haight Award of Excellence and Innovation from the Congressional Crime Survivors and Justice Caucus. It was presented on Capitol Hill as part of National Crime Victims' Rights Week. It is awarded annually to someone who has significantly influenced the development and implementation of public policy on behalf of crime victims. ■



SPOTLIGHT

From FGCU campus to career: Digital badges offer a path

BY LAURIE D. BABCOCK

IN FALL 2020, LADY Ramirez Molina ('22, health administration) was well on her way to completing degree requirements that would lead to a career. But she was keen to explore her options by taking a variety of electives in her major. Of all the available courses, the Naples native and first-generation college student chose a new offering: the medical device industry course and the optional digital badge.

"I wanted more experience. The medical device industry wasn't something I knew a lot about, and I wanted to educate myself on all the options I had in health administration," Ramirez says.

"The badge helped me get an internship and then a full-time position at Arthrex," she says. Ramirez transitioned into a clinical research associate role earlier this year. "It helped me choose a career path."

For college students about to enter the workforce, it's important to rise above the crowd of applicants to be more marketable to recruiters and employers. With various industry-specific micro-credentials like the medical device industry badge Ramirez proudly displays on her LinkedIn profile, FGCU is helping students document the skills they gain in the classroom.

"Students may believe that if they have not had direct employment experience, they haven't necessarily practiced and mastered essential skills desired by employers," says Kristen Vanselow, assistant vice president in FGCU's Innovative Education and Partnerships. "FGCU's industry-



Lady Ramirez Molina

specific digital badges provide evidence that students demonstrate competencies and skills identified by employer partners."

The partners' collaboration with FGCU faculty and staff to develop the micro-credentials has helped create talent pipelines connecting graduates with local employers. These partnerships were highlighted at a May panel discussion on campus featuring representatives of Arthrex, Gartner, Hertz and NeoGenomics. FGCU President Aysegul Timur, who spearheaded development of digital badges as vice president and vice provost of Strategy and Program Innovation, moderated the discussion.

"We must continue to partner with industry and continue to innovate and create better solutions to make our students workforce ready," she told



Regina Bale

participants. "These badges are really giving our graduates a competitive advantage."

For individuals already in the workforce, it's equally important to demonstrate advanced knowledge, experience and a commitment to continued learning. Earning a digital badge can supplement a résumé with evidence of certain skills.

That's exactly what Regina Bale ('09, bachelor's of elementary education; '22, master in curriculum and instruction, educational technology) was looking for when she started the introduction to educational technology class and optional instructional technology (IT) essentials badge as part of her master's program. Instructional technology is the theory and practice of using technology to help others learn,

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FGCU360.COM / FGCU360 MAGAZINE **15**

ARTS



PHOTO BY JAMES GRECO

“

I want to keep doing this kind of thing in the future.
This is where I want to live, in this interdisciplinary
area between art and science.

”

MACY NOLL, ART AND BIOLOGY MAJOR

CERAMICS

The depths of creativity: Art meets science in the Gulf of Mexico

BY LAURIE D. BABCOCK

IN THE ARTS COMPLEX AT Florida Gulf Coast University, three tables hold an array of ceramic artwork. Some are as tall as 2 feet with ridges and octopus suckers, while others resemble fragments of miniature water park slides. A few look like hexagonal decorative tiles bound for the garden. Half the pieces are terracotta colored, reminiscent of healthy coral reefs, while others are a more subdued beige. Together, they're a Seussian assemblage of design, shape and size.

"All this was made so that it can disappear," says Patricia Fay, a Bower School of Music & the Arts professor. She stands before the table, looking over some of the 60-plus pieces of ceramic artwork she created with Macy Noll, an art and biology double-major, in coordination with the Vester Marine & Environmental Science Research Field Station. Like oversized aquarium decorations, the pieces have been sculpted to mimic the uneven and organic nature of coral formations and to host marine organisms. They will be installed at Kimberly's Reef, an artificial reef in the Gulf of Mexico created by The Water School at FGCU.

"We want these pieces to be completely overwhelmed and consumed by the underwater environment," Fay says, "so that you won't see individual pieces, but you will see the structure."

Spanning 11 acres, Kimberly's Reef is composed of six "villages" designed in part by Mike Parsons, Water School professor and Vester director.

Each village comprises rectangular concrete culverts, which Fay points out are "not as attractive a habitat for settlement in the Gulf — and for development of longer-term established habitats — because it doesn't have enough complexity."

"The culverts are these big blocky, right-angle objects and they're very foreign," Noll says. "They're not what you would expect to see at the bottom of the Gulf. But the sculptures we've made look very organic, very fluid. They look like something that belongs in the ocean."



ARTS

Fay and Noll created a variety of reef enhancements to be affixed with marine epoxy in various combinations and configurations on the flat tops and inner and outer walls of the open-ended rectangular culverts. The reef location and the qualities and firing temperatures of the clay influenced their designs. "But then it was also, think like a fish — what would I enjoy if I was a fish — and making this kind of wonderful amusement park," Fay says.

"There are limitations as to how natural you can make them look," Noll says of the ceramic pieces. "The whole point of this project was bio-mimicry. The natural processes already in place are working great. If we want to help it along, we should mimic those."

Fay and Noll are divers, which Fay says helped them create the artwork funded by the Seidler Fellowships in the College of Arts & Sciences, an annual competitive grant program through the Seidler Benefaction. "We used those internalized references as we developed the sculptures."

The finished pieces are not glazed because Fay was concerned that would inhibit organisms from attaching. Encouraging attachment is also the reason for all the added textures.

"A reef is built in layers, so the more nooks and crannies and crevices and ridges and everything else, the better the baseline organisms will be," Fay says.

The textured design was created by modifying standard ceramic extruder technologies. Picture a large-scale Play-Doh press.

Fay started with basic extruder plates, which allow wet clay to be pushed through and shaped on the outside while hollowing out the inside. She modified the plates by drilling out various ridges and patterns. Working together, Fay and Noll squeezed 20-pound blocks of wet clay through the modified plates to create unique textures and patterns, just like the colorful modeling compounds kids play with.

Fay and Noll then cut or tore off the clay in sections, attached different pieces together to create reef-like designs and fired the unglazed clay



in gas and electric kilns. A unique number zip-tied to each piece will be used to create a catalog allowing scientists at Kimberly's Reef to report on organisms by their locations.

The first pieces were installed this summer. The moderate size of the sculpted corals and placement atop

LEFT: Macy Noll, left, an art and biology double-major, helped Patricia Fay create the ceramics for Kimberly's Reef.

BOTTOM LEFT: Patricia Fay hands off a ceramic piece to Vester staff to be installed at Kimberly's Reef, an artificial reef in the Gulf of Mexico created by The Water School at FGCU.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Melissa May, a Department of Marine & Earth Sciences assistant professor, helps with installation.

and inside the concrete culverts allow divers to swim over and around them.

Their design serves to create a habitat that encourages the growth and development of marine life. As marine creatures seek shelter and refuge within the crevices and niches, the ceramic enhancements will create a biodiverse habitat at Kimberly's Reef for moray eels, tube worms, plankton and other marine organisms.

The project is a catalyst for growing FGCU's marine ecosystem in the Gulf, but also perfectly fits Noll's aspirations to merge her art and biology interests.

"I want to keep doing this kind of thing in the future," Noll says. "This is where I want to live, in this interdisciplinary area between art and science." What's the dream job? "National Geographic photographer. I would love to be a scientific correspondent, photographer and writer. I'm trying to tie it all together." ■

ARTS BRIEFS

Celebration of spirituals

A mother-daughter vocal duo brings a celebration of traditional African American spirituals to the Bower School of Music & the Arts' Nisita Concert Series at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 10. Valerie Francis, director of opera at Nicholls State University, and her daughter, award-winning singer Imani Sarai Francis, will be joined in the program by Michael Baron, professor and head of keyboard studies at FGCU.

Tickets for the concert in the Music Building's U. Tobe Recital Hall are \$15 for the public or \$7 for students. Purchase them online at fgcu.edu/concerts. ■

'Silent Sky' staged

An intelligent and ambitious scientist pursues her passion for astronomy but is constrained by gender norms of her era and the pull of family obligations in FGCU's production of "Silent Sky" Feb. 16-25 in TheatreLab.

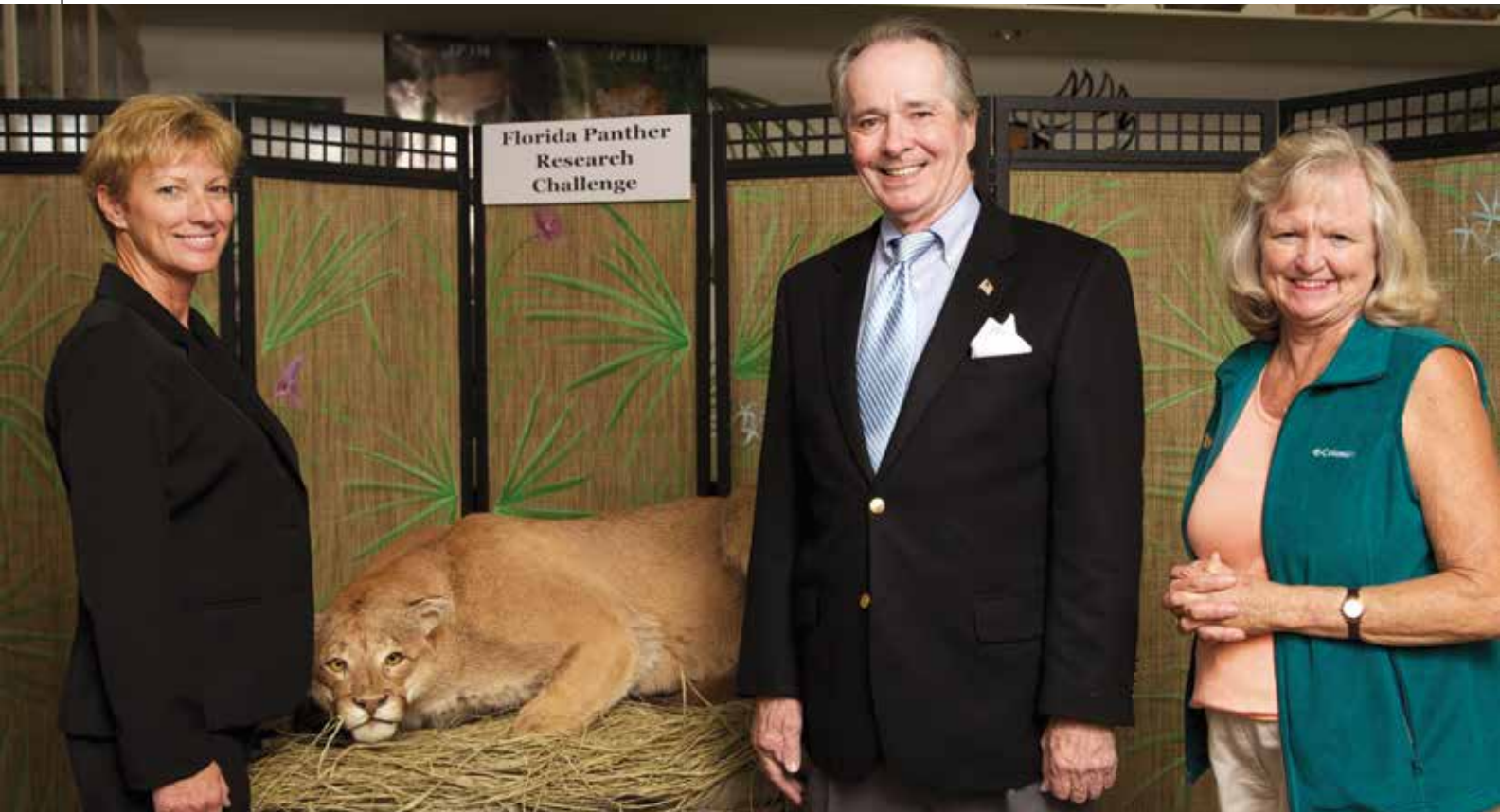
Lauren Gunderson's play, written in 2011, is a contemporary take on an overlooked historical figure, Henrietta Leavitt. Tickets are \$15 for the public and \$7 for students and can be purchased at fgcu.edu/theatrelab. There will be a discussion with the cast and crew following the Feb. 24 performance. ■

Seidler projects showcased

The Seidler Showcase of Arts & Humanities at 5 p.m. Feb. 21 will feature the College of Arts & Sciences' vibrant projects supported by Lee and Gene Seidler. The program features performances by theatre and music students and presentations by faculty and students throughout the FGCU Arts Complex. ■



GIVING



Water School scholarship honors conservation advocate's passion

BY DREW STERWALD

“WATER IS LIFE.” That’s how the late Charles Dauray boiled down the importance of water conservation, according to longtime colleague and friend Peg Phillips. But it takes more than three simple words to capture the depth of Dauray’s involvement and impact in South

Florida when it comes to water. Dauray served as South Florida Water Management District governing board vice chair from 2007 to 2011 — when the state accelerated restoration plans for the Everglades and the Kissimmee River, a waterway he particularly cherished. Dauray also advocated and lobbied for long-term efforts to improve water quality and flood control around Lake

Okeechobee and to restore Lake Trafford for the public’s benefit. Dauray had many interests and causes, but water was a primary concern. “He had influence in so many different areas, but his passion was always water,” Phillips said. “He used to say his generation, the generation before his and the generation after his, did not grow up with a water conservation ethic. That’s why the next

“

He had influence in so many different areas,
but his passion was always water.

”

PEG PHILLIPS

generation has to be educated, to try to correct some of the mistakes that have been made.”

The newly established Charles Dauray Water School Scholarship will help achieve that mission. Supporting graduate students in The Water School at Florida Gulf Coast University will empower future scientists and scholars to research and solve critical water issues and educate the next generation.

“I hope they will be inspired by what my brother did all of his life,” said Mary Lou Dauray. She and her husband, Alan Davis, made a \$1.5 million gift through the Davis/Dauray Fund to

Green, executive director of the FGCU Foundation. “By assisting deserving graduate students with the cost of their education, the scholarship will also help us grow the graduate program at The Water School, which is an important focus for the university.”

The scholarship formally connects Dauray’s name with The Water School, but his involvement with FGCU runs deeper. As the College of Life Foundation chair and CEO for over two decades, he supported FGCU’s Wings of Hope program educating youngsters about water conservation and the endangered Florida panther. The foundation’s gift

and transplanted when he moved to Naples in 1970.

“He was a scavenger,” Mary Lou Dauray recalled. “He would go into the potato fields and come back with loads of arrowheads. He was always interested in looking for relics and learning the history of the native cultures that lived there. That was formative for him.”

A longtime Izaak Walton League conservation group member, Dauray could instantly identify flora and fauna as he led tours of the Kissimmee River to show how the restoration was working, Phillips said. He earned a

“He used to say his generation, the generation before his and the generation after his, did not grow up with a water conservation ethic. That’s why the next generation has to be educated, to try to correct some of the mistakes that have been made.”

PEG PHILLIPS

establish the scholarship. “When we thought about ways to honor Charles, the water story was the most important — and you have the perfect university for that. He loved the school and talked a lot about it. This can only help to make it bigger and bolder.”

Their desire to enhance educational opportunities through philanthropy aligns with long-term plans to grow The Water School.

“We are so grateful to Charles Dauray’s sister and brother-in-law for honoring him in this way,” said Kitty

LEFT: Peg Phillips and Charles Dauray with Ricky Pires, director of Wings of Hope, in FGCU’s Panther Posse classroom.

of much sought-after artifacts from a pioneer colony that settled in Estero in 1894 created “The Koreshan Unity Collection” in the University Archives and Special Collections.

Dauray, who died in 2021 at 78, was deeply involved in preserving history far beyond the Koreshans. He led the Collier County Historical Society as chair for 18 years and helped found the Southwest Florida Holocaust Museum and Education Center. He funded the rescue, relocation and restoration of two historic buildings for the Estero Historical Society, of which he was a longtime board member.

His lifelong fascination with history and archaeology was rooted in his youth in Charlestown, Rhode Island,

bachelor’s degree in political science from Providence College, but his curiosity and knowledge spanned disciplines.

“Charles knew the name of everything — the native vegetation, the fish, the birds. As he pointed them out, he said, ‘This is why we’re doing this,’” Phillips said. “We toured sections that were restored and compared them to sections that were still not restored. It was amazing to see the difference.”

Much of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan is still to be realized. The Charles Dauray Water School Scholarship could yet play a part in enabling FGCU graduates to continue the work Dauray so valued and see the difference in their lifetime. ■

15 teams and one couple's remarkable impact on FGCU Athletics

BY LAURIE D. BABCOCK

DONNA SUBLETT and her late husband, Jim, had courtside seats to Florida

Gulf Coast University's evolution over the past 26 years. With a lifetime of giving to FGCU's athletic programs amounting to over \$3 million, they cemented their place as transformative donors.

A \$1 million gift in 2015 established the Sublett Family Strength and Conditioning Center next to FGCU's Alico Arena. The center allows athletes from the 15 sports that constitute FGCU Athletics to easily transition between workouts and practice sessions. Access to this modern, well-equipped facility means FGCU's Division I student-athletes can target specific fitness and skill development aspects effectively.

But the Subletts' impact reaches beyond the dollars donated. For Donna Sublett, it's about the relationships with coaches and players she and her husband formed as donors.

The Subletts moved from Missouri to Southwest Florida in the 1980s. Big sports fans, they were early supporters of FGCU Athletics and attended the first basketball games played at the Hertz Arena location.

"How we really got involved in giving was our company, First Home Builders, wanted to give Jim a Christmas present. I said, 'He doesn't need a thing. If he needed it, he'd buy it,'" Sublett recalled. " 'Why don't you donate money to FGCU basketball in his name?' So that was the first Sublett scholarship."



Donna Sublett at the ribbon cutting for the Sublett Family Strength and Conditioning Center.

Butch Perchan is associate director of athletics emeritus and an FGCU Foundation fundraiser. He remembers the Subletts attending men's basketball games at Alico Arena as guests in Charlie Edwards' box suite before they bought their own. But after a year, they requested a change.

"Donna told us, 'I don't want to always be up here with eight or 10 people. I want to be in regular seats and give the money to scholarships,'" Perchan said.

Once the Subletts moved to floor seats, their focus broadened. They redirected the annual funds that paid for their box suite to student-athlete scholarships.

"My dad always said the reason he had a better life than his brothers was because he had athletic ability and great coaches," Sublett said. "His parents had no money to pay for college. When they lost their jobs during the Depression, he quit college three or four times and went home to help them."

Her father had been a three-sport athlete in high school and played collegiate football and basketball. For Sublett, the FGCU scholarships she and her husband donated are one way to see a direct impact on student-athletes like her dad.

"We have this dinner every year with 200 student-athletes and the donors

who provided their scholarships. Jim and Donna spurred that on with us when they made it clear they really wanted a relationship with their basketball scholarship recipients," Perchan said.

"A lot of people want to feel like they have a part in someone's life and, especially, if they know the player," Sublett said. "Most of our FGCU fans are older, and to have a relationship with a younger person is so much fun."

"She really loves them," said Perchan about Sublett's scholarship recipients. "She just loved Brett Comer, and she stays close with Chase Fieler and Eddie Murray from that group" — the 2012-13 "Dunk City" team. She also stays close with other basketball players: Marc-Eddy Norelia, Tyra Cox, Sarah Hansen and Alyssa Blair.

It may have started with men's basketball, but the Subletts' generosity is felt across all of FGCU's athletic programs. Rather than favoring one sport, their commitment speaks to a larger vision — where student-athletes benefit from the resources and opportunities a well-funded athletic department provides.

"More often than not, college athletic donors are real fans who touch just one sport, but Donna and Jim have touched all of them. They're an athletic administrator's dream come true," Perchan said. He still talks about the Subletts as a couple, even though Jim died in 2019.

"We had it in our will that we were going to give FGCU a big donation when we both died," Sublett said. "But I was talking to our daughter, and I decided, why shouldn't I see the benefits while I'm living?"

Four years after Jim's death, her continued presence at games demonstrates a genuine and enduring connection with FGCU. Her ongoing involvement reminds student-athletes their hard work and dedication are valued and recognized by the Southwest Florida community. ■

FGCU Foundation campaign tops \$75 million in two years

BY DREW STERWALD

THE FGCU FOUNDATION'S fundraising campaign to enhance Florida Gulf Coast University's academic excellence reached a \$75 million milestone in August.

As the effort to elevate scholarships, faculty and programs continues, sights are set on reaching \$100 million.

"We're so grateful for everyone who's supported us this far," said Cindy Learned, University Advancement assistant vice president. "We created so much momentum during the first two years of a three-year campaign, reaching and surpassing our funding goals. We anticipate bringing this same fundraising capacity to the library renovation and to endow programs and positions for the Honors College."

Launched in 2022 as FGCU celebrated its 25th anniversary and envisioned its future, the "Turning Ideas into Impact" campaign has fueled 43 new endowed scholarships.

"We have surpassed \$6 million in scholarships awarded in the first two years of the campaign and expect to do so again this year," Learned said.

The campaign also established 14 new non-scholarship endowments, including two endowed faculty positions in the Bower School of Music & the Arts.

Endowed positions enrich academic excellence by attracting faculty who are experts in their field and advance research in their area, Learned said. They also draw additional faculty and students

because of published research and reputation.

"Academic excellence is a daily activity at FGCU, and this initiative will not ultimately be complete until every college and school has an endowed position," Learned said.

The campaign also delivered resources to expand programs, faculty and labs in the newly accredited Stock Development Department of Construction Management. Seed money was generated for new strategic initiatives — the Shady Rest Institute on Positive Aging and the Golisano Intellectual Development & Disabilities Initiative.

The initiatives' impacts will resound far beyond campus. They aim to strengthen the local economy via workforce development and the community through expanded resources, research and outreach in areas of critical need, Learned said.

The Shady Rest Institute in Marieb College of Health & Human Services, for instance, is well-positioned to provide a holistic approach to successful living. Considering Southwest Florida has a large population of older residents, it's a prime place to serve as a living laboratory for researching and fulfilling their needs. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION

► To support the campaign, go to fgcu.edu/impact, email development@fgcu.edu or call 239-590-1067.

AYSEGUL TIMUR'S JOURNEY TO THE PRESIDENCY

BY KYLE McCURRY

It was a late April morning, and Aysegul Timur was occupying a corner booth in a Naples eatery. Her table was covered in books, a computer and a few notepads. From afar, it looked like someone was cramming for a major test, and, in a lot of ways, she was. In a matter of days, she was going before the Florida Gulf Coast University Board of Trustees to make her case to become the institution's fifth president.



“

I remember my family members and friends telling me, ‘We knew, one day, you’d be telling stories.’

”

AYSEGUL TIMUR

“

I

t’s not cramming,” remarks Efehan, her son. “That’s always our workspace. It doesn’t shock me in the slightest that you got to view that experience. That’s

just how it’s always been.”

Efehan would know. His mother has often talked about raising him while she pursued her Ph.D. at the University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa. That period makes up some of his earliest memories.

“We only had one car. So, time to time, my mom [and dad] would go to USF, and my dad would drive back [to Collier County]. Then, at the end of the day, he would take me with him. We would drive two hours and pick my mom up. Mom drove back and forth four days a week for four years,” he recounts, estimating the family car gained an additional 100,000 miles in a single year.

Efehan knows the effort was worthwhile.

“It wasn’t easy; we all knew that going in,” he says. “I’m really proud that she [earned her doctorate]. It inspired me going forward to continue my education.”

But before she became a fixture on Florida’s Gulf Coast, Aysegul was connected to another shore.

Water as a foundation

If you’re traveling by boat from Greece to the Black Sea, there are



a series of waterways one must traverse. After passing through the Aegean Sea, the Dardanelles empties into the Sea of Marmara. From there, one more channel lies between you and your destination.

The Bosphorus flows between the

Aysegul Timur with her parents, Nezahat (left) and Ali (center) Ustun.

European and Asian border, but it’s more than a confluence of continents. At this natural boundary, cultures, languages and religions, among



earned degrees, became a professor and, eventually, FGCU's fifth president.

The pursuit of higher education

It was 1998 when Aysegul and her fiancé, Mete Timur, were planning their nuptials and pondering a transcontinental move to the U.S. to continue their education. After completing their degrees, they planned to return to their hometown.

"We were thinking about the timing," Mete recalls. "My mom said, since we were going to come back, we should go sooner so we would come back sooner."

Aysegul's family, the Ustuns, were conservative, which played into the decision-making.

"My mother gave me that look," Aysegul says, laughing. "That look

was so important, and she said, 'You're not going anywhere without getting married.'"

What followed was a whirlwind.

"It's really funny because we get our I-20s (U.S. Certificates of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status) on Wednesday, applied to the consulate on Thursday, got our F-1 visas Friday and then we married on Saturday," Mete adds.

The newlyweds packed the next day, flew to the U.S. Monday, and

TOP LEFT: Mete and Aysegul Timur on Marco Island soon after their arrival in the U.S. in 1998.

BELOW: Aysegul and Mete Timur pose at the Bosphorus, where two continents — Europe and Asia — meet.

other things, meet. This atmosphere enveloped Aysegul.

"I've always identified as someone from Bosphorus," she says.

Like her parents, Aysegul was born there. Her father was a locally known soccer player turned small-business owner, and her mother was a housewife. Together, they raised three children — two boys and a girl — with Aysegul being the youngest by 13 years.

Growing up in an international melting point fashioned her a colorful personality. Aysegul's name pays homage to a children's book character, one known for storytelling and a love of teaching and learning. Consequently, she was the subject of a spot-on prediction.

"I remember my family members and friends telling me, 'We knew, one day, you'd be telling stories,'" Aysegul says.

The skill set was useful as she



started an English as a second language (ESL) program in Collier County three days later.

Learning English in Southwest Florida

"Learning a language is not learning the technicality of the language, the grammar and the vocabulary," Aysegul explains. "It is about learning the culture, learning about the behaviors, learning about, you know, so many things, including history, jokes, idioms and traditions."

For Aysegul, the greatest challenge of learning English dealt with writing and saying verbs in the correct tense. Her professor offered tips on properly using this grammatical aspect. He also provided suggestions on how to think about the words.

"He asked me to write 10 essays every day, and he was constantly giving me feedback. He would say, 'This is not the right word,' 'This word is in the wrong place,' and 'This grammar is not correct.'"

It worked. Within four months, she could speak, listen and write in English at varying levels of proficiency. The progress was nothing short of remarkable.

Focus on family

Spend any time around a Timur, and one realizes the importance of family. Aysegul beams when talking about her parents.

"It was a working-class family but with very core values of the culture and the fundamental values of being a family. We were a very welcoming family. My parents' home was known as 'you go there and you're going to get the best hospitality,'" Aysegul says.

Mete, Alara and Aysegul Timur celebrate Efehan's (in cap and gown) graduation from USF earlier this year.



COURTESY PHOTO

“I’ve been in the region for about the same time as FGCU has existed. I’ve put in the hard work and the people of this university have done the same to make Southwest Florida a better place for everyone to live. I’m excited about what’s to come.”

AYSEGUL TIMUR

She brought that hospitality with her to America.

“My parents really like to entertain,” says Alara, her daughter. “So ever since I can remember, we’ve always had small parties with their friends. And now, obviously, since there are more events that my parents host, I kind of just picked up on helping out.”

Besides the warmth that carried over from her parents’ household, Aysegul and Mete made sure their children were grounded in core values. They are expected to be honest and trustworthy, respect themselves and care for others, including their family. In fact, Aysegul decided not to apply the first time the Board of Trustees asked for applications during the presidential search. She was worried about how the job might impact her family dynamic, particularly for Alara, who is in high school.

“The only thing I was concerned about was her not taking the opportunity,” says Alara.

Alara got her wish. When the trustees revisited the application phase of the search, her mom applied and, ultimately, was selected as FGCU’s fifth president.

Hard work as the baseline

Aysegul’s upbringing along the Bosphorus explains her love for Southwest Florida.

“I can’t live anywhere without a large waterbody nearby,” Aysegul says.



The Florida Board of Governors confirmed Timur as Florida Gulf Coast University’s fifth president June 22.

“More than that, Naples has several similarities with where I grew up. You meet so many people in our area who come from somewhere else with a mix of different cultures and traditions.”

It’s another ecosystem that’s allowed FGCU’s president to thrive. In less than six months leading the university, Aysegul has dedicated every moment to FGCU’s success. It’s a pace her son expected.

“I think having my mom at the helm is definitely a good choice,” says Efehan. “It sounds a little biased because she’s my own mom, but anybody who knows

her knows she’s going to be the hardest worker on the team.”

And hard work is the ultimate link between Aysegul and FGCU.

“I’ve been in the region for about the same time as FGCU has existed,” Aysegul says. “During that time, I’ve put in the hard work and the people of this university have done the same to make Southwest Florida a better place for everyone to live. I’m excited about what’s to come.” ■

THE INSTALLATION OF AYSEGUL TIMUR, PH.D.

**10 a.m. Friday, Jan. 12
Alico Arena**

TV

stations help FGCU grads launch careers

BY KYLE McCURRY

Photos by JAMES GRECO

RIGHT: 2022 journalism graduate Sarah Mankowitz moved from producer to on-air reporter in six months at NBC2 and ABC7 in Fort Myers.





Daft Punk released a futuristic song with a robotic voice repeating four words: “Television Rules the Nation.” Since its release in 2005, some, especially the younger among us, have shunned the fabled box in favor of tablets, phones and computers. That shift hasn’t had the expected impact, at least not in Southwest Florida.

Touring Fort Myers’ TV news houses leads one to believe business is still good. In fact, Hearst Television — a subdivision of the company started by William Randolph Hearst in 1887 — recently took an interest in this media-friendly region. It purchased locally owned Waterman Broadcasting and took over the content creation and programming

for NBC2 and ABC7.

As one transition was underway, so was another. News Director Tim Klutsarits was changing his mind about hiring on-air talent. He was now willing to give recent college graduates the chance to secure a spot on NBC2’s and ABC7’s newscasts.

“The industry and the business model have changed within our industry, and right now, there is a crunch on the available people and available workforce out there in the world,” Klutsarits said. “As that has changed, our position on that has changed as well.”

Enter Sarah Mankowitz.

“I’m the first Tim has ever hired to go from the producer to reporter track like this,” said Mankowitz.

By “first,” the May 2022 Florida Gulf

Coast University journalism graduate means she was initially hired as a newscast producer — responsible for laying out shows, writing copy and securing content. She was fast-tracked to an on-air reporter position after her first six months. Before Mankowitz, professional reporting experience was the only way to go on air at NBC2 and ABC7.

ABOVE: Samantha Romero is a producer and on-air reporter for Hearst Television in Fort Myers.

RIGHT: Samantha Romero, Tyler Watkins, Sarah Mankowitz and Sebastian Gonzalez are among 13 FGCU graduates and students working at NBC2 and ABC7.

“It’s not something that’s been done before, and we’re still working out all the kinks. But it really is a huge honor. It’s made me feel so proud of myself to have someone look at my work and be like, ‘You know what? I think I see potential here.’”

SARAH MANKOWITZ

“Usually, you go to a smaller market and work your way up,” she said.

A “market” refers to a designated market area (DMA). As of 2023, Nielsen ranks 210 DMAs. On that list, New York City is No. 1, Tampa-St. Petersburg is 13, Miami-Fort Lauderdale is 18 and Fort Myers-Naples is 55.

Klutsarits’ decision to hire Mankowitz gave her career a significant boost. Over the last two years, reporters have left Fort Myers and landed jobs in Philadelphia (No. 4), Dallas (No. 5), Phoenix (No. 11) and even major news networks. While Mankowitz is up to the task, being first doesn’t make her job

any easier.

“It’s not something that’s been done before, and we’re still working out all the kinks. But it really is a huge honor. It’s made me feel so proud of myself to have someone look at my work and be like, ‘You know what? I think I see potential here,’” she said.

The door Mankowitz kicked open was still ajar when classmate Samantha Romero earned her FGCU degree. At her December 2022 graduation, journalism professor Judd Cribbs told her opportunity was knocking. One month later, Romero joined NBC2 and ABC7.

Like Mankowitz, Romero’s first six months were spent producing. In

August, she moved to a hybrid role.

“I’m still producing some shows during the weekdays, and on the weekends, I report for the morning shows,” Romero said. “So, I’ll do some morning live hits, and I’ll do some [story] packages for the 6 p.m. and the 11 p.m. shows.”

Behind the scenes

While being on television at NBC2 and ABC7 immediately after graduating is a relatively recent endeavor for people holding FGCU degrees, most of the 13 Green and Blue employees at Hearst work off-camera.

Tyler Watkins wasn’t exactly sure



“

I put in the work early on while I was in school at FGCU, and I really was grateful for my opportunities to grow with FGCU360 and also just to become a better writer within the classroom.

”

TYLER WATKINS

what his career would entail until he took a class with journalism professor Lyn Millner. The course helped Watkins discover his passion for writing. That passion led him to an internship in the university's marketing and communication department, where he wrote for FGCU360.com.

“Keith Gibson, he was my mentor,” Watkins said. “I loved every second of working with him and Karen [Feldman], as well.”

Under the tutelage of Feldman and Gibson — both former newspaper reporters — and through Millner's class, Watkins learned how to write well. He was so successful that he secured a position with NBC2 and ABC7 while still an FGCU student. Watkins is a digital content producer, which means his journalism work is on the station's website — writing copy and editing video — and pushing content to social media.

“I put in the work early on while I was in school at FGCU, and I really was grateful for my opportunities to grow with FGCU360 and also just to become a better writer within the classroom,” he said.

While Watkins is a more recent example of behind-the-scenes success for FGCU journalism grads at NBC2 and ABC7, photojournalist Sebastian Gonzalez has been working for the company (mostly) since 2017. But



visual reporting wasn't his first career path.

"I always wanted to be a writer," he said.

He followed his writing dream to a local newspaper but decided the position wasn't for him. He got a job at NBC2 and ABC7 and started learning about photojournalism.

"I just loved it," Gonzalez said. "I think it only took me a couple of weeks here to realize, 'Whoa, this is what I'm going to do.'"

Rising through the ranks, and a brief spell at a station in Jacksonville, led him to a new NBC2 and ABC7 role — director of photojournalism. In this role, he oversees the people running the cameras for the company. His employees include other FGCU

graduates and current students.

"We've always wanted to have a pipeline of FGCU students who come here after graduation and have their first job. I think that we solidified that pipeline. I don't want to say I created it, but I helped solidify it," he said.

That's a testament to the company's belief in the FGCU journalism program and what it has to offer.

"Professor Cribbs used to have a meme on his office door with the words, 'Small but scrappy.' That was the journalism program," he said. "It's just becoming better and better and bigger and bigger."

Klutsarits agrees.

"The [FGCU journalism] program has grown over the past few years and has continued to increase their

stature," he said. "Their students are much more viable coming straight out of the university."

And as the program continues to grow, the value of each graduate's degree is more valuable. That's a great example of turning ideas into impact. ■

LEFT: Tyler Watkins landed a job with NBC2 and ABC7 before graduating from FGCU.

CENTER: 2017 graduate Sebastian Gonzalez is now NBC2's and ABC7's director of photojournalism.

RIGHT: Tim Klutsarits is the news director hiring FGCU grads at NBC2 and ABC7.



ALUMNI



CLASS OF 2015, 2019

Adam Catasus has the keys to research and adventure

BY LAURIE D. BABCOCK

ON A PICTURE-PERFECT day, Florida Gulf Coast University's Water School professor Mike Parsons navigates a boat through the Gulf of Mexico and tells how he came to hire Adam Catasus.

"Adam came and knocked on my office door as a sophomore, I think,"

Parsons says about the man hired in 2019 as a laboratory technician before he started his current role as the coordinator of education and research at FGCU's Vester Marine & Environmental Science Field Station. "He asked if there was any work to do in the labs. I said, 'Yeah, you can gut some fish.' So he gutted a lot of fish.

Now look at him!"

Parsons points over to Catasus ('15, bachelor's, marine science; '19, master's, environmental science), captaining a second boat on their way to Kimberly's Reef. Both men sport beards that would make Hemingway proud, and it's difficult not to see Catasus as a younger version of Parsons.

PHOTO BY JAMES GRECO



Become something they need you for, learn a skill that fits the need; be indispensable.



ADAM CATASUS

Gutting fish isn't just scut work in Parsons' lab. His team uses the fish to study the harmful algae that produce toxins in Southwest Florida waters.

"But Adam gets to do all the fun stuff now," Parsons says about Catusus driving the boats and heading out to do the science while his boss directs operations from behind a desk at The Water School. "I find the money and give him the keys."

Parsons doesn't only mean the keys to the boat but also those to the office at Vester Field Station and FGCU research facilities down in the Keys and on other Florida barrier islands.

Catusus wouldn't have any keys without having heeded some advice from his big sister. During spring break in his sophomore year, she advised him to email his professors and ask what he could do to help. She even watched over his shoulder until he hit send on the emails, which led directly to Catusus knocking on Parsons' door and getting that first fish-gutting job.

What advice does Catusus have for current students trying to find an "in" to something greater?

"Become something they need you for," he says. "Learn a skill that fits the need; be indispensable."

Post-hurricane "droning"

Catusus and Dhruvkumar Bhatt, a geographic information systems analyst with The Water School, ventured out less than a week after Hurricane Ian, Florida's deadliest hurricane since 1935. Bhatt, who isn't a boat captain and can't swim, needed to fly a drone over an FGCU research site to document the post-storm overwash to see how the barrier islands changed. The site is at Lovers Key State Park, between Bonita Beach and Fort

Myers Beach, but bridges were out, and roads were closed. The only way to access the site was to boat in.

In the aftermath of a hurricane, what lurks beneath the surface can be just as deadly as the storm itself. "There were houses and cars and docks all in the bay," Catusus says, "and the majority of channel markers were snapped in half so you couldn't see them at high tide."

Wreckage floated on the surface and was hidden under rust-colored water, churned up by the fierce winds that battered Southwest Florida, making it challenging to navigate safely. But Catusus and Bhatt couldn't let storm debris and zero-visibility water get in the way of science.

"It was terrifying but important," Catusus says.

The two scientists were at the site trying to fix a technical issue with Bhatt's drone while Catusus kept one eye on the skiff he beached on the island's Gulf side. Around three hours in, the winds and tides changed. The skiff was being hammered by waves crashing on the beach.

"I'm trying to help Dhru so we can get this drone up," Catusus says, "when I turn to check on the boat. And it's just out there, 50 yards from land."

Catusus acted fast and ran into the Gulf, keeping his head above water as he swam after the boat. He couldn't see below the surface or feel the bottom. He reached the skiff, hauled himself aboard and navigated back to the island, where he ran the boat up on the beach so it wouldn't go anywhere again. When he returned to his colleague, Bhatt pointed to the water Catusus had just been in.

"There's a shark swimming around about three feet offshore," Catusus says. "The water was so brown, all we

could see was the fin. I would have had no idea if he was swimming next to me."

After that, he didn't much care about getting the drone to work.

An underwater classroom visit

Months later, the brown water had cleared, and Parsons, Catusus and other team members headed out on four boats. This is where our story started.

On Parsons' boat is a WGCU documentary team, while Catusus transports a bunch of FGCU staff and reporters from WINK News and Fox 4. Everyone is heading out to witness the deployment of Kimberly's Reef, the newest FGCU research site. Catusus shares his Spotify playlist with his passengers. At over 400 songs, it's a little of everything you'd expect to hear on a craft used for adventure and discovery: some metal, some rap, all the Highwaymen and a little Jimmy Buffett. Catusus grins mischievously when he admits he's titled the playlist "boat/doing stuff"

Of course, his job is much bigger than "doing stuff," boat maintenance or swimming with sharks. After Hurricane Ian, Catusus was the chief science officer on the Florida Institute of Oceanography's ships, the R/V Hogarth and R/V Weatherbird II. He's been intimately involved in Parsons' ciguatera research since 2013 and has conducted red tide and artificial reef research since 2019.

Parsons' team will be at Kimberly's Reef at least monthly. Catusus will likely spearhead most of those trips, while Parsons focuses on the administrative tasks associated with being the principal investigator on scientific research projects.

Because Catusus has the keys. ■



CLASS OF 2008

Seminole artist preserves heritage with textiles and ceramics

BY LAURIE D. BABCOCK

THE FIRST EXPERIENCES Jessica Osceola ('08, liberal arts) had with the creative arts came from the women who taught her to weave and bead.

"I feel like I'm a preservationist in that sense. If I'm not continuing to do these things, they will stop with me," she says.

The Naples native grew up in a Seminole village, cherishing memories of learning traditional arts, like basket-making, beadwork and textiles. Osceola teaches the arts for the Seminole Tribe of Florida. Since 2017, she has also been teaching ceramics at FGCU's Bower School of Music and the Arts.

Her textile work and ceramics creations were featured in "Reclaiming Home: Contemporary Seminole Art," a recent exhibit at The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota.

Ola Wlusek, the Ringling's Keith

LEFT: Jessica Osceola believes exhibitions can be an important tool to preserve Native culture and traditions.

RIGHT: A hoop skirt Osceola designed especially for the Ringling exhibit.

UPPER RIGHT: A large band of blue in the skirt symbolizes water, and a row of cream with blue and green fabric symbolizes waves while referencing Osceola's alma mater.

PHOTOS BY DALE WARD

D. Monda Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, and who curated "Reclaiming Home," called the exhibition "a celebration of Seminole and Native American culture and imagination." The inspiration for the exhibition emerged from Wlusek's visits to the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum on the Big Cypress Indian Reservation and the Marco Island Historical Museum, as well as conversations with several Native artists. The first Seminole artist she met was Osceola.

"If you don't keep doing as your grandmothers did or your fathers, it lets out," Osceola says. "The museum world can be utilitarian. So, for this show, I wanted to bring these pieces to a level where they are recognized as art by Seminole."

She explains that Native American craft design is often heavy with symbolism and observations of the environment, as well as vibrant colors and intricate patterns. Through her formal training, she learned about color psychology and how to evoke feelings. She feels her work blends Native American art techniques with the contemporary styles she learned at FGCU and her master's program.

One of Osceola's pieces is a ribbon

skirt paired with an FGCU T-shirt. A large band of blue symbolizes water, and a row of cream fabric with blue and green patterns symbolizes waves while also making a reference to Osceola's alma mater. She describes the garment as a collaboration with The Water School at FGCU.

Greg Tolley, a marine science professor and executive director of The Water School, has discussed with Osceola the need for greater collaboration between the Indigenous community and the university. "There's a real deficit at FGCU, even though there's a community all-around that's Indigenous," Osceola says. She credits Tolley for "being at the front of allowing a safe space for this conversation" to address the hurdles that often prevent Indigenous students from building or finding sense of community in college.

The FGCU-inspired skirt is a modernized take on traditional ribbon skirts worn by Native Americans for over a century.

"The allure of kaleidoscopic Native textile patterns and designs has unfortunately led to appropriation and theft by some of the major fashion houses in the U.S. and Europe," states Wlusek. "Osceola has taken an activist role in protecting the traditional knowledge of working in patchwork by speaking out publicly against copying and selling Seminole textile designs without permission."

Osceola views her work as a means of preserving Indigenous traditions. During her time in Collier County public schools and throughout her master's degree, she felt it necessary to place her Indigenous culture "on the back burner."

"I'm always navigating between two worlds. I have to exist in this world, but then there's the world that I actually grew up and lived in," she says. "I have my Indigenous upbringing and belief system, which is so opposite to Western culture."

In her village, women wore clothing with functional lengths, multiple layers and ruffles to keep ticks and other bugs at bay. She contrasts the comfort



and versatility of ribbon skirts with the elaborate ballgown she made especially for the Ringling exhibit. A hoop skirt under the gown holds the floor-length skirt away from the legs, creating a dramatic silhouette.

"Goodness knows what would have crawled up underneath a skirt that popped out like that in the village,"

says Osceola. "We would never have worn a ballroom gown in the swamp."

The gown's rows of red blocks on a white background symbolize the telephone poles along the Tamiami



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THE VIDEO

Trail that replaced pristine sections of the Everglades but brought a means of communication, she says. Thin strips of bias tape and rickrack trim convey the idea of communication lines.

For Osceola, exhibitions hold great significance for both Indigenous communities and the art world. "Maybe these look like 'just' textiles to somebody, which in the art world isn't often viewed as important, so I'm grateful to FGCU and The Ringling for finding value in this."

"It's how we keep going forward with it," she adds. ■



SPORTS

BASKETBALL

Pageant crown proves Sha Carter is more than just a basketball star

BY TERRISA MARK

FROM THE TIME she started playing competitive basketball at 13 to her acclaimed collegiate career at Florida Gulf Coast University, Sha Carter's hard-working personality has yielded exceptional results.

At 22, a mentor prompted her to take that same drive into unfamiliar territory — a beauty pageant. Despite some hesitation, Carter accepted the new challenge and won the Miss Black and Gold title. The 2023 Atlantic Sun Conference Scholar-Athlete of the Year and ASUN First-Team member showed how players can excel beyond Alico Arena.

"It gave me a chance to show girls that, yes, I play basketball, but I can throw on some heels and do this pageant," said Carter.

The Miss Black and Gold pageant hosted by Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. aims to highlight and foster the connection between different forms of success and etiquette among young women. It also helps showcase poise,

self-confidence, communication skills, intelligence and beauty.

Maggie Hohne, assistant director of student-athlete development and academic advisor for the 13th ASUN Conference regular season champs, tipped off Carter to the pageant. FGCU's Upsilon Sigma Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity requested Hohne's assistance in identifying and nominating outstanding women for the competition.

"Based on these talents and skill sets, I knew this would be a great opportunity for Sha to continue to grow and showcase herself and her talents outside of the arena," Hohne said.

Carter took the challenge head-on, just like the Eagles' 33 winning games last season. She wanted to scratch off a personal goal to be more involved with campus activities and to break down barriers



LEFT: Sha Carter won the Miss Black and Gold pageant hosted by Alpha Phi Alpha.

RIGHT: Carter also won 2023 ASUN Scholar-Athlete of the Year. She now plays professionally and lives in Hungary.

“

It gave me a chance to show girls that, yes, I play basketball, but I can throw on some heels and do this pageant.

”

SHA CARTER

between athletes and non-athletes.

“I saw it as the perfect opportunity to know more about where I go to school and expand my palette [of] friendship,” said Carter. “My biggest thing was, let’s go try something new. This seems like something fun and out of my comfort zone.”

Still, it was yet another activity to juggle in her already busy life. Carter would balance basketball practice in the morning and classes during the day. Then, she kept her energy up in the evening for extensive pageant practices and additional studying. With her signature determination, she achieved a 4.0 GPA as a grad student in criminal justice — a field of study influenced by someone close to her.

“My grandmother showed me this show called ‘Psych’ and got me interested in criminal justice,” she said, referring to USA Network’s 2006-14 detective show. “I wanted to become a detective.”

From that point on, Carter narrowed her future career to becoming a forensic scientist and psychologist. She took the right steps to make the dream come to life as she graduated from Walsh University in Ohio with a bachelor’s

degree in psychology and criminology with minors in forensic science and government foreign affairs. She came to FGCU to pursue her master of arts in criminal justice.

Carter’s academic achievements were a major factor in the Miss Black and Gold pageant, along with competition in attire, evening gowns, ticket sales, speeches and, ultimately, talent.

“Everyone wanted me to do something along the line of basketball, and I kept saying no! I’m more than basketball. I worked on a contemporary dance with my mom, and it was so special to me to be able to do it with her. I cried during the dance as I thought about the trials and tribulations that I have been through in my life.”

It was emotional for others, too.

“It’s one thing to see Sha work hard in her own element of the basketball court, but to see her put so much passion [into] and execute the dance was just amazing to watch,” said Chelsea Lyles, women’s associate basketball coach.

With all the pageant sections completed, the three finalists held hands onstage while waiting for the winner to be announced. Carter controlled her breathing and held her posture as if she were attempting free throws in the final moments of a game. She won Miss Congeniality, which the contestants voted on. She also won the talent section. When she was announced as the winner of Miss Black and Gold, she was “happy, really in disbelief about winning and just overjoyed.” ■



ATHLETE SUCCESS

NIL collective created to support FGCU student-athletes

BY KYLE McCURRY

SWFL FLIGHT CREW, the first-ever name, image and likeness (NIL) collective for FGCU Athletics, has been created to support student-athletes.

"This collaboration marks a significant step forward in our commitment to supporting our student-athletes in their journey to excel both on and off the court," said Pat Chambers, the head men's basketball coach. "We believe our student-athletes should have the opportunity to benefit from their NIL while representing FGCU. The SWFL Flight Crew shares our vision of empowering the young men on our team to maximize their potential, and we couldn't be more excited about the possibilities."

SWFL Flight Crew is a third-party B corporation that connects FGCU student-athletes with opportunities to leverage their NIL.

"The SWFL Flight Crew aims to build relationships between regional businesses, fans, boosters, nonprofit organizations and Florida Gulf Coast athletes, allowing the athletes to realize the full potential of their NIL campaigns by making appearances at community events as well as leveraging their social media presence," said Timothy J. Cartwright, chair of the SWFL Flight Crew. "The college sports landscape changed forever July 1, 2021, when the NCAA

permitted student-athletes to earn compensation for their NIL."

Cartwright is no stranger to FGCU. His expertise helped the university establish its entrepreneurship program, which is now known as the Daveler & Kauanui School of Entrepreneurship.

"The SWFL Flight Crew was established by a group of regional business leaders to assist FGCU student-athletes as they take the first step on their entrepreneurial journey

Athletes promote these businesses and SWFL Flight Crew members' charities through endorsements, appearances and social media promotions. Payments to athletes are made from the money generated by the SWFL Flight Crew.

"Local charities grow as student-athletes experience the impact of their NIL partnerships on partner organizations. The school retains its athletes, who are likelier to stay in college instead of turning pro or transferring."

FGCU Athletics believes that every student-athlete has an opportunity to capitalize on their NIL. In February, FGCU launched the FGCU NIL Store powered by Campus Ink, featuring custom and co-licensed merchandise.

"Eagle Nation, we are excited to introduce the SWFL Flight Crew as our preferred NIL collective," Director of Athletics Ken Kavanagh said. "As we navigate the ever-evolving landscape of intercollegiate athletics, it's crucial that we provide our Eagles with the best opportunities to succeed.

"That's why we're thrilled to collaborate with the SWFL Flight Crew, a dynamic organization that shares our passion for empowering student-athletes. We believe this collective will allow our student-athletes access to unprecedented NIL opportunities, mentorship and valuable educational resources to help them maximize their potential." ■

S O U T H W E S T F L O R I D A
FLIGHT CREW
NIL COLLECTIVE FOR FGCU STUDENT-ATHLETES

of marketing themselves and engaging with their fans and the community," said Cartwright, who leads the collective with support from business leaders James Richmond and Bob Mills.

According to the SWFL Flight Crew website, the collective depends on membership fees from alumni and fans, who gain access to exclusive private events, and appearance or endorsement fees from local businesses. The collective then works with athletes to match them with opportunities to use their NIL.

LEARN MORE AT:

► swflflightcrew.com

SWIMMING

FGCU swimmer a passionate advocate for school counseling, mental health

BY DREW STERWALD

EMILY MERTON SAYS her high school counselor in Jacksonville was the kind of dedicated professional who ensured students didn't fall through the cracks. It was a Title I school, and many of her classmates were economically disadvantaged. If they went to college, they would likely be the first in their families to do so, says the Florida Gulf Coast University graduate student and swimming and diving team member.

"She was amazing," Merton recalls. "She made sure people had opportunities and applied for college. She really inspired me to help others."

That positive example is part of the reason Merton decided years ago she wanted to become a school counselor and is now pursuing a master's in counseling at FGCU. On the negative side, she says that "amazing" high school counselor followed "not-so-great experiences" with elementary and middle school counselors.

By the time she was in third grade, Merton says, her mother recognized signs of attention deficit disorder in her daughter and sought help from the school system. But because Merton was doing relatively well academically, her counselor didn't see the need for extra assistance, she says.

"We weren't finding the help we needed," she says. "Going through that horrible experience at a really young age was eye opening. I saw what a difference good counseling can make."

Merton went on to achieve a 4.0

GPA while balancing the demands of being a student-athlete. Her drive to succeed parallels the passion she feels about becoming the kind of counselor her high school counselor was.

"We need to make school counseling better," she says. "I'm passionate about mental health and



Emily Merton

reaching a wider audience, helping people understand what school counseling is."

Part of it is counseling special populations, a recent course that is still rippling in Merton's mind as she chats enthusiastically about her chosen field. A project for the class involved cultural immersion. Merton paired up with a Filipino American peer, and they compared their life experiences.

"I'm mixed racially, and he was mixed culturally," she says. "We

both struggled a bit to find a way to fit in and identify. Working toward accepting all cultures and celebrating everyone is important for mental health."

Rather than studying psychology or early childhood development, Merton strategically chose to pursue a degree in communication with a minor in political science. She believes knowledge of public relations and how government and public policy play into school systems will enable her to raise awareness about the need for improved counseling services and mental health support in schools.

As a graduate assistant in FGCU's Prevention & Wellness Services, Merton has also helped educate peers in emotional, social, financial, physical, spiritual and other aspects of health.

Her own pursuit of spiritual well-being led her to the Gulf Coast Wesleyan Foundation at FGCU, a mission of the United Methodist Church. Its pastor, Christine Holden, also teaches courses on contemplative practices and spirituality at FGCU. The two have collaborated on spirituality themed programming and training for peer educators on spiritual topics.

"Emily is so committed to using the skills and talents she has to make the world a more loving and generous place," Holden says. "I really love that she lives her faith in an integrated way. She's always looking for pathways to use what she's learning and not just for her own end. She is a poster child for what I hope the university wants to produce in its students." ■



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► The Eagle Nation has a striking new photo op for sharing FGCU pride in a big way – literally. The university logo in aluminum letters 5 feet high was unveiled Sept. 25 as a new landmark on the library lawn.

