

A PUBLICATION FOR ALUMNI, STUDENTS AND FRIENDS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS

SILVER & BLUE

FALL 2021

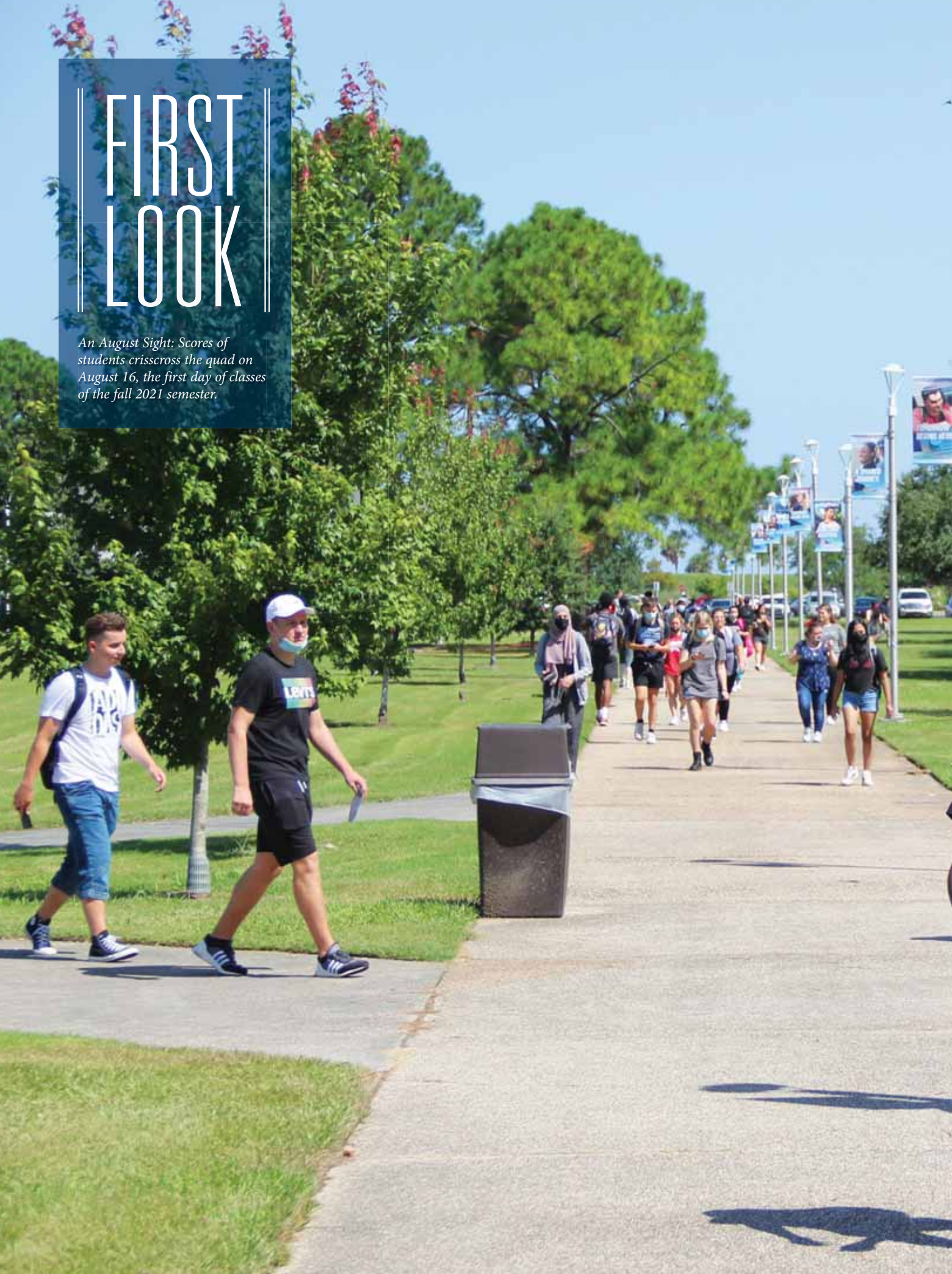
GUARDIAN *of the* GROOVE

Alumna Beth Arroyo Utterback
is the general manager of
New Orleans' award-winning
jazz and heritage
radio station WWOZ



FIRST LOOK

An August Sight: Scores of students crisscross the quad on August 16, the first day of classes of the fall 2021 semester.





The image shows the interior of a modern office space, likely an esports arena. In the foreground, two large, cylindrical, metallic columns stand on a light-colored tiled floor. To the right, a glass-walled office is visible. The glass has the text "NEW ORLEANS eSports" printed on it in large, white, sans-serif letters. Inside the office, a person is seated at a desk, working on a computer. The desk is equipped with multiple monitors and a chair. The office has a blue wall and a blue carpet. The ceiling features recessed lighting fixtures.

NEW ORLEANS
eSports



The new eSports Café opens at the University of New Orleans with intramural, club and varsity teams on the way.

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DEAR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS:

YOU HAVE LIKELY HEARD SOME VERSION OF THE MAXIM ABOUT ADVERSITY revealing true character. The people of Southeast Louisiana experienced an avalanche of adversity in August when Hurricane Ida roared ashore as a Category 4 storm, peeling off roofs and plunging the region into darkness for days and, in some places, weeks. Compared to our neighbors in the River and Bayou Parishes, the University was relatively fortunate. After two weeks of canceled classes, employees and students were able to return to campus to resume the fall semester. And yet, our community was suffering. In particular, students who lived in the hardest hit areas had their worlds turned upside down. They lost homes, cars and their most cherished possessions. Their places of work and worship were damaged. Their children's schools and daycares closed.

After the storm passed, it became quickly apparent that our students needed help. One student wrote to me that her home was uninhabitable. She said, "I am concerned about food, shelter and basic necessities on a daily basis. I've cried more times than I can count. And as horrible as my situation is, I know there are still others who are experiencing worse. Thankfully, my community helps those in need."

Within days, the University created the Hurricane Ida Student Relief Fund and began getting the word out to UNO alumni and friends. We asked students who had immediate needs to apply for the assistance by filling out a brief survey. Within the first 24 hours, 1,000 students had applied. Several days later, that number climbed to more than 1,300. Students requested cash for gas and groceries or to pay bills because their employment had been interrupted.

Now here's what I mean about true character being revealed. Donations started trickling in. \$20. \$50. Then larger gifts. Within a matter of weeks, all of those individual acts of selflessness, of empathy and of kindness added up to nearly \$100,000. I was blown away. Every dollar that we raised went directly to students. We distributed it as fast as we could, and it did not last long. The amounts were modest—and we certainly wished they could have been larger—but our students let us know that they were grateful. The same student I mentioned earlier wrote, "I just want you to understand how truly appreciative I am of your flexibility and support as a university." She added, "It means a lot knowing there are people like you that care so deeply and are willing to help in any way possible."

Gratitude is what I felt, too. I am so thankful to our alumni, friends and supporters. You saw that members of our Privateer family were hurting, and you pitched in without promise of praise or fanfare. That compassionate spirit is indomitable, and it will help us face the challenges that lie ahead. It is also why I am so optimistic about the future of our university. With Privateers like you, there's simply no way we will not triumph.

UNO Proud,
John Nicklow
PRESIDENT

 @UNOPresidentJN  @unopresident



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CAMPUS SCENE

HEADLINES AND HAPPENINGS

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CEREMONY RETURNS TO
LAKEFRONT ARENA

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CASSIMERE JR. GIVES
COMMENCEMENT
SPEECH

MOVE-IN DAY

NEW STUDENT
CONVOCATION

FIRST DAY OF CLASS

HURRICANE IDA



COMMENCEMENT CELEBRATION RETURNS TO LAKEFRONT ARENA

Alumnus Raphael Cassimere Jr., an emeritus professor of history and civil rights leader, was the principal speaker at the University of New Orleans spring 2021 commencement ceremonies. Because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the University had held virtual commencement events since spring 2020.

In May, four separate in-person commencement ceremonies were held in the Lakefront Arena to comply with city and state capacity limits instituted due to the coronavirus.

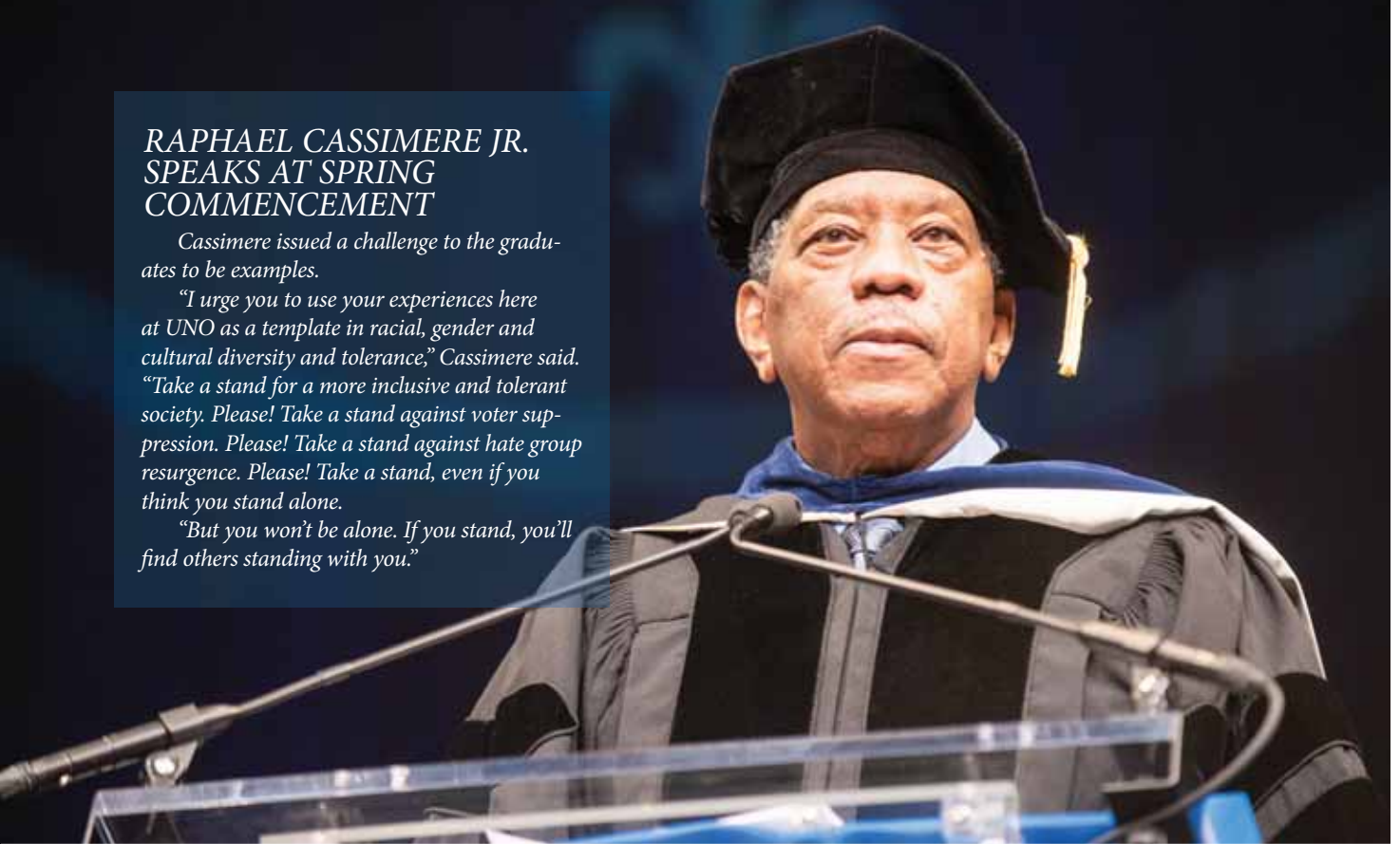


RAPHAEL CASSIMERE JR. SPEAKS AT SPRING COMMENCEMENT

Cassimere issued a challenge to the graduates to be examples.

"I urge you to use your experiences here at UNO as a template in racial, gender and cultural diversity and tolerance," Cassimere said. "Take a stand for a more inclusive and tolerant society. Please! Take a stand against voter suppression. Please! Take a stand against hate group resurgence. Please! Take a stand, even if you think you stand alone.

"But you won't be alone. If you stand, you'll find others standing with you."



MOVE-IN DAY

Move-In Day at Pontchartrain Hall was held over several days in August and included staggered check-in times to ensure it was a socially distanced event.

CAMPUS SCENE

FIRST DAY OF CLASSES

Students returned to campus for the start of classes on Aug. 16.



NEW STUDENT CONVOCATION

Following last fall's COVID-19 forced hiatus, the University of New Orleans returned to tradition by welcoming the Class of 2025 with New Student Convocation held at the Lakefront Arena.



HURRICANE IDA

Less than two weeks into the start of the fall semester Hurricane Ida, a category 4 storm, hit Louisiana's coastland on Aug. 29 bringing heavy rain, life threatening tidal surge and winds exceeding 130 mph. The powerful storm caused widespread electrical power outages in metro New Orleans and resulted in the evacuation of residential students to Lafayette.

The campus avoided major structural damage, and residential students returned and classes resumed after electricity was restored. Meanwhile, UNO students reached out to lend a helping hand to others impacted by Hurricane Ida.



NEWS & EVENTS



UNO RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY PARK REIMAGINED AND REBRANDED AS THE BEACH AT UNO

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans Research and Technology Park — a 30-acre site on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain leveraging 800,000 square feet of customizable office and laboratory space where public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private companies come to innovate and create through technological, cultural, and scientific interaction — has rebranded as The Beach at UNO.

The comprehensive rebrand, which includes a new website, social media handles, logo and tagline, aims to reflect the park's collaborative and inclusive community, which fosters a spirit of inquiry and the exchange of ideas to maximize innovation and shared prosperity throughout the Gulf region.

Established in the mid-90s, the park is owned and managed by the UNO Research & Technology Foundation (R&T Foundation) — a public-private partnership with the university created with the mission to support the research, scholarship, and commercialization activities at UNO and to advance the development of the Greater New Orleans community in collaboration with public and private sectors.

The park is the R&T Foundation's most valuable asset. Together, the park and UNO generate an annual economic impact of approximately \$1 billion for the city and region.

"The New Orleans business and entrepreneurial ecosystem is burgeoning with much opportunity for growth," says R&T Foundation President and CEO Rebecca Conwell. "Our city benefits from a great depth of brilliant and inspired minds and a network of support for the innovative process. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, businesses and entrepreneurs continue to need supportive, inclusive workspaces that provide amenities, access to equipment and peer organizations, as well as a relationship with the institution that supports their growth — and that is exactly what they will find at The Beach."

Just steps away from the university, The Beach stands to serve as an essential player in the region's business and entrepreneurial ecosystem development, functioning as a bridge from start-up to growth and growing networks that build an entrepreneurial community.

"The park has long been

one of the University of New Orleans' closest partners, and we are so excited about this re-energized partnership," says UNO President John Nicklow. "The Beach combines the best of the Foundation and UNO, providing tenants with access to world-class laboratory space, research equipment, and talent beyond the borders of the research park, bringing out the best of academia, government, and entrepreneurial endeavors."

The university — with nationally recognized undergraduate, graduate, and research programs within the Colleges of Business Administration; Liberal Arts, Education & Human Development; Engineering; and Sciences — offers The Beach tenants the unique opportunity to engage in joint proposals, collaborate on research projects with university researchers, and supplement their workforce through internships for undergraduate and graduate students, Nicklow says.

The reimagining and rebranding of the research park to The Beach is one of the first actions of the implementation of the R&T Foundation's 2019 strategic plan, which aims to ensure that the Southeast is

UNO Research & Technology Foundation board members pose with the newly unveiled sign for The Beach at UNO: A Sandbox for Collaboration.

recognized as a resource-rich and entrepreneurial community-driven epicenter of complex social, scientific, and business breakthroughs.

Over the next year, there will be several real estate projects that will enhance the park and best reflect the vibrant entrepreneurial culture.

In addition to real estate improvements, a programmatic division of the R&T Foundation is being developed that will focus on supporting the growth of current tenants and creating pathways for the success of new companies.

"We are committed to working with UNO and our community stakeholders to bring even more innovation to the park," says R&T Foundation Board Chair David Gallo. "We're excited about pursuing opportunities with the blue economy, military and technology innovation, food economy — the future at The Beach is very bright."



ANTHROPOLOGY PROFESSOR D. RYAN GRAY EXPLORES AUSTRIAN WWII SITE

THIS PAST SUMMER, University of New Orleans anthropology professor D. Ryan Gray and a small team, including students and recent alumni, traveled to the Austrian Alps to explore a site potentially associated with a World War II aircraft

crash. The site exploration was in collaboration with the University of Innsbruck and the U.S. Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency whose mission is to make the fullest possible accounting of missing in action U.S. military personnel.



Excavating on a steep slope created a number of challenges. The team used rope clamps and mountain safety gear to excavate on the steep Austrian mountainside. Eventually the team carved out pathways to make the slope more accessible and set up additional rope lines specifically to move buckets.

SMALL BUSINESSES FLOURISH ON UNO'S CAMPUS

A CLUSTER OF SMALL businesses located directly on a university campus is not at all common. However, a growing number of research-oriented businesses are calling the University of New Orleans home.

Since 2017, the University of New Orleans Advanced Materials Research Institute (AMRI) has been leasing space to small businesses in the Science Building on the University's campus.

Attracted by quality lab and office facilities, faculty collaborations, readily available undergraduate and graduate interns and a pipeline to new graduates, eight companies are currently housed at UNO.

The companies—InnoGenomics, Obatala Sciences, Model Content, Bastian Enterprises, Stadius BioPharma, Golden

Leaf Energy, TMS BioScience and Cell Free Systems—have varied interests including biotechnology, green materials, medicine, forensics, marketing and chemical analysis.

The companies have over 30 employees on the UNO campus, including four UNO graduates.

These tenants are finding UNO an effective part of their development and sustainability, says John B. Wiley, director of AMRI and a chemistry professor.

"We have a unique environment here," Wiley says. "While many of the outcomes can be anticipated, what is especially exciting is the potential for new developments, new collaborations and new ideas that will impact education, research and business."



The proximity and strong relationships between the companies and AMRI are leading to other positive results. Some AMRI faculty are starting their own businesses and AMRI tenants are more than willing to help faculty negotiate the path to developing a successful startup, Wiley says.

In terms of education, AMRI faculty members were recently able to secure more than \$400,000 from the National Science Foundation (NSF) for undergraduate research. This program, starting summer of 2022, includes one- and two-day internships in AMRI companies, providing undergraduates with important exposure to small business.

It was clear from the NSF proposal reviews that the inclusion of student industrial internships were a major highlight of the proposal, one that would not have been possible without the proximity of the various companies, Wiley says.

The first business to rent space at UNO was Advano, a company specializing in the development of silicon nanomaterials that increases the energy and power of

Trivia Frazier is president and CEO of Obatala Sciences, one of eight companies renting space on campus at the University of New Orleans.

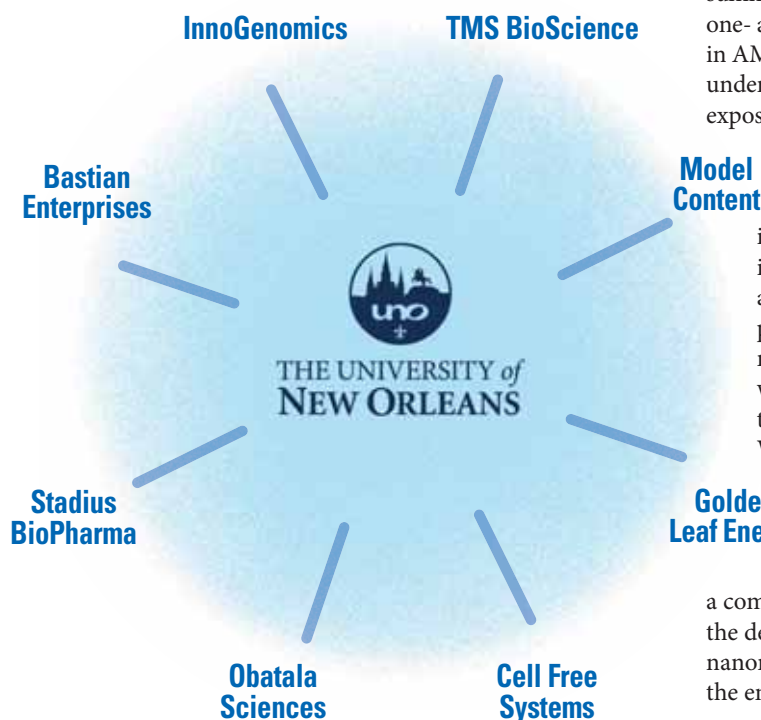
rechargeable, lithium-ion batteries.

Advano started in AMRI in the spring of 2017 with 650 square feet of lab space and four employees, but grew quickly to over 4,000 square feet and 20 employees. In the spring of 2020, the need for expansion to support their processing efforts led to a move to the UNO Research and Technology Park, where the company, valued at \$50 million, now has 30 employees and over 15,000 square feet of lab and office space.

"The support from AMRI and UNO has been and remains extremely critical to our success," Advano's CEO and co-founder Shiva Adireddy says. "The staff at AMRI readily gave us access to equipment and space at crucial times in our development; we thrived in AMRI."

The synergy between AMRI tenants has also been meaningful for UNO faculty and students, Wiley says.

Damon Smith, an assistant professor in mechanical engineering, has ongoing projects involving 3-D printing with





UNO's Talent Search Program Receives \$2.3M Federal Grant

The Talent Search Program at the University of New Orleans has received a five-year, \$2.3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to continue assisting middle and high school students in preparing for college. The award is a renewal of an existing grant.

Talent Search, which is a federal program, provides academic, career and financial aid counseling to students from disadvantaged backgrounds who have a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Plan and have the potential to succeed in higher education.

A goal of the program is to increase the number of such students who finish high school and complete their postsecondary education.

University officials have collaborated with several schools in Orleans and Jefferson parishes to help identify students who are eligible to participate in the program.

New Instant Admit Program Offers Jefferson Parish Schools Students Automatic Admission

Jefferson Parish Schools and the University of New Orleans announced a new Instant Admit program that would grant automatic admission to the University of New Orleans for all graduates from Jefferson Parish Schools who meet enrollment criteria.

To be eligible for automatic admission, students must have graduated from a Jefferson Parish High School with a 2.0 overall GPA or greater and a Louisiana Core 4 GPA of 2.5, and submit a free college admissions application at apply.uno.edu.

In addition to ease of enrollment, the University of New Orleans is committed to providing financial assistance for Jefferson Parish Schools students. As promised in its Privateer Pledge, the University will cover the unmet financial need for all eligible students whose parents earn \$60,000 or less. Additionally, students will be automatically considered for an academic scholarship ranging from \$2,000-\$5,000 a year for four years.

University Awarded \$50K Grant to Advance 21st Century Skills Development Through University-Community Partnerships

The University of New Orleans has received a \$50,000 grant from the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and Coalition of Urban Serving Universities to further its partnerships with local community organizations and businesses aimed at providing students with the skills they'll need to successfully enter the workforce upon graduation.

"Despite the advances in technology accessibility,

two biotech companies, InnoGenomics and Obatala Sciences.

Meanwhile, Viktor Poltavets, assistant professor in chemistry, has been working with Advano, which has led to a contract for characterization of spent batteries and a collaborative Louisiana Board of Regents industrial ties grant. The two funding sources have a combined worth of more than \$640,000.

"The connection with Advano and their battery expertise has helped accelerate the development of my own battery program in sodium molten salt batteries," Poltavets says. "The initial proximity of my labs and theirs readily catalyzed our collaboration."

Internships with the various companies also have been very beneficial for UNO students. These provide not only hands-on research experience in applied technologies, but also expose the students to a small business' day-to-day operations, Wiley says.

UNO student Madison Fisher, a chemistry major, has interned for two semesters with InnoGenomics, a small business working on DNA test kits for both medical and forensic applications.

InnoGenomics products have helped to decrease the extensive backlog of rape test kits in crime labs across the country.

Fisher, whose project involved advancing DNA analysis for follicle-less hair strands, says the convenience of interning at a company located on campus was an added bonus.

"Having the company, classrooms and professors all in the same building was great," Fisher says. "Rather than spending time traveling between campus and another facility, I was able to get more hours in the lab before, between or after classes."

the information literacy gap has widened even more in recent years," says Mahyar Amouzegar, UNO's provost and senior vice president for academic affairs. "We are excited to gain the support of APLU and our industry partners to create a program that helps to educate and train a more information literate workforce."

The University of New Orleans is partnering with GNO, Inc., to cultivate relationships with local industry leaders and gather their input on an information literacy curriculum and a digital badge that will be offered to all of UNO's undergraduate students.

Through a UNO Information Literacy Summer Institute, UNO faculty will receive in-depth, expert training on information literacy, participate in course development workshops, and be paired with appropriate partner organizations who will host experiential learning projects that operationalize information literacy skills.

Women in Computer Science Scholarship Winners Announced

Two University of New Orleans students Courtney Harris and Lisa Gilmore-Montero have been selected to receive a Women in Computer Science Scholarship, which was created by alumna Sabrina Farmer, a vice president at Google.

The award covers in-state tuition for the academic year and comes with a mentorship from Farmer who established the scholarship a year after she graduated from UNO in 1995 with a computer science degree.

Harris is a junior who has received numerous awards within the College of Sciences. Gilmore-Montero is a senior majoring in computer science with a minor in digital media.

Two Computer Science Students Receive Inaugural Hosch Scholarship

University of New Orleans students Jaiya Bass and Roy Perez have been awarded a \$6,000 Hosch Scholarship for the 2021-22 academic year.

Bass and Perez, both computer science majors, are the inaugural recipients of the award established in honor of Fredrick Hosch, one of the original faculty members who helped start the computer science department at UNO.

Bass is a sophomore from New Orleans and Perez is a senior, whose family relocated from New Orleans to Florida after Hurricane Katrina. In addition to the monetary award, both students will receive mentoring from a member of Google's software development team.

NANCY BIGGIO IS NEW ASSOCIATE VP FOR THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

NANCY BIGGIO, THE NEW associate vice president for the University of New Orleans Graduate School, has a fondness for policy and procedures. She sees them, not only as tools to ensure the continued quality of a program, but also as a way to help steer student success.

Biggio says helping guide graduate student success involves removing potential hurdles or barriers created unintentionally by certain processes and connecting students with on-campus resources they may need.

“My role is to act as administrative oversight for all graduate programs at UNO to ensure policy and procedures are

adhered to, but more importantly, to work with faculty and schools to help recruit and retain graduate students and aid in their success,” she says.

Biggio has 20 years of higher education experience, a portion of which was spent teaching political science. She holds a doctorate in political science from the University of Alabama.

She has spent the last decade working in academic affairs at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, where she served as an associate provost.

“Although I was not impacting students directly every day ... I was able to update, change, develop policy



and programs which I felt benefitted even more students than I could have by working directly,” Biggio says.

“That to me is where the rewards come from, feeling as though I’m working on things that are going to make things better for the student and their experience, and make things easier for the faculty so that they can focus on their teaching and their research.”

As the new steward of the University’s 32 master’s and nine doctoral programs, Biggio says

she sees her role not only as an administrator, but an advocate and ambassador as well.

“I think my role is to try to, in some cases, provide additional resources, but also to advocate for graduate programs with administration, with leaders across campus,” Biggio says. “And try to be an ambassador for the programs out in the community with business interests and spread the word of UNO across the region and, in some cases, even broader depending on the program.”

PORTIA GORDON, NEW DIRECTOR OF COUNSELING AND HEALTH SERVICES: ‘WE ARE HERE’

AS PORTIA GORDON settles into her role as the new director of counseling and health services at the University of New Orleans, she has a very simple message for students.

“We are here,” says Gordon. “The services are included in their tuition so they should be accessing those services as much as they can.”

Gordon based her message on a recent student survey in which she says a majority of the more than 600 respondents indicated they didn’t know about the on-campus counseling center—nor where it is located.

One of her priorities is ensuring that perception changes, Gordon says.

“Just getting the word out

that it’s here, it’s available,” Gordon says. “And it’s right here on campus. We’re offering virtual sessions along with in-person sessions when school starts.”

The professional staff, which includes three counselors, is experienced in the assessment and confidential treatment of mental health concerns common among university students.

Another goal for Gordon is to remove the negative stigma some people place on seeking therapy and to normalize it as much as possible, she says.

“I think everyone needs counseling ... it’s about your well-being in general, your quality of life,” Gordon says.

Gordon is a licensed professional counselor with supervisor certification who previously worked as the counseling director for Sexual Trauma Awareness and Response (STAR®), a nonprofit organization that has centers in New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Alexandria. She earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in counseling from Xavier University in New Orleans.

“The whole point of counseling is to work ourselves



out of a job,” Gordon says.

The Counseling Center is located on the second floor of the University Center in Room 226. The office hours are Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The telephone is (504) 280-6683.

JUAN LAFONTA MULTICULTURAL LOUNGE OPENS IN THE UNIVERSITY CENTER GALLERY

NEW ORLEANS ATTORNEY Juan LaFonta recalled the struggles he faced trying to fit in among his Black peers as a student at the University of New Orleans in the 1990s.

LaFonta's fair skin and straight hair, traits of his Creole heritage, did not quite compute with some Black students who thought he was attempting to "be cool" by appropriating their culture.

"So my first semester at Bienville Hall I was kind of fighting one battle trying to stay housed and was also fighting a battle with people who didn't accept me for who I was," LaFonta says. "It was people who were not from here that basically didn't get the whole Creole thing ... you don't necessarily look like what, supposedly, a Black person is supposed to look like in the United States, so I used to get a lot of heat."

LaFonta, who says he ran away from home at 15 and was homeless before enrolling at UNO, credits UNO faculty and staff members for creating a community of support that helped him to navigate financial hurdles and social troubles.

"Where would I be if those people hadn't created safe spaces for me? Where would that guy be who ran away from home when he was 15, who was sleeping in a trap house in Carrollton," an emotional LaFonta asks. "There were safe spaces here at this University that got me out."

LaFonta shared the story during the August grand opening of the Juan LaFonta

Multicultural Lounge in the University Center. It's a space designed by the University of New Orleans Diversity Engagement Center aimed at building a support community for all students, said Desirée Anderson, the associate dean for diversity and student affairs.

"This space was envisioned as a visually representative space on campus where students from all backgrounds could see themselves reflected and find the resources and people to survive and thrive," Anderson says. "Oftentimes, students do not know where to go to find a community or to get answers about specific experiences they have on and off-campus and this space will serve as a point place to find direction."

The area consists of a multipurpose room, conference room, lounge, study room, interfaith prayer/meditation space and the Diversity Engagement Center's office. In addition to planned Diversity Engagement Center events, the space will be available for clubs to use and reserve for programming, studying and lounging around, Anderson says.

The project was funded with help from LaFonta and the UNO Student Government Association.

This is not a finished product," Anderson says. "It is just a start. My goal down the line is that it not only becomes a space for where people can gather, but that we are doing the



type of programming, the type of mentoring, we're building those types of relationships, where people feel that they can grow together as a people and as a community."

UNO President John Nicklow thanked LaFonta and the SGA for their support, noting that diversity, equity and inclusion are core values contained within the University's Strategic Plan.

"My goal is to create the most welcoming and inclusive campus environment possible," Nicklow says. "We still have a lot of work to do and a new Multicultural Lounge is not a cure-all. But I believe that it fills a valuable need in giving our students a place of peace and acceptance where they can be themselves."

SGA President Amber Lemelle says she is excited to be a part of the Multicultural Lounge.

"I can't wait to see how it grows," Lemelle says. "I think that this is an important space. I'm excited to be a part of it and I'm excited to see the students fill it up."

LaFonta, who graduated UNO in 1997 and later earned a law degree from Southern University, says for him the lounge answers a question that former UNO history professor Raphael Cassimere Jr. would

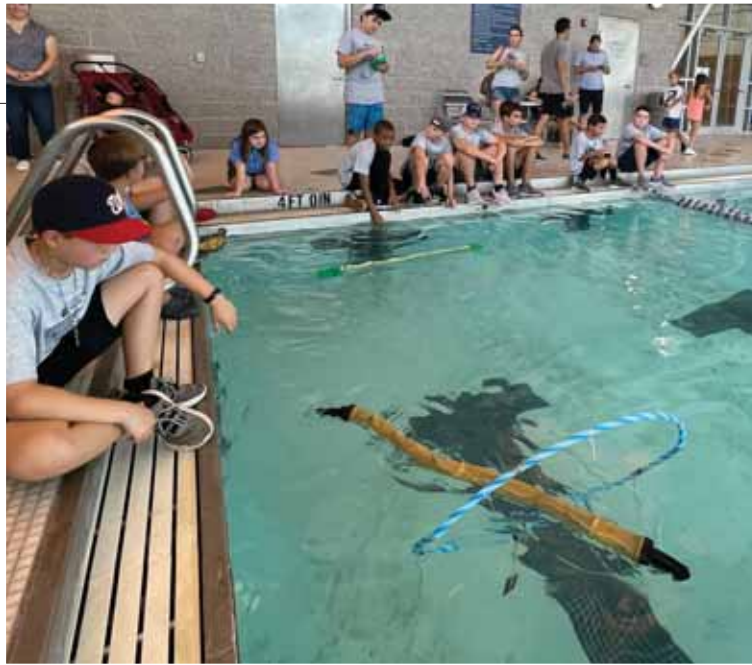
University of New Orleans alumnus and attorney Juan LaFonta speaks during the grand opening of the Multicultural Lounge that bears his name in the University Center.

often ask: What are you doing to support your community?

Cassimere, who spent 35 years in the history department, is currently an emeritus professor of history. He was the first Black instructor hired at UNO and made his mark on the political landscape of New Orleans by helping lead boycotts as president of the NAACP Youth Council during the Civil Rights Movement in the early 60s and 70s.

"When I started speaking to the people (at UNO), I said this is what Cassimere was talking about," a tearful LaFonta says. "What are you doing as a Black male to impact your community and create safe spaces for your people?"

"I'm hoping we have a space that it doesn't matter what your money is, what your religion is, what your race is, how you look, your sexual orientation, this space will be safe," LaFonta says. "With things being the way they are now, places like this are more important than ever before."



Students test out their robotic eels at the University of New Orleans recreation center's pool. The robots were created as part of a weeklong robotic "PrivatEEL STEM" camp funded by the U.S. Office of Naval Research.



UNO ROBOTIC EEL CAMP INTRODUCES MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS TO ENGINEERING

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS from the metro New Orleans area spent a week delving into engineering topics and creating projects to demonstrate those concepts as part of the University of New Orleans robotic eel camp.

"The goal of the camp was to expose middle school students to various engineering

topics including 3D printing, electrical engineering, robot design, robot building, buoyancy and thrust/drag," UNO naval architecture and marine engineering professor Brandon Taravella says.

The "PrivatEEL STEM" camp, led by UNO's School of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering, was funded by the

U.S. Office of Naval Research on July 12-16.

The students spent the week performing various STEM activities, such as building water bottle rockets and constructing and testing the strength of straw towers, Taravella says. The students also toured UNO's engineering labs and created their own robotic eel.

Taravella is the recipient of several grants for his research into hydrodynamic propulsion that led to the creation of the robotic eel for use as an underwater drone, to search for mines and in data collection.

The camp culminated with students testing their own robotic eel creation in the recreation center's pool.

GRANT TO CREATE URBAN BIRD HABITAT ON UNO CAMPUS AND SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans has received a \$34,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to create an urban bird habitat on campus and support educational programming connected to environmental conservation.

The grant will fund habitat restoration, the creation of a birding trail on campus and educational experiences for UNO TRiO Upward Bound students.

“New Orleans is a key stopover for migrating birds as they travel along the Mississippi Flyway,” says Dan Shahar, assistant professor of philosophy and the grant’s lead co-principal investigator. “However, birds face serious challenges here due to a lack of habitat, pollution and insufficient awareness of ways we can help them. With its 195-acre campus on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain, and rich connec-

tions with diverse and underserved students, the University of New Orleans has unique potential to help.”

This project will establish a 1-mile birding trail at UNO—with interpretive signage, designated parking and an accompanying website—and initiate regular bird counts to monitor populations along the route. The Greater New Orleans chapters of the Native Plant Initiative and Louisiana Master Naturalists will work with volunteers to plant 120 native trees and shrubs at two sites along the trail—totaling 4 acres, enhancing campus canopy and providing birds with needed refuge.

With the Pontchartrain Conservancy, UNO will organize twice-yearly trash cleanups along the Lake



Pontchartrain lakefront.

UNO’s Pontchartrain Institute for Environmental Sciences, Orleans Audubon Society and the Pontchartrain Conservancy will deliver 375 expert-led, hands-on environmental educational experiences to UNO TRiO Upward Bound students, empowering them to become lovers and stewards of the natural environment in their community and beyond, according to Shahar.

“Especially in the aftermath of another major storm that has further reduced our city’s tree canopy and disrupted education for school-age children, we are thrilled that we will be able to make some tangible progress

A \$34,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation will create an urban bird habitat on campus and support educational programming connected to environmental conservation.

in these areas,” says Shahar, who studies environmental philosophy and is a member of UNO’s Urban Entrepreneurship and Policy Institute.

Other co-principal investigators on the grant are Elizabeth Sigler and John Bishop in the UNO Office of Research.

UNO Upward Bound is a federally funded TRiO program that provides support to participants in their preparation for college entrance.

THEATRE UNO PRODUCTIONS WIN KENNEDY CENTER AWARDS

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans Theatre’s fall production of “Single Black Female” earned a Citizen Artist Award at the 2021 Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival held virtually on May 22. The national festival is sponsored by The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

The Kennedy Center Citizen Artist Award recognizes programs in higher education using theatrical production to promote long-term societal impact through an artistic lens, to encourage empathetic exploration of the complex cultural

and physical world and to advocate for justice on campus and throughout the world.

Based on the two-woman play by Lisa B. Thompson, “Single Black Female” explores the lives of two 30-something African American middle-class women “as they search for love, clothes and dignity in a world that fails to recognize them among a parade of stereotypical images.”

MFA student Richon May directed the play, which starred fellow graduate students Alexandria Miles as a university English literature

professor who commiserates with an attorney played by Danielle James.

UNO also earned recognition for a second fall production, “The Emperor Jones.”

“Both shows in the fall were big winners,” film and theatre professor David Hoover says.

The Kennedy Center also recognized UNO students and professor Diane Baas in these categories:

- Special Achievement in Overall Production Design “The Emperor Jones”
- Special Achievement in

Lighting Design

“The Emperor Jones” – Diane Baas

- Special Achievement in Performance

“Single Black Female” –

Alexandria Miles

“Single Black Female” – Danielle James

“The Emperor Jones” – Justin Davis

- Special Achievement: Overall Production

“Single Black Female”

“The Emperor Jones”

- Special Achievement in Directing

“The Emperor Jones” – Bill Ware 🌟

FACULTY FOCUS



THIS HISTORICAL FISH TALE CAN GUIDE FUTURE CONSERVATION POLICY, UNO RESEARCHERS SAY

ANALYSIS OF SHEEPSHEAD bones by researchers at the University of New Orleans has unearthed information they say can help guide policymakers facing the critical challenge of overfishing in the Gulf of Mexico, which is an important fishery that provides food and livelihoods to many in Louisiana and beyond.

The research, conducted by UNO anthropology professor Ryan Gray, earth and environmental sciences professor Martin O'Connell and anthropology research associate Ryan Kennedy, uses size estimation and stable isotope analysis of archaeological sheephead bones from New Orleans to identify two previously unknown, but important, overfishing events in Gulf waters.

The work not only highlights the history of fishing in New Orleans but also has important conservation implications for fish in southeastern Louisiana and the broader Gulf of Mexico, the researchers say.

"Our findings indicate that sheephead have to be considered in broader conservation plans, as any efforts to protect other species in the Gulf of Mexico could potentially lead to increased pressure on sheephead, which we now know are susceptible to overfishing,"

Kennedy says.

While sheephead might appear plentiful and are overlooked by many in New Orleans compared to the popular red drum species, sheephead are likely to come under increased fishing pressure if or when commercial fishers are unable to harvest other fish in Louisiana and other Gulf of Mexico waters, researchers say.

"At the end of the day, our results serve as a reminder that policy needs to consider ecosystems as a whole and not just individual species," Kennedy says.

That research, conducted in conjunction with researchers at the University of Leicester in England and Trent University in Canada, has been published in the journal *Science Advances*.

Researchers say overfishing is a critical challenge today but that policy makers and environmental scientists are often hampered by a lack of empirical data about fisheries prior to the mid-20th century.

Archaeological fish bones offer a unique view into historical fisheries and past human impacts to fish populations that can extend baseline data about the health of fish species hundreds or thousands of years in the past.

"In this case, our analysis of



sheepshead bones provides the earliest evidence of overfishing of this species in the Gulf of Mexico, indicating that not only are sheephead vulnerable to overfishing but also that modern sheephead populations in Louisiana may still be recovering from past overfishing," says Kennedy, a zooarchaeologist whose expertise is in analyzing animal bones.

"Knowing about past overfishing of sheephead can help inform future policy decisions."

The research also showed how rising urban populations drove increased demand for sheephead that ultimately led to overfishing in surrounding waters, says Kennedy, who describes sheephead as the "fish that fed New Orleans,"

UNO researchers' analysis of sheephead bones provides the earliest evidence of overfishing of the historically popular New Orleans fish.

particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries.

"To me, one of the most interesting results of this research is that the expansion of fishing locations beginning in the 1820s and the subsequent quick crash of new sheephead populations corresponds with a period of extended population growth in New Orleans," Kennedy says. "New Orleans' urban population grew 366% between 1830 and 1860!"

"Aside from documenting previously unknown overfishing of sheephead in the past, our results also show how rising

urban populations drove increased demand that ultimately led to overfishing in surrounding waters.”

The recent study is part of ongoing research by Gray, O’Connell and Kennedy using archaeological fish bones to examine changes in fishing practices over the past 2,500 years in the New Orleans area.

Most of the sheephead bones analyzed in the study are curated at UNO by Gray and many were recovered from archaeological sites in New Orleans by Gray and his students as part of archaeological sites around the city, such as the Passebon Cottage and 810 Royal Street.

Gray, a leading expert in the archaeology of New Orleans, was responsible for determining what time period sheephead bones dated from by examining site histories and the kinds of artifacts recovered from each site.

O’Connell is an expert on the various fish species of southeast Louisiana and helped the team interpret the archaeological data in the context of modern fish ecology in the area. For example, a chemical analysis of sheephead bones showed that some sheephead from the mid-19th century had a chemical signature unique to fish living in seagrass beds.

O’Connell’s knowledge of southeast Louisiana fish ecology was critical in connecting these data with historic fishing activities in the Chandeleur Islands and other nearby locations where seagrass is common.

Kennedy’s work focused on identifying all sheephead bones at the study sites by comparing archaeological fish bones to modern fish skeletons from known species, many of which were collected by O’Connell and his students.

PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT CHAIR ROBERTO REFINETTI APPOINTED EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF CHRONOBIOLOGY INTERNATIONAL

PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSOR and department chair Roberto Refinetti is the new editor-in-chief of the journal *Chronobiology International*. The monthly biomedical journal specializes in the study of biological rhythms and applications in medicine.

Refinetti is a biological and comparative psychologist.

His research concentrates on behavioral and physiological mechanisms, including neural mechanisms, responsible for biological rhythms, particularly daily or circadian rhythms.

Refinetti, who was selected for the post by a search committee, assumed his duties with the journal on April 1.



Roberto Refinetti

“As the editor-in-chief, my job is to coordinate the peer review of submissions; that is, to decide whether articles that are submitted are worthy of publication,” Refinetti says. “I have

appointed four associate editors to assist me in evaluating the merits of submission.”

Refinetti is author of the book “Circadian Physiology,” currently in its third edition,

and has published more than 200 articles in professional journals. He is a Fellow of the American Physiological Society and a member of several organizations, including the Society for Neuroscience, the Association for Psychological Science and the Society for Research on Biological Rhythms.

Prior to accepting the editorial reins at *Chronobiology International*, Refinetti spent 18 years as the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Circadian Rhythms*, a smaller, more specialized open-access journal.

Refinetti joined UNO in 2020, after serving as a faculty member at the College of William & Mary, the University of South Carolina and Boise State University.

SOCIOLOGY CHAIR D’LANE COMPTON APPOINTED TO NATIONAL CENSUS ADVISORY BOARD

UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans sociology professor and department chair D’Lane Compton has been named to the U.S.

Census Bureau’s National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations.

The committee advises the Census Bureau on topics such as hard-to-count populations, race and ethnicity, language, aging populations, American Indian and Alaska Native tribal considerations, new immigrant populations, populations

affected by natural disasters, and highly mobile and migrant populations, among other issues.

Compton is one of 10



D’Lane Compton

new members selected for the committee which aims is to have a balanced representation among its members, considering such factors as geography, age, sex, race, ethnicity, technical expertise, community involvement and

knowledge of census programs or activities.

“This is kind of a dream come true for a data nerd like

myself,” Compton says. “The idea I might be able to help get a question on the census for sexual orientation and gender identity ... I’m pretty excited.”

The committee is composed of up to 32 members appointed to three-year terms by the director of the Census Bureau.

Compton, whose two major research interests are social psychology and the demography of sexual orientation, has worked with census data and LGBT measurement issues for over 20 years. They have been a critical voice in new ways of capturing gender identity on large-scale surveys and have co-authored three books dealing with LGBT methods.

FINANCE PROFESSOR TARUN MUKHERJEE ESTABLISHES STUDENT-MANAGED FUND TO HONOR PARENTS, OFFER EXPERIENTIAL COURSE

AS A CHILD GROWING up in a small town in India, University of New Orleans finance professor Tarun Mukherjee recalled his mother's seemingly unquenchable thirst for knowledge. She was born in an era when some family members adamantly opposed females seeking education, Mukherjee says.

"She had to learn how to read under the mosquito net with a small, dim lamp after everyone went to bed. Yet, she acquired the knowledge and wisdom that surpassed all of her children combined," Mukherjee says. "Lack of formal education did not stop her from expanding her horizon; she would read the daily newspaper from the first word to the last, sit by the radio to listen to the world news and debate any subject of importance, including world politics."

His parents, Kali and Sushila Mukherjee, who are now deceased, instilled the importance of hard work and the value of education in their 10 children in words and deeds, he says.

"My father, a government officer, worked relentlessly to put food on the table and a roof over our heads. We learned the value of honesty and hard work from him," Mukherjee says.

His mother's mission was to make sure her children got the best education, he says.

"To achieve this mission, she sacrificed all things material," Mukherjee says. "She sold all her jewelry, asked her accomplished brothers to extend room and boarding so that we could avail ourselves of the higher



Tarun Mukherjee, whose primary expertise is in corporate finance, has established the Kali C. and Sushila B. Mukherjee Student-Managed Fund to give UNO finance majors real-world experience in portfolio management.

education she wanted us to have but was not available in the small town where we lived."

The mantras on the importance of education that his parents instilled in him, including, "One thing that no one can take away from you is education," has led Mukherjee to donate \$50,000 for the creation of a student-managed investment fund that bears their names: The Kali C. and Sushila B. Mukherjee Student-Managed Fund.

Starting in the fall 2021, the University offered a new three-hour course called Student Managed Investment Fund for undergraduate senior finance majors and students in the finance master's degree program.

"We do consider this an experiential learning course because they will be managing

a real-world portfolio under the directions of a real-world portfolio manager," says Walter Lane, chair and associate professor of finance and economics. "Dr. Mukherjee gave a donation that now allows us to have some actual money to manage ... we're really excited."

The Student Fund is a restricted asset of the UNO Foundation and all funds will be held in a brokerage account at Charles Schwab, says Anthony Gregorio, president of the UNO Foundation.

"I am very excited about the program and very thankful for Tarun's generosity," Gregorio says. "We certainly hope others join Tarun in support of the student-managed fund."

While Lane and others praised his generosity,

Mukherjee, who has spent nearly four decades as a faculty member at the University of New Orleans, says it was done to acknowledge the sacrifices his parents made to provide a better education for him and to offer UNO students another professional skill.

"Hands-on training gives our students the tool that almost all business, especially finance, students at other institutions have. Being exposed to this experience allows our students to compete on a level playing field," Mukherjee says.

"My 'generosity' is not a selfless act. Indeed, I am selfish in my intent to memorialize my parents, give my students a tool that they need to compete and further the mission of an institution of learning with which I have fallen in love."

PROFESSOR MARY NIALL MITCHELL COLLABORATES WITH K-12 TEACHERS ON CURRICULUM USING FREEDOM ON THE MOVE DATA

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS history professor Mary Niall Mitchell is collaborating with New Orleans public school teachers, museum directors and other community leaders to develop a K-12 curriculum using Freedom on the Move's (FOTM) database of advertisements seeking runaway enslaved people.



Mary Niall Mitchell

enslaved people that can be tied to both the environment and the particular topography of the city of New Orleans and its environs."

After completing lessons on the historical context of slavery in New Orleans and the experiences of enslaved people, students will explore the topical places in the city and region via

walking tours.

The tours will include areas such as the city's French Quarter and the grounds of Whitney Plantation, located about 30 miles upriver from New Orleans in St. John the Baptist Parish.

FOTM received a nearly \$150,000 grant in May from The National Historical Publications and Records Commission, an arm of The National Archives, to create a pilot program that could be replicated nationally.

With cost sharing from UNO and its partners, the

pilot engagement program is a \$300,000 project, says Mitchell, who is also director of the Midlo Center for New Orleans Study at UNO. The Midlo Center is administering the grant.

The collaboration brings together historians, curriculum innovators, teachers, museum professionals and urban planners with the support of the Midlo Center, community spaces and artists.

Each of the groups will play a vital role in helping students engage with the advertisements in the FOTM databases and the stories of enslaved people that it contains.

One such story is about a woman named Jane who ran away from her enslaver in New Orleans in 1844. Her enslaver placed an ad in the city's newspaper describing her and seeking her return.

Jane's act of resistance is why historians know—according to the advertisement—that she was about 19 years old, "rather talkative," barefoot and wearing a blue dress when she left. The

advertisement provides a map of how Jane most likely moved about the city because it includes names of streets and locations where she was seen.

The public engagement project will allow elementary, middle and high school teachers and students to engage with the forgotten stories of Jane and others.

The insights the ads provide into the experiences of enslaved Africans and African American people are especially valuable because so little information about them as individuals has been preserved, FOTM project coordinators have said.

"It is hard to know how many of them succeeded, but because they ran we have these advertisements that describe them and tell something of their personal stories—what their personalities were like, what skills they had, their physical features, health or disabilities, recent histories of sale, family ties," Mitchell says.

"They are truly remarkable documents. And there are thousands of them."

ECONOMICS PROFESSOR GREGORY PRICE SELECTED AS POLICY SCHOLAR TO ADDRESS SYSTEMIC RACISM

UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans economics professor Gregory Price is one of five people selected by former New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu to be an E Pluribus Unum Policy Scholar tasked with examining and addressing systemic racism in the U.S., particularly in the South.

As an economist, Price will bring both an economic and a racial equity lens to examining the distribution of environmental quality, entrepreneurship

opportunities for the justice involved and the distribution of recovery funding, Landrieu says.

Landrieu, who is president of the organization, announced the inaugural cohort class of scholars in June.

The scholars' research will inform the organization's engagement with elected officials and community leaders across a range of issue areas including: the intersection of health and housing, community resilience, environmental justice

and minority entrepreneurship.

"The urgency to tackle these issues head-on is evident. That's why we're partnering with this cohort of knowledgeable and accomplished researchers to develop data- and research-driven policy recommendations for the leaders of today."

Landrieu founded E Pluribus Unum in 2018 as a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with a mission to build a more just, inclusive and equitable South.



Gregory Price

COMPUTER SCIENCE PROFESSOR PHANI VADREU AWARDED \$1.2M NSF GRANT TO COMBAT SOCIAL ENGINEERING ATTACKS

IF YOU HAVE EMAIL OR spend any time at all browsing the internet, you have probably experienced some form of a social engineering hack, which is a fraudulent attempt to get access to personal information—or your money.

Survey scams, scareware and phishing expeditions are some examples of such attempts that can lead to malware and ransomware infections and cause monetary damage to victims.

University of New Orleans computer science professor Phani Vadreu has been awarded a \$1.2 million grant from the National Science Foundation to develop methods to protect users from such web-based social engineering attacks.

The project, which will use artificial intelligence to track and model online attacks, is expected to improve the research community's understanding of web-based social engineering and make a substantial impact on user protection.

"The NSF grant is focused on developing client-side defenses against all web-based social engineering attacks," Vadreu says. "Our goal there is to develop AI-based defenses that can help protect users from such attacks."

The four-year research project is a collaboration among UNO's Cyber Center, the University of Georgia and Stony Brook University in New York, Vadreu says.

To defend against such attacks, Vadreu's team plans

to develop a comprehensive framework that utilizes multiple advanced machine learning techniques to discover, model and defend against web-based social engineering attacks on both desktop and mobile devices.

Researchers plan to develop targeted web-crawling techniques for automatically harvesting, analyzing and categorizing instances of new social engineering attacks on the internet.

The designed defense systems will track how web pages are delivered to users, monitor how they are executed within the browser and extract visual features, as well as network and web-content metadata.

By learning how the attack models work, the defense systems are expected to detect new attacks in real-time on both desktop and mobile devices, researchers say.

"PHISHPRINT" ANOTHER PUBLIC IMPACT RESEARCH PROJECT

Vadreu is also working on an unrelated, but complementary internet-user defense project that has garnered him a monetary "bounty" from Google and recognition from other sectors of the tech industry, including a presentation of the findings at the USENIX Security Symposium. USENIX is a highly selective security conference that publishes cybersecurity research.

Vadreu's research is called "PhishPrint: Evading Phishing Detection Crawlers by Prior



Profiling." It is a measurement study that found weaknesses in security crawler systems used by top companies, such as Google, Microsoft and AT&T.

"Right now, I am working on a grant proposal to develop defenses for such weaknesses," Vadreu says.

The lead author of the paper, Bhupendra Acharya, is a UNO graduate student whose research work is part of his thesis, Vadreu says.

Many internet companies use some bots, also called crawlers, to automatically scout websites to find whether they are safe or not, Vadreu says. These bots then quickly create, in real-time, a block list of "unsafe websites" and notifies the user.

All major web browsers including Chrome, Edge, Safari and email services, such as Outlook, use these website lists to keep users safe. For example, Google's bot service, called Google Safe Browsing, is deployed in over 4 billion devices and is being used by about 2 billion users in the world, Vadreu says.

However, by capitalizing on the idiosyncrasies of some of the security bots, Vadreu's research found new ways to circumvent the security measure.

Vadreu says researchers were able to easily "fingerprint" bots and use the information to

University of New Orleans assistant professor of computer science Phani Vadreu.

build their own smart phishing websites that would show "safe" content to only the bots of security companies. Meanwhile, the same website would allow the "unsafe" content to be shown to a large percentage of potential human users.

"Our experiments, conducted with due ethical considerations, showed that while regular phishing sites can be detected and shut down by these scouting bots in a couple of hours, our 'smart' phishing websites can stay alive indefinitely despite multiple submissions to several popular security bots," Vadreu says. "This showed the seriousness of the weaknesses that we discovered in the crawlers."

UNO researchers found these deficiencies in 23 security bots including those used by Google, Microsoft, AlienVault (from AT&T), PhishTank (from Cisco), Norton and Sophos, Vadreu says.

As is the custom with security papers, researchers contacted the organizations and gave detailed disclosures of the vulnerabilities discovered.

Google responded with a \$5,000 grant from its Vulnerability Reward program for the discovery.

COMPUTER SCIENCE PROFESSOR BEN SAMUEL AWARDED RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP TO STUDY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans computer science professor Ben Samuel spent a portion of his summer working with the U.S. Navy on an artificial intelligence research project designed to produce AI methods that are easier to interpret and explain.

Samuel was awarded a Summer Research

Fellowship by the Office of Naval Research, which pairs faculty members with naval research mentors. The fellowship offers an opportunity to conduct full-time research of mutual interest to faculty members in academia and to the Navy.

Samuel joined a project where he leveraged his background in game design and interactive storytelling to explore



Ben Samuel

interactive machine learning techniques. The project is working toward the Department of Defense's broader agenda of explainable artificial intelligence, which is the ability to produce solutions that are clearly understood by humans.

"For decades, there's been a friendly rivalry between symbolic

approaches to artificial intelligence and statistical ones," Samuel says. "Lately, statistical approaches have led to some incredibly impressive breakthroughs, but they often lack the explainability that symbolic approaches afford. This can lead to some pretty serious issues, such as biased decision-making that presents itself as an absolute truth whose bias is obscured

through black-box processes.

"I hope that the work we accomplish this summer brings us a step closer towards bridging these approaches. The dream is to produce AI techniques that still produce marvelous results without sacrificing interpretability."

Samuel, who earned a doctorate in computer science from the University of California Santa Cruz, has been an assistant professor of computer science at the University of New Orleans since 2017.

His research interest includes applying artificial intelligence in works of computational media, with a particular bent toward developing socially aware virtual agents and novel interactive storytelling techniques.

"Whether we're studying and practicing in the arts, humanities or sciences, narrative is a core part of who we are," Samuel says. "It's woven into our very fabric of

our beings. It is through storytelling that we understand our past and present, through storytelling we may shape the future.

"On top of that, work in interactive storytelling and games has lots of application areas to autonomous agents and broader AI challenges in general. I'm thrilled that ONR recognizes the importance and versatility of this work, and I'm excited to leverage it toward real world problems."

The 10-week fellowship began June 1 and included a \$16,500 stipend.

"We are very proud of Ben for being awarded the prestigious ONR Summer Research Fellowship" says Mahdi Abdelguerfi, professor and chair of the computer science department. "The University of New Orleans already has strong ties with the Naval Research Laboratory, and Ben's selection into the program further strengthens our instructional and research partnership."

PLANNING AND URBAN STUDIES PROFESSOR MARLA NELSON SELECTED FOR URBAN AFFAIRS ASSOCIATION'S 2021 HONOR ROLL

UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans planning and urban studies professor Marla Nelson has been selected as a 2021 inductee into the Urban Affairs Association Honor Roll. Nelson is one of 16 people to receive the award, which recognizes the association's most impactful service leaders.

The Urban Affairs Association (UAA) is the international professional organization for urban scholars, researchers and public/nonprofit service

providers. The association is dedicated to creating interdisciplinary spaces for engaging in intellectual and practical discussions about urban life.

Nelson, who coordinates the Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) program at UNO, has published widely on the impacts of and responses to industrial and occupational restructuring in U.S. cities and regions, human capital and interregional migration,

and post-disaster recovery and redevelopment.

Nelson's current research focuses on adaptive migration as a critical site of action and examines how planning and policy can produce outcomes that

are more just for residents and communities on the frontline



Marla Nelson

of climate and environmental change.

Nelson has held numerous positions in national and local organizations including the Urban Affairs Association. In 2011, the Urban Affairs Association

awarded her the UAA-SAGE Activist Scholar Award.

*Alumna Beth Arroyo Utterback:
WWOZ General Manager and a*

GUARDIAN of the GROOVE

BY LITTICE BACON-BLOOD



WHEN THE WORLD RENOWNED NEW ORLEANS JAZZ AND Heritage Festival was canceled in 2020, University of New Orleans alumna Beth Arroyo Utterback felt the void needed to be filled.

Utterback is the general manager of New Orleans' award-winning jazz and heritage radio station WWOZ and proudly carries the colloquial title "Guardian of the Groove," a title bestowed by the station upon those who play a significant role in preserving and enhancing the culture of New Orleans.

The festival, traditionally held at the Fair Grounds over two weekends in April and May, was canceled because of the coronavirus

pandemic.

"We knew we had to do something," Utterback says.

That "something" turned out to be "Jazz Festing in Place," an eight-day broadcast event held the same days and hours as the originally scheduled Jazz Fest would have been held at the New Orleans Fair Grounds.

"We partnered with the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Archives to draw on decades of recordings from Jazz Fest to put our own festival together—complete with (scheduling) cubes!" Utterback says.



The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation holds WWOZ's broadcast license and owns the festival.

Listeners of 90.7 FM and viewers of WWOZ's website could enjoy more than 100 archival Jazz Fest performances that included Fats Domino, Allen Toussaint, Irma Thomas, The Neville Brothers, Ella Fitzgerald and Stevie Wonder, Dr. John and many others.

And tune in they did. The station's social media views exploded and the exponential traffic growth on their site required an increase in the station's bandwidth to handle the traffic, Utterback says.

"Millions of people from around the world jazz fested in place

ABOVE: University of New Orleans alumna Beth Arroyo Utterback is general manager at WWOZ radio in New Orleans.

with us," Utterback says.

The event was such a success in 2020 that the station decided to do it again in 2021.

Utterback's parents, Sid and Verna Arroyo, who were Jazz Fest regulars at the Fair Grounds, planted the seed for a virtual Jazz Fest decades ago, she says.

As the couple got older, they found it more difficult to navigate ☒

the fest, so they created their own experience, Utterback says.

“They decided they would literally Jazz Fest in place in their backyard and under their carport,” Utterback says.

Her mother would cook jambalaya, gumbo and red beans and rice. Her dad had the carport fridge fully stocked with beer, soft drinks, wine and water for anyone who wanted to come by, Utterback recalls.

“Dad would proudly open the fridge and say, ‘We got OZ on the speakers, great food, cold beer, free parking and a bathroom with no line. Jazz Fest should take notes!’” Utterback says.

The couple also decorated the carport with their own original artwork and urged visitors to take some home, Utterback says.

“The idea for ‘Jazz Festing in Place’ started with my parents in their Gentilly neighborhood carport in the early 90s,” Utterback says. “Now

Guardians of the Groove around the world are festing in place and creating their own memories!”

As the general manager, Utterback is the executive producer of WWOZ’s special programming, including the highly acclaimed “Jazz Festing in Place” series, New Orleans Tricentennial Music Moments series, Jazz Fest at 50 and Groovapedia, the station’s comprehensive media collection.

“It’s a wonderful feeling to know that we are spreading so much happiness while fulfilling our mission to be the worldwide voice, archive and flag-bearer of New Orleans music,” Utterback says. “We are a multi-platform, multimedia organization including radio, over the air and internet, video streams and social media platforms.”

She leads the professional staff and more than 150 active volunteers to provide service to the listener-supported station’s local and global fan base, which reaches millions of



TOP LEFT: Beth Arroyo Utterback, general manager at WWOZ radio, credits her parents, Verna and Sid Arroyo, for the “Jazz Festing In Place” idea.

ABOVE AND FACING PAGE: Fans sent in photos of themselves from all over the world showing how they fested in place, Utterback says.

people from nearly 200 countries and territories.

“I love working with our incredible show hosts, staff and volunteers, as well as the awesome musicians and culture bearers of New Orleans,” Utterback says. “I also love meeting and hearing from our fans—known as Ozillians—from all over the world.”

Utterback graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor’s degree in drama and communications from UNO in 1983. Her class was the first to hold commencement at the Lakefront Arena, Utterback says.

“My degree has allowed me to stay in the city I love in the field I love,” Utterback says.

Utterback has worked in the New Orleans media her entire professional life, starting as an intern at WDSU-TV when she was 16. She spent 35 years at WYES-TV holding the positions of executive vice president and chief operating officer.

“I was the chief content officer and programmer there and served

as executive producer for our local and national PBS programming,” Utterback says.

Utterback was hired to lead WWOZ in 2017. When asked what attracted her to the position, Utterback’s response is one word: Irma!

As in Grammy Award winner Soul Queen of New Orleans, singer Irma Thomas.

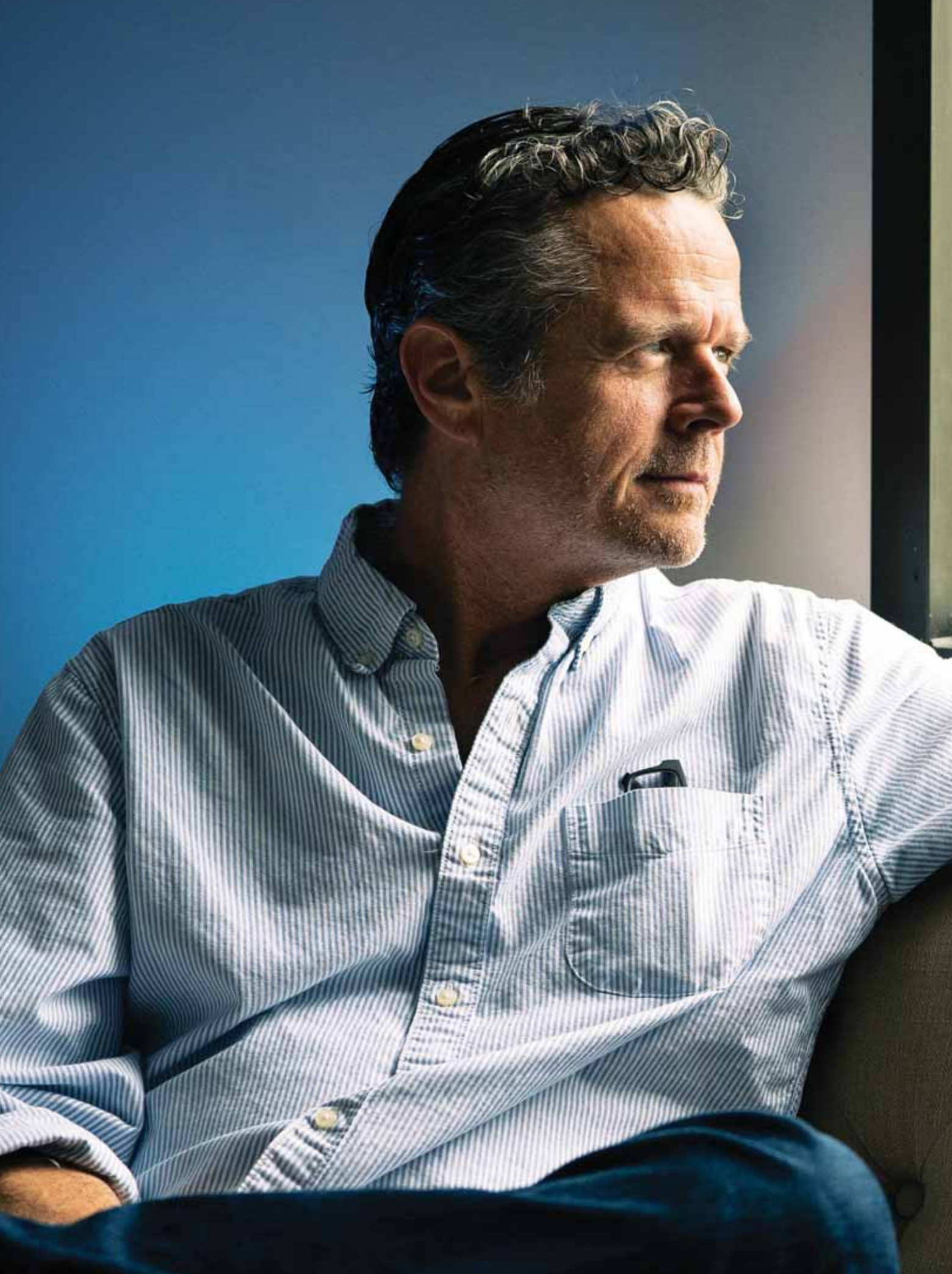
“I met Irma in 1981 when I was 20 years old,” Utterback says. “I worked on a WYES special with her and we’ve been friends ever since!”

Thomas called her and said she thought Utterback could make a difference at WWOZ, Utterback says.

“I met with the incredibly involved and supportive board of directors and I was sold,” Utterback says. “It was a rare opportunity to lead an organization from New Orleans that truly has a daily worldwide impact.” 🌍



ABOVE RIGHT: Hired in 2017, Utterback credits her old friend Irma Thomas for suggesting she “could make a difference” at WWOZ.



Alumnus Jim McCormick's songwriting

TOPS THE CHARTS

BY LITTICE BACON-BLOOD

University of New Orleans alumnus Jim McCormick is a Grammy-nominated, multi-platinum-selling songwriter who has had No. 1 songs on the Billboard Country Music Charts.

AT AGE 15, UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS ALUMNUS JIM McCormick was playing a regular Tuesday night gig at a New Orleans bar called Jed's on Oak Street. The future multi-Grammy-nominated songwriter was the front man for the "sort of blues/rock" band called Resonance, McCormick says.

"Like resonating music," McCormick says with a laugh. "We were very, very earnest."

Years later, the multi-platinum selling songwriter is still bemused that his parents allowed him to play at Jed's.

"I'm really grateful that my mom and dad gave me that freedom and trust to do that," says McCormick, who grew up on the west bank of New Orleans in the Lower Aurora neighborhood of Algiers.

"You know, we agreed with the bartender not to try and drink while we were there ... I'm not sure if we held true to that promise, but we managed to keep the gig for three years!"

The group disbanded as its members headed off to college. McCormick enrolled at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., where he earned a bachelor's degree in English before returning to

DISCOVERING "SONGWRITING" AS A CAREER

It also was during travels with The Bingemen that McCormick met some songwriters in Nashville who encouraged him to pursue the craft.

"They liked what I was writing, the lyrics, the structure and all that," McCormick says. "I was not a country music kid or fan, the closest I got to it was like ZZ Top and the Band ... but it was something in that notion. Like wait, there's a job called 'songwriting?' I was like, I'm getting that job!"

It was the late 1990s and the internet was not this ubiquitous entity where one click could render reams of information on a host of subjects, McCormick says.

"You didn't have the sort of easy exposure or access to all of the different things going on in the country or in the world," McCormick says.

In Nashville, where he would later move, McCormick discovered an "ecosystem" of songwriters who wrote songs for artists making records.



New Orleans and starting another band.

"We were called The Bingemen. What were we thinking?" McCormick asks rhetorically. "But we had a great run. We put out two albums, we wrote wonderful songs. For seven years, I was in a band with three childhood friends touring the Southeast every weekend."

During that time, McCormick also earned an MFA in creative writing from the University of New Orleans.

"That was a wonderful chapter in my life," he says. "I'm rolling through Tuscaloosa to Tallahassee and reading William Wordsworth for my exam next week. That was my life. That was great."

McCormick praises the Creative Writing Workshop at UNO, saying it deserves to be applauded and nurtured.

"The UNO creative writing program is very dear to me," he says. "Humanities get second tier attention compared to business and science, but you don't get a Jim McCormick without the creative writing program at UNO, let alone a Pulitzer Prize winning poet!"

"Outside songs, which is what we call it when they are not written by the artist that sings it, are very important to the economy of country music," McCormick says. "In country, the artists don't insist on writing their own songs all the time. You don't find that in pop and hip hop. In country, there's an opening for songwriters to make a living who are not the artists—who are not even in the room with the artists."

Nashville is a songwriter's town and, by extension, a music publisher's town, McCormick says. The music publishers act much like a songwriter's manager in that they pitch songs to artists and book songwriters for collaborations with other writers and artists, says McCormick, who is a staff songwriter at Eclipse Music Group in Nashville.

"They are a close-knit kind of network and they are booking writers in the city with each other across the months," McCormick says. "I know where I am for the next hundred days or so."

McCormick has written several songs that have topped No. 1 on the Billboard Country Music Charts, including Brantley

“The UNO creative writing program is very dear to me. Humanities get second tier attention compared to business and science, but you don’t get a Jim McCormick without the creative writing program at UNO, let alone a Pulitzer Prize winning poet!”

Gilbert’s “You Don’t Know Her Like I Do,” Jason Aldean’s “Take A Little Ride” and, most recently, Gabby Barret’s “The Good Ones.”

Barret performed that song on primetime television in April during the Country Music Awards.

“I was reminded watching it how lucky I am to be a part of this wonderful world of country songwriting,” McCormick says.

“I was miserable because it wasn’t what I was meant to do with my life and I knew it,” McCormick says about his stint in journalism.

His boss knew it as well, he says. She fired him “in the most friendly way possible,” McCormick recalls with a laugh.

“I took off for Nashville and the next four years of my life was spent writing songs four times a day with anybody and everybody



“There’s no greater thrill than hearing a gifted singer singing words you helped write.”

McCormick’s lyrics also have been sung by other popular country music stars, such as Tim McGraw and Trisha Yearwood.

Other releases written by McCormick include Payton Smith’s “Can’t Go Wrong With That” and “What It Meant to Lose You,” Kelly Clarkson’s “Minute,” Luke Bryan’s “All My Dreaming There,” Aldean’s “Lights Go Out,” and Harry Connick Jr.’s “I Do Like We Do.”

“The only control I have over my business is the quality of the work that I create,” McCormick says. “You’ve got to let it go and hope somebody responds to the quality of the work ... my job is to create the very best silver bullet that I can create and give it to my publisher and say ‘go find the right artist.’”

ADVICE: GO SEE

Prior to making the move to Nashville, McCormick worked as an editor for a New Orleans trade magazine for three years and was “miserable.”

that would write with me,” says McCormick, who supported himself by painting houses and hanging sheetrock. “It was one of the happiest times of my life and I knew in my heart that this was what I should be doing. I just stayed with it.”

It was a difficult journey, says McCormick, who currently divides his time between Nashville and New Orleans where he teaches the craft and business of songwriting as a faculty member at Loyola University. However, he offers this career advice to the purpose seekers.

“Stay tuned for those moments for when the doors open and a new road opens up in front of you,” he says. “Have the nerve to go experiment, walk through that door, go down that road. *Go see.*”

FACING PAGE, LEFT: McCormick in the studio. FACING PAGE, RIGHT: Jim McCormick and Gabby Barret (white jacket). THIS PAGE, LEFT: Jim McCormick and Brantley Gilbert (black hat). THIS PAGE, RIGHT: Jim McCormick and Jason Aldean

POSITIVE SIGNS

Alumnus Kentrell Martin uses his children's book series to introduce American Sign Language BY LITTICE BACON-BLOOD



UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS alumnus Kentrell Martin humorously refers to himself as an “accidental author.”

The 6’4” former guard/forward for the Privateers, who earned a business degree from UNO, has created a children’s book series that incorporates American Sign Language as a way to help bridge the gap between the deaf and hearing world.

Martin, whose older brother is deaf, grew up using sign language to communicate with his brother and his brother’s friends. He now travels to schools presenting information based on his books and recently received a \$10,000 business grant from Beyoncé’s BeyGood Foundation.

“I have so many plans with what I’m doing that I kind of feel that it’s my purpose just from the feedback from the students,” Martin says. “I get thousands of letters from the schools that I’ve visited.”

His goal, Martin says, is to create a product that has longevity and continues to be impactful.

“When you think of companies and names like Disney, Scholastic, Dr. Seuss, I want you to think of Shelly’s Adventures,” Martin states on his website. “A new age company that found a way to introduce millions to a language and culture in a fun and educational way.”

Martin’s initial plan was to create an animated cartoon, he says. He got the animation idea in 2006 while watching cartoons with his young niece, Michelle, and started doing research. He even wrote some scripts. His wife convinced him to use the material to create a book instead, Martin says.

“I guess I would be an accidental author,” Martin says with a laugh. “I never planned to be an author or anything like that.”

In 2007, he published his first book, “Shelly’s Outdoor Adventure,” which takes its name from Martin’s publishing company, Shelly’s Adventures. Later came “Shelly Goes to the Zoo,” which earned literary awards in Florida, including being named a finalist for picture book of the year.

“I started going to conferences and publishing events to learn the industry,” Martin says. “Then I ended up starting an official series in 2013.”

The book’s main character is 9-year-old Shelly whose father is deaf. Her goal is to teach her friends and everyone around her American Sign Language, Martin says.

“Shelly is just like any other little girl, it’s just that her father is deaf,” Martin says. “Many times kids are curious, like how do they communicate if they can’t hear? She’s showing her friends this language.”

The book series now includes 10 titles, each offering its own specific lesson, Martin says.

“Most sign language books are just words. There’s a word and then there’s someone signing the word,” Martin says. “I wanted to create something that is still a story, still adventurous, but you can learn in sign language in the meantime.”

For example, “Shelly Goes to the Bank” incorporates financial literacy and teaches kids how to write a check, Martin says. In “Shelly Va a Una Fiesta,” readers follow along as Shelly attends a party for a friend.

“Shelly teaches signs for different family members and, in turn, Shelly’s friend teaches them the Spanish word for each member,” Martin says. “In every (book) I try to emphasize teaching something. Each book has a different learning aspect to it besides the sign language.”

SHELLY GOES TO SCHOOLS

Martin has expanded his book audience with in-person presentations. He’s a frequently requested visitor at schools, particularly at the elementary level, where he’s able to expound more in-depth about American Sign Language.

“While I’m in schools I get to break it down a bit more for the kids ... that American Sign Language is just a different language and it’s no different than having a parent who speaks a different language that a majority of your classmates may not be able to speak,” Martin says. “So, just letting the kids know and explaining that the only difference between deaf and hearing people is really the communications barrier and that neither part is different.”

FACING PAGE: University of New Orleans alumnus Kentrell Martin, a former basketball player for the Privateers, has created a children’s book series that incorporates American Sign Language. BELOW: Martin interacts with school children on a recent book tour.

In 2015, Martin left his job as a loan officer to dedicate his attention full-time on his publishing company and creating school presentations. Martin estimates that he presents at nearly 150 schools annually.

MORE SHELLY ADVENTURES

Martin is currently working on a live-action stage production based on the books.

“Before COVID, I had about 20 schools committed to bringing their whole school for a fieldtrip for the event, and that was like within two weeks of promoting it,” Martin says. “It just fell in place.”

He hopes to start touring in the spring. New Orleans is one of the title locations for Martin’s series and will be on the tour schedule, he says.

Martin said he has many fond memories of his time at UNO, particularly the lasting friendships he made, favorite foods consumed—catfish, beans and rice—and adjusting to the heat!

“I had a great time at UNO,” Martin says. “It was perfect for me. I could walk to where I needed to walk.”

Although he grew up in Gainesville, Florida, Martin says his introduction to the sweltering New Orleans temperatures is a story he shares frequently.

It was his first week at UNO and he was staying in Bienville Hall.

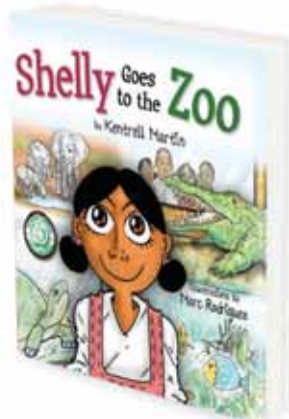
One day, after making multiple treks to classes and the University Center, the heat really hit him.

“I just had to stop under a tree it was so hot!”


Martin says laughing. “I was like ‘This can’t be real!’ It was just sooo hot.”

Martin played basketball under then-head coach Monte Towe from 2001 to 2004 and coached for a year under Towe. He visits New Orleans at least twice a year and makes it a point to drive around campus.

“I always bring my sons on campus,” Martin says. “They are probably tired of driving through campus, but I like it.” 🇺🇸







ANTI-VIOLENCE ORGANIZER TEYONNA LOFTON: SPEAKING UP AND OUT FOR HERSELF AND OTHERS

TEYONNA LOFTON HAS ALWAYS loved to talk. The youngest of six children, her speech was often boisterous, loud and, inevitably, the target of rebuke from teachers who called her classroom animation a “disruption,” Lofton says.

“I always got in trouble just for talking,” says Lofton, who emphasizes, “talking” with an air of incredulity as she leans forward with a wide smile and her hands on her hips. “I just liked to talk. I didn’t understand then why it was a problem.”

A high school mentor helped Lofton take her love of talking and earn a positive reputation as a go-to public speaker, says Lofton, a first-year student at the University of New Orleans. Lofton hasn’t chosen a major, but is interested in communications and helping people, she says.


“She sat me down and told me that I have leadership skills and that people watch me,” says Lofton, a high school honors graduate. “As I got older, I saw how it wasn’t just about me ... that my

friends would see and know that they could do so much more just like me.”

She was chosen to speak at school assemblies, to give school tours and to engage with school administrators on behalf of her peers on a variety of issues, Lofton says.

In her Chicago neighborhood, Lofton became an advocate for anti-violence and social justice initiatives through a church organization called B.R.A.V.E., which stands for Bold Resistance Against Violence Everywhere. The program aims to teach youths how to be leaders and peacemakers in their communities.

She also worked with Arne Duncan, the former U.S. Secretary of Education and his Chicago-based anti-gun violence organization. The National Basketball Association selected Lofton to a part of its NBA All-Star Youth Leadership Council in 2020, part of the league’s initiative prior to the NBA finals held in Chicago that year.

“I realized I had everything I needed inside of me and I just needed to 

use it the right way,” says Lofton, who recalls battling to be heard over her older siblings. “Once I started to communicate properly it was like, ‘Oh, you want to hear me speak? They are asking for Teyonna Lofton to come speak on this platform? To speak in front of Arne Duncan? To speak in front of the NBA players? Oh yeah, I’ll do it!’”

“I can talk!” Lofton says with a gleeful laugh.

This year, Lofton was on the seven-person committee that selected the inaugural recipient of the NBA Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Social Justice Champion award, a new annual honor that will recognize a current NBA player for pursuing social justice and upholding the league’s decades-long values of equality, respect and inclusion.

While most of the selection process was conducted via email and telephone calls with an NBA representative, Lofton says she enjoyed learning about the programs the professional athletes were involved with in their communities.

“I was very happy to have my voice and vote for one of the NBA players for this award,” Lofton says. “It was really nice to hear about the things they were doing in their communities and everything.”

“THE POINT OF MY ACTIVISM IS TO SHOW THAT YOUNG PEOPLE UNDERSTAND, THAT WE ARE AWARE, THAT WE ARE COMING AND THAT WE ARE HERE. I WON’T BE 19 FOREVER, BUT WHILE I AM YOUNG I WANT TO MAKE AS MUCH NOISE AS I CAN!”

Lofton, who has spoken out often about the lack of resources in her Auburn Gresham neighborhood—most noticeably, the absence of a medical trauma unit in an area known for frequent gun violence, learned first-hand what that void meant after she was shot.

The shooting happened May 31, 2020, just a few hours after Lofton’s family had held a socially distanced parade in honor of her high school graduation.

Lofton was looking forward to starting college that fall and experiencing a new environment in Louisiana. She has friends who attended college in New Orleans and Baton Rouge and couldn’t wait to start her own new adventures.

Those plans were sidetracked when gunfire erupted from a passing vehicle as Lofton stood in line outside of a neighborhood gas station. Lofton and others were wounded in the incident, which was captured on surveillance video.

An injured Lofton can be seen on the video trying to crawl to safety after a bullet ripped through her left arm, damaging a major artery.

“The first thing I did was start praying,” Lofton says. “Once I hit that ground, I told God, ‘Not me, not today.’ My mom told me she prayed as well and I believe that’s what got her through it as well.”

Several frantic calls from Lofton to 911 went unanswered and then when answered, Lofton says she was told that no one could respond because they were busy elsewhere in the city. It was six

days after the murder of George Floyd by a Minnesota police officer and areas of downtown Chicago were beset with looting, Lofton says.

Lofton called her mother.

“I told her that I had been shot and no one was coming,” Lofton says, getting emotional as she recalled the events. “I come from a neighborhood where somebody is shot every two minutes and we have not one trauma unit. The closest hospital to my neighborhood is 15 minutes away, so that’s exactly where my mom had to get me.

“No extra speed, no escort, in a regular truck. A Trailblazer.”

Lofton spent nearly a week in the hospital after having emergency surgery in which the medical team had to graft a vein from her thigh to repair the damage in her arm. Occupational therapy has helped her regain some mobility, she says.

There was no police report of her shooting, Lofton says. So, she started talking.

“I had to make my own noise to get my story out so I could get a police report,” Lofton says about calling the news media and sharing her story. “I finally got a police report three weeks after the

incident; they still didn’t find the shooters.”

Lofton says being the victim of gun violence has increased her drive to speak out and speak up for victims and the need for resources and support systems to help victims recover.

“What I didn’t realize or take into effect was the trauma behind whatever happens to you, and how you overcome it,” Lofton says. “I come from a big family and they were there, they were very loving.

I had certain resources ... but other young people do not have those things. Our city does not provide anything for them to move forward and it made me realize why so much gun violence or violence overall has a ripple effect, because we’re not getting anything to help us.”

Lofton says she wants to help get better resources for her Chicago neighborhood and other communities that are lacking needed social services.

“My goal with my activism is not just to be heard. When I speak out, my hope is for something to get done,” Lofton says. “The point of my activism is to show that young people understand, that we are aware, that we are coming and that we are here. I won’t be 19 forever, but while I am young I want to make as much noise as I can!”

On May 31, 2021, Lofton held a “do-over day” in New Orleans. She wanted to mark the anniversary date of her shooting with a positive declaration and to make note of her progress surrounded by her family and friends who arrived from Chicago.

They all wore orange T-shirts, the signature color for gun violence awareness.

“I’m here for a reason and I thank God for a second chance,” Lofton says. “I want to encourage more young people to speak out and embrace their second chances. It’s OK if we fail; what matters is that we get back up and that you keep going.” 🙏





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UNO Student Perry Hawxhurst's *Other Life*

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS STUDENT Perry Hawxhurst spends his summers delivering some serious smack downs to people who are just itching for fight. On weekends, Hawxhurst morphs into his showtime personality, pro wrestler PJ Hawx.

"I can be larger than life in the ring when I have to act," Hawxhurst says. "But, in person I really don't like to be too braggy or over the top."

Indeed, the well-mannered Hawxhurst blushes a bit when speaking about the national attention he garnered last year after a video of a wrestling stunt went viral.

"I knew it was going to be big, but I didn't expect it to be as big as it was," Hawxhurst says. "It was on all over the place ... I had people coming up to me saying, 'Hey man, this is you!'"

Hawxhurst, who is a senior majoring in exercise physiology, captured the attention of the national media after one of his wrestling moves became a social media sensation with more than eight million views. The video was shown on ESPN SportsCenter and local media outlets, among others.

As part of a benefit show produced by his dad's training facility, Wildkat Sports, Hawxhurst jumped from a second story railing at the Esplanade Mall in Kenner into a wrestling ring during a match.

While acknowledging the "coolness" of the jump, Hawxhurst is quick to warn against anyone attempting to copy the stunt.

"I am a trained stuntman," he says. "Not only that, I'm a professional wrestler and my dad has also been doing stunts since 2007. I would not advise anybody to do that without proper training and I had proper training."

The event happened in February 2020, prior to restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus pandemic and drew hundreds to the Kenner mall.

While confident in his training, one disturbing thought flitted across Hawxhurst's mind as he carefully climbed over the second-floor railing.

"Hopefully, my mom doesn't kill me, that was my main one," Hawxhurst says while laughing. "She didn't know. Nobody knew. It was actually the day of we decided to do that."

The impact of landing, absorbed some by the other wrestlers, was still painful, Hawxhurst says. However, no one was seriously injured, he says.

Hawxhurst was a varsity wrestler at Grace King High School in Metairie and is a former state wrestling champion. He fell in love with the sport as a child watching his pro wrestler father, Luke Hawxhurst.

"Watching my dad, who has been a wrestler since before I was born, was the coolest thing in the world. He's basically my hero," Hawxhurst



says. "Since I was young I've always wanted to be a professional wrestler."

The elder Hawxhurst opened Wildkat Sports in 2011 to train professional wrestlers. The duo created the tag team Hawx Aerie shortly after Perry Hawxhurst graduated high school.

His first pro wrestling match was a "battle royal" in a North Carolina convention center that included about 20 other wrestlers of various ages and weights. Hawxhurst was 18.

"I think I was about the sixth person left in the ring before I got thrown out. So, I lasted a good amount of time for my first match," he says. "Every time I get in the ring, I get better."

His father produces shows around metro New Orleans, mainly on Friday and Saturday nights, Hawxhurst says. Other times they are on the road, participating in shows sponsored by other production companies.

The duration of his matches can be as little as a minute or as much as a half hour or longer, he says.

"Most of my matches are between 10 and 15 minutes," says Hawxhurst. "I've gone 40 minutes before ... you've got to have good conditioning, that's why we train."

There are no age or weight categories, says Hawxhurst, who is 22.

Hawxhurst describes his wrestling technique as more technical than acrobatic. He goes for a hold or a body slam versus high dives.

"It's more of wearing my opponent down and keeping them down," he says. "I do acrobatic stuff, but not too much."

The best thing he likes about wrestling, Hawxhurst says, is tagging with his dad. The two have had matches across the U.S., in England and Mexico. Their wrestling skills have paved the way for them to stunt work on movies and a television series.

He is a member of the Screen Actors Guild, Hawxhurst says.

For seven months this year, he and his father were working as wrestling coordinators for a new series on the Starz network called "Heels."

Hawxhurst says he also snagged an acting role in the series, which is about a wrestling family in a fictional Georgia town. The series premiered in August and stars actor Stephen Amell, known for his portrayal of Oliver Queen on The CW series "Arrow."

"It's got everything," Hawxhurst says. "Life, love, drama."

On the wrestling front, as the pandemic restrictions are lifted, Hawxhurst says his father is planning a show to celebrate his company's 10th anniversary.

"I've learned a lot from my dad, Wildkat Sports and the coaches there," he says. "We took a hiatus during COVID, but we're coming back stronger. I'm excited to have fans coming back." 🍷



FACING PAGE: University of New Orleans senior Perry Hawxhurst poses with his championship belt won as part of the wrestling tag team Hawx Aerie with his dad, Luke. THIS PAGE, TOP: PJ with his father, Luke Hawxhurst, in tag team Hawx Aerie mode. ABOVE: PJ Hawx in the ring versus Stevie Richards at the Wildkat Sports Revolution Rumble in 2019 in the Ponchartrain Center.



The Launch of eSports

New facility will serve as a hub for both recreational and competitive gamers.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans has launched eSports programming with the opening of a new on-campus eSports Café and plans for intramural, club and varsity teams in the future.

The new facility, which features an array of PC, PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X consoles, is located in the Recreation &

Fitness Center and will serve as a hub for both recreational and competitive gamers.

“The growth of gaming has been explosive in recent years,” says Tim Duncan, vice president for athletics and recreation, who oversees the eSports program. “We know that our current students and future students want to play these games and some



of them will want to do so in a competitive environment. That's why we will be offering different levels of competition to suit their needs.

"The opening of the eSports Café is the first step as we grow our eSports program, and I'm looking forward to seeing it flourish," Duncan says.

Open Monday-Friday from

11 a.m. to 5 p.m., participants will be able to play games via their Steam account—a cloud-based gaming library—or choose from a selection of favorites including League of Legends, Rocket League and NBA 2K.

Users can reserve gaming consoles in the eSports Café by the hour, with monthly and se-

mester-long passes available for purchase. Users can bring their own headphones or purchase them from the front desk of the Recreation & Fitness Center.

Gamers will be asked to fill out a survey to provide feedback on their experience.

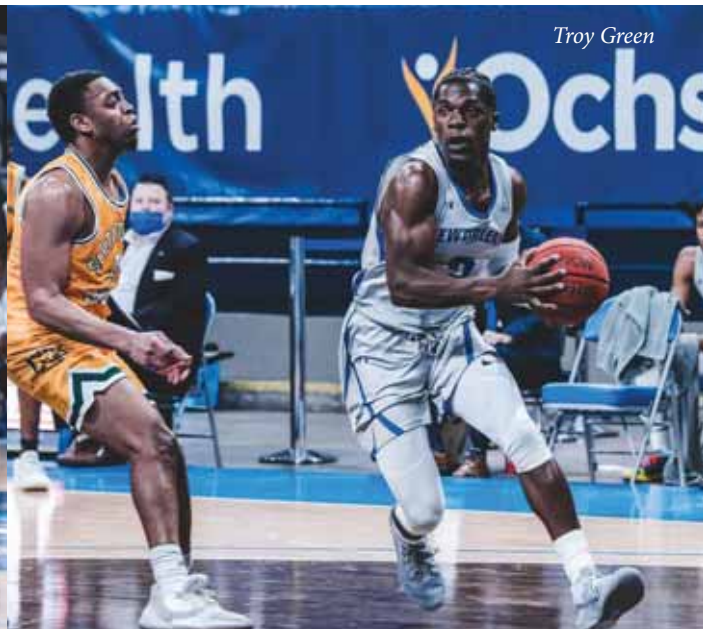
The University will start an intramural eSports league in October and plans to hire an

eSports head coach during the fall semester to manage the club and varsity teams, Duncan says.

"We hope to create a thriving community of gamers among our students, faculty and staff," Duncan says. "And we're excited for the UNO campus to host tournaments and serve as a gaming destination throughout the region."



Derek St. Hilaire



Troy Green

Troy Green, Derek St. Hilaire Returning for Final Season

UNFINISHED BUSINESS. Those two words embody the impetus for Privateer men's basketball starters Troy Green and Derek St. Hilaire's decision to return to the Lakefront for one last season.

Green and St. Hilaire's return was made possible after the NCAA decided not to charge a year of eligibility for the 2020-21 basketball season due to COVID-19. That ruling enabled the two men to extend their collegiate playing career for an additional year.

As he embarks on his fifth and final campaign, Green says he wants to deliver on bringing the league championship back to New Orleans.

"I've made my mark individually here at UNO but it's time to deliver a championship," says Green, who grew up about 30 miles west of New Orleans in St. John the Baptist Parish. "I'm excited to remain close to home representing this city."

Currently ranked in the top 10 in several statistical categories,

Green was named a 2021 Southland Conference Second Teamer and NABC All-District. His 377 made free throws rank third, 133 steals are tied for fifth, 120 career games are tied for sixth, 313 assists rank eighth (tied) and his 1,327 points are good for ninth.

In 2021, Green averaged 15.4 points and shot 80.2 percent from the charity stripe. He added 5.6 rebounds, 2.5 assists and 1.2 steals.

"Troy is on a mission to get our program back into March Madness," says head coach Mark Slessinger. "It is so rewarding to be able to see a player that we recruited since he was a junior in high school and see him progress as a student-athlete and a man."

"I know how much he loves being home, getting his education at UNO, and being a part of our basketball family. I am excited to be able to coach him for another season."

Green ended the season with nine consecutive double-digit performances and reached

double figures in 21 of the 25 games. He posted a career-high 34 points on 12-of-18 shooting at the BSN Dolphin Classic. In the three-day Jacksonville tournament, he registered a double-double with 18 points and 12 rebounds in the victory of Florida National.

St. Hilaire, a graduate student pursuing a master's degree in education, says he also wants to win a championship.

"Education is important to me and it is a goal to earn my master's," says St. Hilaire. "I also believe our team has a serious chance of winning the Southland. We played a strong second half and have unfinished business."

"Our goal is to win a championship and I am excited for the opportunity to do that while also achieving my personal goals," says St. Hilaire, who is returning for his second season on the Lakefront.

St. Hilaire averaged 12.3 points and shot 40.1 percent from three-point range with 2.6 assists and 2.5 rebounds in 25 games.

In league play, St. Hilaire posted 15.7 points and connected on 43.4 percent of his shots from long distance, good for second in the Southland. He scored 20+ points four times, including a career-high 33 and a highlight-reel dunk in a win versus McNeese on January 16. His 32 points and six triples against Nicholls State University earned him the Southland Conference Player of the Week. He also won Louisiana Sports Writers Association (LSWA) Player of the Week.

"We are so excited to have Derek return for next season," says Slessinger. "It was great to see his development progress through the year. He had a tremendous first season here at UNO."

St. Hilaire will be finishing his master's degree in educational leadership, Slessinger says.

"He is driven to be a great student and prepare himself for life after professional basketball," Slessinger says. "On the court, he is driven to help lead our program back to the NCAA Tournament and March Madness."



Ismael Kone Earns All-America Honorable Mention with Performance at NCAA Championships

New Orleans standout Ismael Kone was honored with an All-America Honorable Mention after his performance at the NCAA Division I Outdoor Track & Field Championships at Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon in June. Kone cemented himself as one of the top sprinters in the nation as he finished 21st in the country in the 100 meters.

Kone, the first UNO student-athlete to advance to an outdoor national championship since 2017, posted a 10.50 to take seventh out of the third heat at the national championships. His Top-21 finish overall was the second-best performance at an outdoor na-

tional championship in school history. With the showing, Kone also ranked himself as the tenth-best freshman in the country in the 100.

"I am so proud of Ismael and what he accomplished," head coach Brian Johnson says. "When he arrived in New Orleans, we both knew the skill was there, but for him to be able to unlock it and reach the national meet in just his freshman year is an accomplishment that we will both remember for a lifetime."

Johnson, an NCAA national champion and USA Olympian himself, knows a thing or two about high-level athletes.

"The sky is the limit for Ismael," Johnson says. "I truly believe that."

Ashley Preston Is New Privateer Volleyball Coach

ASHLEY PRESTON WAS named the 14th head coach in Privateer indoor volleyball history on June 29, 2021.

Preston was most recently at Cal State Fullerton, where she coached for five seasons. In 2019,

Preston was Co-Coach of the Year in the Big West after leading the Titans to a six-win improvement from their 2018 campaign. Cal State Fullerton also finished in the top 25 nationally in digs per set with 17.44.

Prior to Cal State Fullerton, Preston spent three years at Coppin State, where she guided the Eagles to 40 wins. During her first season with the Maryland-based school in 2012, Preston led Coppin State

to their first conference tournament appearance in six years. In 2013, Preston led the Eagles to a then school record for wins in a season.

A 2008 graduate from Morgan State University, Preston spent three seasons as an assistant between Morgan State and Loyola-Maryland. Her first year as a head coach was in 2011 when she guided Spelman College for the season.

As a player, Preston was a three-time First Team All-MEAC selection and the school's record holder in total digs. Preston earned her bachelor's degree in telecommunications from Morgan State in 2008. She earned her master's in publications design from the University of Baltimore in 2011.

Ron Maestri to be presented with Lefty Gomez Award for 2022

FORMER LEGENDARY Privateers baseball head coach and athletic director, Ron Maestri will be presented with the Lefty Gomez Award by the American Baseball Coaches Association (ABCA) for 2022.

The award will be presented on Friday, Jan. 7, 2022 in Chicago during the Hall of Fame Banquet at the ABCA Convention.

The Lefty Gomez Award is presented annually to an individual who has contributed significantly to the game of baseball locally, nationally and internationally. The award was first instituted in 1962.

"I'm humbled and very honored," says Maestri. "This is a great honor to be chosen for the Lefty Gomez Award,

and I'm just glad I'm going to be able to share it with a lot of people that really helped make this possible including my players, family, coaches and school."

Maestri has left an indelible mark on the University of New Orleans baseball program. In 16 years as a head coach over two different stints, Maestri has won 543 games and taken his teams to two College World Series. He also coached 38 draft picks including six who made it to the Majors.

Maestri won Sun Belt Coach of the Year honors in 1979.

His impact reaches far beyond the diamond though. Maestri was the athletic director at the University of New Orleans for over two decades.



He also served as an executive with the then New Orleans Zephyrs.

Maestri has been inducted into the Hall of Fame of several different organizations including the ABCA, Greater New Orleans Sports Foundation

and Louisiana Baseball Coaches Association.

Jerry Weinstein, who was the 2021 winner, will also be honored at next year's ceremony since the scheduled convention was canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions. 🙏

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Boysie Bollinger Pledges \$3 Million to UNO's School of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering

SHIPBUILDING MAGNATE Donald T. “Boysie” Bollinger has pledged \$3 million to the University of New Orleans School of Naval Architecture and Marine

Engineering, the only such program in the region and one of the few in the nation.

In recognition of the gift, the University has renamed

the school the Boysie Bollinger School of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering.

“On behalf of our students, faculty, alumni and the entire

university community, I am incredibly grateful to Boysie for his commitment to UNO,” says UNO President John Nicklow. “This gift will have tremendous

impact on current and future students by providing greater access to a world-class education and state-of-the-art equipment. This kind of generosity can and will change the lives of students.”

Bollinger is chairman and chief executive officer of Bollinger Enterprises, LLC. He is the former chairman and CEO of Bollinger Shipyards, Inc., a family-owned marine construction and ship repair company that was established in 1946 and now has 11 shipyards throughout Louisiana.

Bollinger Shipyards is the largest vessel repair company in the Gulf of Mexico region.

“Over my career, Bollinger Shipyards has had a lot of graduates from both the College of Engineering and the School of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering,” says Bollinger. “And I would put them

up against anybody else in the country.

“So UNO always had a very special place in my heart and it’s something I’ve been close to for a long time.”

Bollinger’s gift will create endowed scholarship support for undergraduate and graduate students in the College of Engineering with preference given to those majoring in naval architecture and marine engineering. It will also fund equipment upgrades in areas such as the Ship Design Computer lab and the 128-foot-long marine towing tank, which allows for testing models of ships and offshore structures in a variety of water conditions.

UNO’s School of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering was established in 1980 in response to demand from the local shipbuilding and offshore

industry. The school offers a Bachelor of Science in Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering, a Master of Science in Engineering and a Ph.D. in Engineering and Applied Science.

The school’s graduates are in high demand from employers including ship and yacht builders, offshore companies, engineering and design consultancies, and software developers.

“I am very proud of what this school has accomplished and I thought it was a good time to give back,” Bollinger says.

BELOW: Boysie Bollinger and his wife, Joy, attend the ceremony held in his honor at UNO.



ALUM NOTES

Robin Cooper (B.A., '88)

Robin Cooper is the new president and chief executive officer for public television station WYES in New Orleans. She assumed her new role in August.

Cooper, who earned a bachelor's degree in communications and drama from the University of New Orleans, previously was executive vice president and chief operating officer at the station.

"Robin Cooper is a valued member of the WYES community and has demonstrated her commitment, dedication and passion to WYES for over 32 years," search committee chairman Marc Leunissen says. "She has extensive experience in all areas of station operations, including production, programming, development, strategic planning and overall management."

Cooper succeeds Allan Pizzato, who is retiring after serving eight years at WYES and over 46 years in public broadcasting.



Hannah Juliff (B.A., '15) and Steve Juliff (B.A., '16)

Hannah and Steve Juliff are the owners of JuJu Tees, an online art print and apparel brand with a mission of giving artists a platform to showcase their work.

The couple collaborates with artists to put their designs on shirts, crewnecks and art prints.

"We have always wanted to start a business together, but wanted it to be meaningful and weren't sure what to create until now," says Hannah Juliff.

The couple combined Steve Juliff's desire to get his photography out into the world with their desire for positive social change to create JuJu Tees.

"We handle the business side of things so that artists can create and make money from their amazing work," says Juliff.

Twenty percent of all their profits are donated to non-profit organizations. The artists get to choose where 10% of the profits are donated and JuJu Tees chooses where 10% of the profits are donated.

For September, the entire 20 percent of profits were donated to Hurricane Ida relief, the couple says.

Steve Juliff earned a bachelor's degree in film and theatre, while Hannah Juliff earned a bachelor's degree in English.



1970s 1980s

Rebecca Fichter Hale (B.A., '73, M.A., '88)

Rebecca Fichter Hale has published a second book, "Tips From A Talent Agent: Practical Advice For Actors." Hale is the owner of Hale Talent Agency in Metairie, Louisiana and has been a talent agent for 27 years.

Hale also taught theatre, speech and English for 43 years. She earned a bachelor's degree in English and a master's in drama and communications from the University of New Orleans, and a doctorate in educational theatre from New York University.

Rev. Lonnie Wadsworth (M.Ed., '80)

Rev. Lonnie Wadsworth is the pastor of Glencoe Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Glencoe, Alabama. Wadsworth, who studied at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary before earning a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of New Orleans, is also a recipient of the Purple Heart Medal. The Army veteran was awarded the medal for combat wounds sustained during the 1968 Tet Offensive.

James Breeden (B.A., '86)

James Breeden's novel, "Painting Angela," has been published by the North American Review. The book, a crime mystery, won the Gas Station Pulp Award for literary crime noir sponsored by the North American Review. Breeden earned a bachelor's degree in English from the University of New Orleans.

Gene Seroka (B.S., '86, M.B.A., '88)

Gene Seroka, the executive director of the Port of Los Angeles, has been named the 2021

winner of the Containerization and Intermodal Institute's Connie Award. The award recognizes industry leaders who have made significant contributions to containerization, world trade and the transportation field, as well as for their innovative spirit. It is considered one of the most coveted honors in the maritime industry.

Seroka, who earned a bachelor's degree in marketing and a master's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans, will receive the award at a Dec. 6 ceremony in New Jersey.

Sherrie Miranda, (B.A., '88)

Sherrie Miranda has released a second historical fiction novel called "Crimes & Impunity in New Orleans." The book is set in 1980s New Orleans and follows Shelly, the young northerner, who encounters a slew of colorful characters.

Miranda earned a bachelor's degree in drama and communications from the University of New Orleans.

June Wood Agamah (B.A., '89)

June Wood Agamah's novel "Caryl's Closet" has been published by Carpenter's Son Publishing and is available on Amazon. The novel chronicles Agamah's journey from Guyana to Barbados and to the U.S.

Agamah earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of New Orleans.

Jeff Guillot (B.S., '89)

Jeff Guillot has been hired as vice president, director of retail banking at Metairie Bank & Trust. He brings more than 35 years of banking experience having previously worked for Hancock Whitney Bank, First NBC Bank, Fidelity Bank and First Bank & Trust. Guillot graduated from the University of New Orleans with a bachelor's degree in management.

1990s

Alicia Oliver (B.A., '90)

Alicia Oliver has been named education grants program director for Baptist Community Ministries in New Orleans. She has 28 years of experience in the education and nonprofit sectors in greater New Orleans. Oliver earned a bachelor's degree in English literature and a secondary teacher certification from the University of New Orleans, and a master's degree in education leadership from American Intercontinental University in Chicago.

Darla Saux (B.S., '92)

Darla Saux of Gretna, Louisiana was honored in June with the Special Recognition Award for her eight years of dedicated service as the executive director of the State Board of CPAs of Louisiana. The award acknowledges her influential work protecting the public and upholding the integrity of the CPA designation.

Saux, a retired certified public accountant, earned her bach-

Eboni Thompson Buchanan (B.S., '11)

Eboni Thompson Buchanan is the vice president of Physician Services at Woman's Hospital in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She is responsible for the strategic direction and growth of Woman's physician practices and the continued advancement of clinical services.

Buchanan is passionate about the opportunity to help improve the health of women and infants in her home state.

"I am thrilled to be returning to the place I call home to care for a community that helped shape me personally and professionally," says Buchanan. "Woman's has such a tremendous reputation as a strong, independent hospital focused on women and infants, and I'm excited to be part of future growth and strategic initiatives."

Buchanan, a Baton Rouge native who was born at Woman's Hospital, was previously the senior director of Women's and Infants' Services at MedStar Health in Washington, D.C.

"Eboni clearly has a great deal of experience in leading programs focused on women's and infant health, but it's her passion for improving the health of our community that has me truly excited to have her join our team," says Dr. Barbara Griffith, MD, president & CEO of Woman's Hospital.

Buchanan earned a bachelor's degree in management from the University of New Orleans and a master's in health services administration from University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan.



Katie Bowler Young (B.A., '97)

Katie Bowler Young is the author of "Enrique Alférez: Sculptor," a book about one of New Orleans most renowned artists. The book, released earlier this year, is the latest entry in the well-received Louisiana Artists Biography series from The Historic New Orleans Collection.

Young says she was first introduced to the work of Alférez while she was a student at the University of New Orleans. She would visit one of the artist's more well-known, and once controversial, sculptures at the Lakefront Airport.

"I used to go out to the fountain of the four winds in between classes," Young says. "I wanted to learn more about Enrique Alférez."

Alférez worked in New Orleans for almost 70 years. The book examines connections between Alférez's art and his homeland, international outlook and Indigenous Nahua heritage. It features more than 100 images of his work in New Orleans and beyond.

Young is also the author of "Through Water with Ease" (Louisiana Literature Press, 2019) and "State Street." (Bull City Press, 2009). She is senior director of global partnership and programs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and is an adjunct professor of poetry in the undergraduate creative writing program at Warren Wilson College.

Young earned a bachelor's degree in drama and communications from the University of New Orleans and an MFA from Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, North Carolina.



2000s

elors degree in accounting from the University of New Orleans.

Will Womble (B.S., '93)

Will Womble of Houston, Texas has been promoted to dermatology regional marketing director for Bristol Meyers Squibb. His new duties will include helping launch and market a new pharmaceutical used to treat autoimmune disorders. Womble earned a bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of New Orleans and an MBA from Texas A&M University, Commerce.

George Herrera (M.B.A., '94)

George Herrera has been named executive vice president of donor services for MTF Biologics, a global nonprofit organization in Edison, New Jersey. In his new role, Herrera will oversee all public awareness initiatives related to tissue donation and provide strategic leadership and management to multiple MTF Biologics Divisions.

Herrera holds an MBA from the University of New Orleans

and a bachelor's in marketing and management from Tulane University.

Justin J. Fleetwood (B.A., '95)

Justin J. Fleetwood is the new director of strategic planning for advancement at Brother Martin High School in New Orleans, La. He was previously in Metuchen, New Jersey where he spent three years as a principal and two years as president of Saint Joseph High School, a Brothers of the Sacred Heart school.

Fleetwood earned a bachelor's degree in English education from the University of New Orleans.

John Sutherlin (M.A., '95, Ph.D., '98)

John Sutherlin's book, "Playing with Fire," was published in April. The book examines the story of Marine Shale Processors, the world's largest hazardous waste company, and the women who fought to protect their community and their children.

Sutherlin is professor of political science and public

administration at the University of Louisiana Monroe. He holds a master's and doctorate degrees in political science from the University of New Orleans.

Kimberly Ammons (B.G.S., '95)

Kimberly Ammons has been appointed principal of Prairieville Primary School in Ascension Parish, Louisiana. She previously served as an assistant principal at the school.

Ammons earned a bachelor's degree in general studies from the University of New Orleans and a master's degree from Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond.

Mark Rubin (M.A., '96)

Mark Rubin has been named the new executive director of Jewish Children's Regional Service, becoming only the fourth leader of the Jewish social service agency since 1946. He has served as development director at JCRS for the previous nine years.

Rubin holds a master's degree in arts administration from the

University of New Orleans and bachelor's degree from New York University.

Gary Dressler (B.S., '96)

Gary Dressler of Metairie, Louisiana, a certified public accountant, has been named the 2021-22 chair of the Society of Louisiana CPAs. He is an associate director with Postlethwaite & Netterville's Tax Services Group in Metairie where his primary focus is on all matters pertaining to state and local taxation.

Dressler received a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of New Orleans.

Elizabeth Ulloa Lowry (B.S., '97, M.B.A., '99)

Elizabeth Ulloa Lowry has been named senior vice president of case management for Paradigm, a healthcare management company in Walnut Creek, California. Lowry earned a bachelor's degree in marketing and master's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans.

Mandi Mitchell (B.S., '00, M.B.A., '03)

Mandi Mitchell has been named president and CEO of the Lafayette Economic Development Authority. Mitchell, a native of Lafayette, was previously the Louisiana Economic Development Assistant Secretary.

Mitchell earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering and an MBA from the University of New Orleans.

Michael D. Jackson (B.S., '01)

Michael D. Jackson was selected to Diversity MBA's annual list of Top 100 Under 50 Executive and Emerging Leaders for 2021. Jackson was recognized during the national leadership organization's gala celebration in September.

Jackson, a construction technology expert for the U.S. Air Force, earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of New Orleans.

Kara Washington-Lawson (M.Ed., '01)

Kara Washington-Lawson has been appointed principal at 

Matthew Robertson (M.S., '01)

Matthew Robertson is the new chief administrative officer of Phoebe Physicians in charge of the daily operations of southwest Georgia's largest team of healthcare providers.

"I'm excited to get back to an integrated health system that has its finger on the pulse of what's happening in its community," Robertson says.

Phoebe Physicians employs more than 850 people, including around 200 physicians and 150 advanced practice providers working in hospitals and clinics in nine southwest Georgia counties.

"Matthew brings a wealth of experience and a compassionate spirit that will move our organization forward and benefit our patients," says Dr. Suresh Lakhanpal, MD, Phoebe Physicians' CEO.

Robertson has more than 20 years of physician practice management experience and has worked in national integrated healthcare delivery systems, including Johns Hopkins Community Physicians and Dignity Health.

Robertson earned a bachelor's degree from Dillard University, a master's in public health from Florida A&M University and a master's in healthcare management from the University of New Orleans.



Fay Nedd (B.S., '00)

Fay Nedd is the new director for national accounts with New Orleans & Company, Inc., formerly New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau, which is the official destination marketing and sales organization for the New Orleans Hospitality Industry.

"I am super proud to devote time and efforts while touting the uniqueness of our hometown to high-level executives at every opportunity," Nedd says.

Nedd, who has been with the company for more than 20 years, manages the biosciences sector for New Orleans that include bio tech/bio med, pharmaceuticals, medical devices and other association and corporate accounts in the Northeast.

She represents the industry on three global advisory boards for Meeting Professionals International, which is the largest meeting planner and event planner industry association worldwide and acts as the prominent voice for the promotion and growth of the industry. Nedd is also a founding member of the Louisiana Chapter of the Society of Government Meeting Professionals.

Nedd holds a bachelor's degree in hotel, restaurant and tourism administration from the University of New Orleans and a master's degree in leadership and human resource development from Louisiana State University.



Lake Pontchartrain Elementary School in LaPlace, La., in the St. John the Baptist Parish Public Schools System. Washington-Lawson previously had been a teacher and assistant principal in the St. Charles Parish Public Schools System.

She earned a master's degree in educational leadership from the University of New Orleans, a doctorate in education from Southeastern Louisiana University and a bachelor's degree from Southern University in New Orleans.

Aarika Dorsey (M.B.A., '05)

Aarika Dorsey is the director of human resources for River Parishes Community College in Louisiana. Dorsey has 20 years of human resources experience, which includes expertise in civil service administration and experience working with the Louisiana Department of Education.

Dorsey received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Louisiana State University and a master's in business administration from the University of New Orleans.

Stacie M. Williams (B.S., '00, M.B.A., '07)

Stacie M. Williams has been named chief executive officer of Susan G. Komen Louisiana, a nonprofit agency dedicated to combating breast cancer by supporting health education, screenings and treatment programs.

Williams earned a bachelor's degree in general studies from the University of New Orleans.

Wayne Nix (M.B.A., '03)

Wayne Nix has been named the new chief innovation officer of research at LSU Health Shreveport. He earned a master's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans. Nix earned his associate degree in respiratory therapy and bachelor's degree in cardiopulmonary technology from Nicholls State University.

John "Bryan" Ehricht (M.S., '04)

John "Bryan" Ehricht of Hammond, Louisiana, a certified public accountant, has been elected treasurer of the Society of Louisiana CPAs. He is a director with James, Lambert, Riggs and Associates, Inc. in Hammond, where he focuses on tax.

Ehricht has a bachelor's degree in accounting from Centenary College and a master's degree in tax accounting from the University of New Orleans.

Tara Melvin (B.A., '06)

Tara Melvin has been named director of community partnerships and education for the New Orleans Opera. Melvin, a soprano who has also performed with the New Orleans Opera Chorus, holds a bachelor's degree in music from the University of New Orleans, a master's degree from Southeastern Louisiana University and a doctorate from Texas Tech University.

Sean F. Conroy (M.A., '07, Ph.D., '17)

Col. Sean F. Conroy of the Louisiana Air National Guard (LAANG) was promoted to the rank of brigadier general during an official ceremony at Jackson Barracks in New Orleans on April 11. Conroy is now the chief of staff at the LAANG headquartered at Jackson Barracks. As the chief of staff, he develops plans and policies, and serves as the principal liaison to state and federal agencies.

Conroy holds a master's degree in political science and a doctorate in international

relations from the University of New Orleans.

Tricia Barrera (B.S., '08)

Tricia Barrera is a financial advisor with Edward Jones and has opened a new office in the Lower Garden District of New Orleans. Barrera earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans.

Carlos Soto (M.B.A., '08)

Carlos Soto has joined OMI, a global healthcare logistics company headquartered in Richmond, Virginia, as senior vice president, manufacturing for their global product business. Soto earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Puerto Rico and an MBA from the University of New Orleans.

John Whittemore (M.B.A., '08)

John Whittemore has been named vice president of Medicare and individual sales for Network Health in Brookfield, Wisconsin. Whittemore has more than 25 years of health insurance experience and previously was the director of sales for government business at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana.

Whittemore earned a bachelor's degree in science from Ball State University in Indiana with a major in political science and history and a master's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans.

Greg Booth (M.S., '09)

Greg Booth of Metairie, Louisiana, a certified public accountant, is serving the second year of a two-year term as a Member at-Large of the Society of Louisiana CPAs. He is a director in the Postlethwaite & Netterville Tax Services Group in Metairie, where he focuses on the real estate, restaurant and professional service industries. Booth has a master's degree in accounting from the University of New Orleans and a bachelor's degree in accounting from Loyola University.

Morolake (Laké) Laosebikan-Buggs (Ph.D., '09)

Morolake (Laké) Laosebikan-Buggs is the new director of inclusive excellence for graduate and professional education at Elon University in North Carolina. Buggs earned her doctorate of philosophy in educational administration from the University of New Orleans.

Sarah Gayler (B.A., '08)

Former New Orleans women's basketball student-athlete Sarah Gayler made history in September as the UNO alumna was named the first female head men's basketball coach in NAIA history following her hiring at Brescia University in Kentucky.

Gayler was also named the athletic director. "College athletics is a lifestyle," said Gayler during her introductory press conference. "It is student-athlete centered and we have their best interests in mind. We want them to leave here being good people."

Gayler previously spent two seasons with the 2021 NBA Champion Milwaukee Bucks as a member of its basketball operations staff with an emphasis on scouting.

"Brescia University is a leader in recognizing the importance of women in roles of leadership," Brescia President Larry Hostetter said. "With that being said, Coach Gayler was selected because she is the most qualified for this important role and we are excited to welcome her to campus."

Gayler earned a bachelor's degree in business management and spent two seasons on the Lakefront from 2006-2008. Current Privateers head coach Keeshawn Davenport was an assistant coach at that time.

"This has been her goal, and I'm so proud of her," said Davenport. "She is going to do an amazing job leading the athletics program and men's basketball team."



Jim Schlossnagle (M.A., '95)

Jim Schlossnagle, a two-time National Coach of the Year as selected by the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association, is the new head baseball coach for Texas A&M.

He spent the past 18 years as head coach at TCU where he led the school to five College World Series.

"When we started our coaching search, we made sure we covered all of our bases within Texas and across the country by reaching far and wide to find the right fit for Texas A&M baseball," says Ross Bjork, director of athletics at Texas A&M. "He owns the best winning percentage of any college baseball program in Texas over the last 10 years and his track record of success on a national stage speaks for itself. Texas A&M deserves to have the very best of the best, and we have hit a proverbial 'grand slam' with Coach Schlossnagle."

Schlossnagle graduated magna cum laude from Elon College in North Carolina with a bachelor's degree in physical education in 1992 and earned a master's of education in human performance and health promotion from the University of New Orleans in 1995.



2010s

Annie Irvin (M.U.R.P., '11)

Annie Irvin is executive director of the historic Beaugard-Keyes House in New Orleans and was named to *Gambit's* 2021 "40 Under 40" list of people under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the New Orleans area. Irvin, who has worked to improve the historic structure and provide a more inclusive history of the house, earned a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the University of New Orleans

David W. Robinson-Morris (M.P.A., '11)

David W. Robinson-Morris, founder of The Reimaginelution, LLC, a strategic consulting firm that focuses on diversity, equity and inclusion, was named to *Gambit's* 2021 "40 Under 40" list of people under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the New Orleans area.

Morris earned a master's degree in public administration from the University of New Orleans.

Kyle Lawson (M.B.A., '11)

Kyle Lawson has been hired as the chief financial officer for Garver's New Orleans Office. Garver is an employee-owned multi-disciplined engineering, planning, architectural, and environmental services firm with nearly 900 employees across the United States. Lawson earned a master's degree in business education from the University of New Orleans.

Kevinisha Walker (B.S., '12)

Kevinisha Walker is the social media editor for The Daily Beast news website and is based in Los Angeles, California. Walker earned a bachelor's degree in English from the University of New Orleans and a master's degree in journalism from Roosevelt University in Chicago, Illinois.

Tiana Nobile (M.A.T., '13)

Tiana Nobile, an award-winning poet and elementary school writing teacher, has published a collection of her poems called, "Cleave." Nobile, who earned a master's in teaching from the University of New Orleans was named to *Gambit's* 2021 "40

Under 40" list of people under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the New Orleans area.

Samantha Mullen (B.A., '13)

Samantha Mullen is a Santa Fe artist who is using her sculptures to parody the medieval practice of shame masks. Her work is being shown at Santa Fe's Keep Contemporary.

Mullen earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts from the University of New Orleans.

Troy Glover (B.A., '16)

Troy Glover is the director for the Center for Employment Opportunities, an organization that provides assistance for job seekers and social services, was named to *Gambit's* 2021 "40 Under 40" list of people under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the New Orleans area. Glover earned a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of New Orleans.

Andrew Siegrist (M.F.A., '16)

Andrew Siegrist was awarded the 2020 C. Michael Curtis Short Story Book Prize for his collection of short stories titled, "We Imagined It Was Rain." The book, which is Siegrist's first, was released in October.

Siegrist is a graduate of the University of New Orleans Creative Writing Workshop.

Brittney Robins (M.Ed., 2017)

Brittney Robins is an educator and founder of Bright Minds, an organization that helps parents of New Orleans students with special needs navigate the school system. Robins, who earned a master's degree in education from the University of New Orleans, was named to

Gambit's 2021 "40 Under 40" list of people under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the New Orleans area.

Mimi Ayers (M.F.A., 2018)

Mimi Ayers has been elected the new Dramatists Guild of America regional representative for the Gulf Coast. The Dramatists Guild the national, professional membership trade association of theatre writers including playwrights, composers, lyricists, and librettists.

Ayers' election is a three-year commitment that includes providing support and promoting opportunities in the theatrical community.

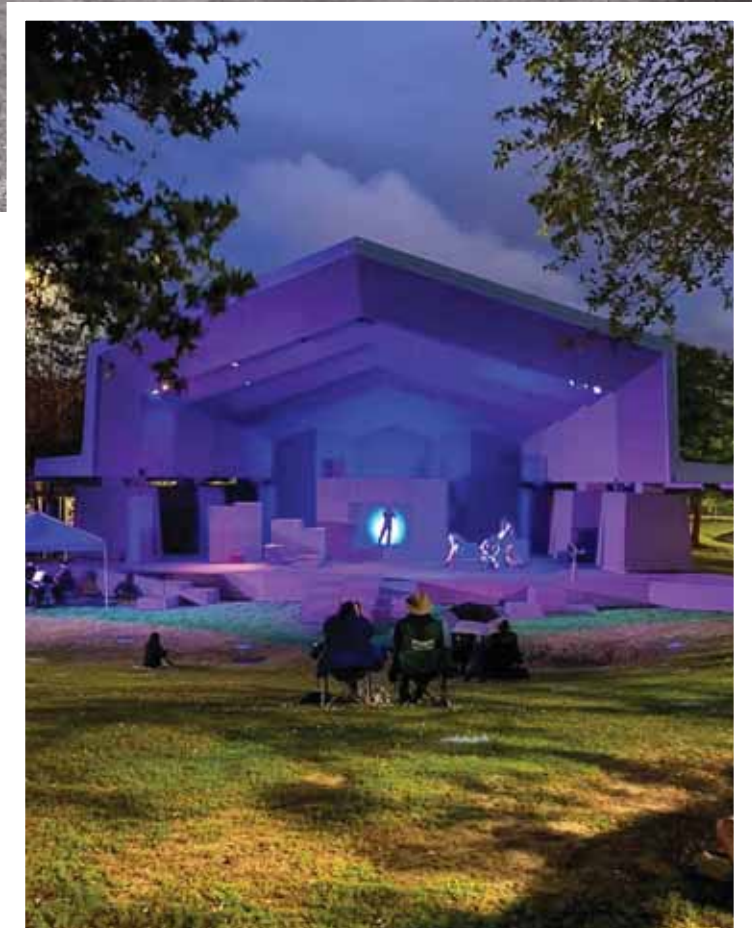
Ayers earned a master's degree in creative writing from the University of New Orleans. 🎭



TELL US YOUR NEWS!

DID YOU: Get married? Get a new job? Receive an award? Have a baby? Send your alum note to alumni@uno.edu

THEN AND NOW



Student Park Amphitheatre

THE OUTDOOR STUDENT PARK Amphitheatre, which was constructed almost 40 years ago, was renovated earlier this year and hosted its first ever student theatre production in mid-April.

The on-campus amphitheatre was transformed for the live performance of the play “Eurydice” with the addition of stage lights, stairs and a balcony. It also sports a new color. Kevin Griffith, design professor in the film and theatre department, spearheaded the renovation project with his students.

In May, the outdoor venue was the scene for a community performing arts series for several weekends. 🌳



PUT UNO FIRST

FOR UNO'S FUTURE

HENRY BERNSTEIN CHALLENGE With the success of last year's gift challenge, former adjunct professor and honorary degree recipient Henry Bernstein Ph.D. is once again challenging the Privateer community to help support students.

Every gift to UNO First until December 31, 2021, will be matched, dollar for dollar, up to \$150,000. **That means that the impact of your gift will be DOUBLED!**

A gift to UNO First helps support student scholarships, enhance campus life and continue academic excellence for current and future Privateers.

Take the challenge and put UNO First with a gift today. Thank you. **Go Privateers!**

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