

SOUTH



Rallying Support

President Jo Bonner begins to share a vision of South as the 'Flagship of the Gulf Coast.'

SOUTH

SOUTH Magazine is a publication of the Office of Alumni Relations and the USA National Alumni Association. It is intended to inform alumni and friends of current USA events and issues.



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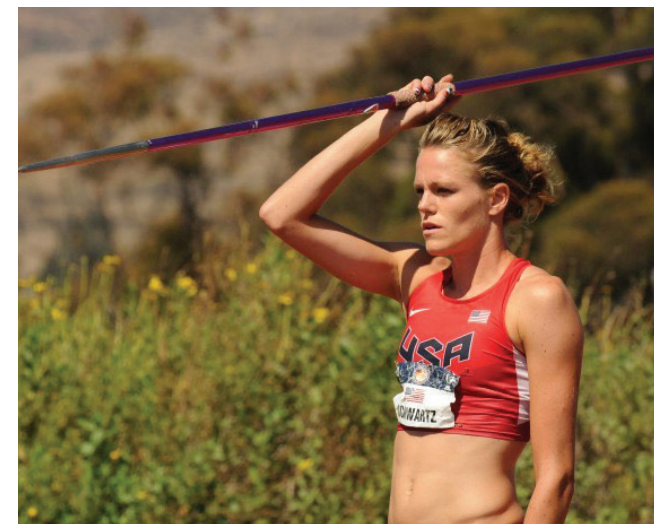
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Spring is a time of growth, new beginnings and renewed energy for the year ahead.

This spring, we celebrated our more than 2,000 graduates as they embarked on the next chapter of their lives and careers. We welcomed them as Jaguar alumni, where they join 90,000 of their fellow alumni across the globe. We're excited to see what the future holds for each of them.

In January, we welcomed Jo Bonner as the fourth president of the University of South Alabama. Throughout his first 100 days in this role, President Bonner spent countless hours speaking with and listening to students, faculty, staff and alumni to learn their thoughts, concerns and ideas about how to make South Alabama an even better institution for everyone now and in the future.

After a year's hiatus, we had the pleasure of honoring five individuals and USA Health during the 17th annual Distinguished Alumni and Service Awards in March. Each one is a testament to the impact that our alumni and friends have on their communities and in the lives of others.

Many of our students and alumni have persevered against the odds to achieve seemingly impossible goals throughout the past few years. Keira Ross, a 2022 graduate, was encouraged to attend South after a conversation with her manager at Waffle House. She is now poised to begin her career as a chemical engineer with ExxonMobil.

As a star track athlete during her time at South, Lindsay Flach never imagined she would compete at the Olympic trials during a pandemic—all while four months pregnant. But compete she did and finished her professional athletic career on her own terms.

The alumni association is excited to announce that the 2022 Alumni Reunion Weekend will take place Oct. 13–15. I hope you will mark your calendars now, and plan to join us this fall for another fun-filled weekend.

Spring, and new beginnings, brings with it the opportunity for reflection and growth. As we look to the remainder of the year, I am excited to see where these opportunities may lead us.

Go Jags!
Karen Edwards '80
Executive Director
USA National Alumni Association



Dr. Debra Chapman '97 honored

Business Alabama has named Dr. Debra Chapman one of 22 Women in Tech for 2022.

Chapman, associate dean and director of graduate studies for USA's School of Computing, is known for her interest in the recruitment and retention of women to STEM fields. Her research interests include STEM education and the recruitment of more women in computing and other STEM careers.

Chapman received a Bachelor of Science from South Alabama in 1997. She has served as a faculty adviser to the School of Computing's Jaguar Women in Technology student organization.

Bonura elected 2022-2023 SGA president

The USA student body elected rising senior Camille Bonura as the 2022-2023 Student Government Association president.

A native of Enterprise, Ala., Bonura is a hospitality and sports management major, a member of Mortar Board Honor Society, Eta Sigma Delta Honor Society, Phi Mu Sorority and Hospitality Ambassadors.

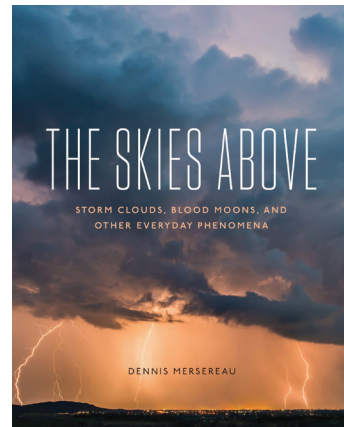
Her parents are Meredith Mitchell Hamilton '95 and Ross Bonura '96.

Mersereau '14 publishes book on weather phenomena

Dennis Mersereau, a 2014 graduate of the University of South Alabama, has published "The Skies Above: Storm Clouds, Blood Moons, and Other Everyday Phenomena."

From basics such as weather fronts and types of precipitation, to more unusual occurrences like polar vortices and meteor showers, Mersereau tracks key phenomena across the seasons and demystifies celestial events visible to the naked eye but still enigmatic to most. The book also delves into how climate change affects weather, forecasts and other events, such as wildfires and hurricanes.

Mersereau has written for the Washington Post's Capital Weather Gang and Gawker's weather vertical, The Vane, as well as Popular Science, Mental Floss, Forbes and The Weather Network.



Dennis Mersereau '14 recently published a book about weather phenomena.



Two alumni honored for teacher excellence

Two of the top three Mobile County Public Schools teachers of the year for 2022 are University of South Alabama alumni.

Kelly Parker '08, M.Ed. '10 is a second-grade teacher at Tanner Williams Elementary in Wilmer. An educator for 14 years, Parker is one of MCPSS's first dyslexia interventionist resource teachers.

William Edmonds M.Ed. '07 teaches French at Barton Academy for Advanced World Studies in Mobile. With 24 years of experience in the classroom, Edmonds has also taught French across Alabama through the ACCESS distance learning program, as well as at the University of South Alabama and the University of Mobile.

Each of Mobile County's 90 schools selected a teacher of the year who was then nominated for the countywide honor. A committee selected the three winners and will forward their applications on to be considered by the state for Alabama's Teacher of the Year.



Welcome new alumni

The USA National Alumni Association welcomed nearly 2,000 students into the alumni family during commencement ceremonies held May 6-7. Following the May 6 ceremony, the alumni association hosted a reception for graduates and their families at the MacQueen Alumni Center. Welcome, Class of 2022!



President Jo Bonner welcomes new graduates and quintuplets Shipley, Sophia, Isabella, Amelia Rose and Hallie Zimlich.



Camille Bonura will serve as the 2022-2023 SGA president.



\$60 million earmarked for College of Medicine building

A new, state-of-the-art University of South Alabama College of Medicine building is one large step closer to reality thanks to a \$60 million appropriation from U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby. The appropriations bill was approved by both the Senate and the House of Representatives in March.

This allocation follows a \$50 million earmark from Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey and a \$30 million gift from the University of South Alabama Foundation.

"The \$60 million allocation for the College of Medicine is more than a commitment of financial support. It is a commitment to our faculty, researchers and students, as well as to the communities that our graduates serve," said USA President Jo Bonner. "Sen. Shelby has spent a lifetime in service to Alabama and to our coastal region. This appropriation is another example of his tireless and steadfast commitment to Alabamians and to the state as a place to live and work."

USA plans to break ground on the project in the next year.



USA senior medical students celebrate residencies at Match Day

The annual tradition called the National Residency Matching Program, or more commonly known as Match Day, is the event where future physicians at medical schools across the United States and Canada simultaneously learn where they will be doing their residency training.

On this year's Match Day, held on March 18 at the Mobile Convention Center, USA College of Medicine seniors matched in 16 states, with 46 students matching out-of-state and 26 students matching in the state of Alabama. Twenty-one of the students matching in Alabama matched at USA Health.

Dr. Melody Twilley Zeidan pins her residency match during the USA Health Match Day event in March.



15th annual GO Run set for September

The 15th annual GO Run 5K race and one-mile fun run will take place on Saturday, Sept. 17 at USA.

Proceeds from the GO Run, presented by the Catranis Family Charitable Foundation, support gynecologic cancer research at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute.

Early detection, prevention and treatment advancements are continuing, thanks in part to the long-standing community support that GO Run receives. Online registration will be available at usahealthsystem.com/gorun.



USA Health hosts A Night Honoring Healers

A Night Honoring Healers, presented by The Mapp Family Foundation, will take place on Thursday, Oct. 13 at the Mobile Convention Center.

The event celebrates the academic mission of USA Health and honors the remarkable stories of USA Health care team members in action as they provide exceptional, compassionate care to their patients.

A Night Honoring Healers will also include an After Party, featuring live entertainment, immediately following the program and dinner. For more information, visit usahealthsystem.com/healers.



Goldwater Scholars

Two University of South Alabama undergraduate students have been named 2022 Goldwater Scholars, a prestigious national science, technology, engineering and math scholarship program that emphasizes research and a desire to pursue an academic or industry research career.

Ivy Nguyen and Noel Godang, both juniors majoring in biomedical sciences, are this year's recipients.

Since his freshman year, Godang has been researching with his mentor, Dr. Glen Borchert, in the USA College of Medicine on noncoding RNAs and their roles in oncogenesis.

Nguyen has spent the past two years conducting synthetic organic chemistry research in Dr. David Forbes's lab.

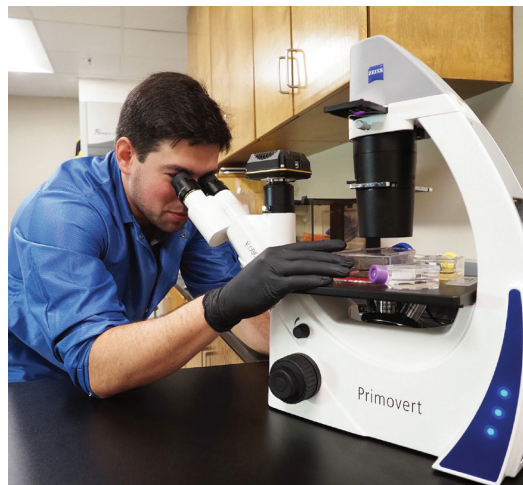
About 25 percent of those nominated to the national competition receive a Goldwater scholarship. Winners receive \$7,500 per year for their remaining time as undergraduates to help cover the cost of tuition, fees, books, and room and board.

Majors added in Marine Sciences, Environmental and Sustainability Sciences

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education approved two new undergraduate programs in the School of Marine and Environmental Sciences in March. South students are now able to pursue bachelor's degrees in marine sciences and in environmental and sustainability sciences.

"USA is uniquely positioned geographically and intellectually to help train the next generation of marine and environmental scientists," said Dr. Sean Powers, director of the School of Marine and Environmental Sciences. "We have a world-renowned faculty of marine scientists and, as the only four-year public university in Alabama with daily access to the coast and ocean, USA is a natural place for both programs."

Powers cites growing student demand and interest in marine and environmental sciences as the catalyst for adding the two majors. They are the first offered by the program, which traditionally has focused on graduate education and research. The University also has invested heavily in resources, including new faculty hires and the renovation of the Education Outreach Building on the north side of campus that now houses a teaching auditorium, classrooms and laboratories.



Students will have direct access to the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, providing a unique educational experience as well as experiential learning opportunities. Nearby natural marine laboratories include the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, Mobile Bay and the Gulf of Mexico.



USA Honors College students *Clorissa Morgan, Nicole Lemon, Mitchell Chambers* and Honors College Interim Dean *Dr. Douglas Marshall* attended the Oxford Consortium for Human Rights workshop in England.

Students attend human rights workshop in England

Dr. Douglas Marshall, Honors College interim dean, and three University of South Alabama students, attended the Oxford Consortium for Human Rights workshop in England in March.

The consortium hosts teaching and research seminars on human rights, global conflict, humanitarian aid, peacebuilding and related subjects. The organization's goal is to understand and develop constructive solutions to the problems of today, drawing scholars and students from a wide variety of disciplines.

Mitchell Chambers, a senior from Montevallo, Ala., attended the workshop. His favorite experience was hearing from humanitarians such as Dr. David Mwambari, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide and Asma Awan, a humanitarian with the Red Cross who has worked in conflict zones around the world.

"Being able to hear from the people who are on the ground doing the work was eye-opening," Chambers said. "They really surprised me and upset my preconceived notions of what humanitarians actually do."



SIX HONORED AT THE 17TH ANNUAL DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI & SERVICE AWARDS

The USA National Alumni Association honored five individuals and USA Health for their outstanding accomplishments during the 17th annual Distinguished Alumni and Service Awards gala in March at the MacQueen Alumni Center. "After a year's hiatus due to the pandemic, we are delighted to have the opportunity to recognize the achievements of our alumni and friends," said Margaret Sullivan, vice president for development and alumni relations. "These individuals have shown outstanding leadership in their respective careers, to the University and in their communities."





“WE ARE HONORED TO RECOGNIZE THESE FIVE INDIVIDUALS AND USA HEALTH, AND WE ARE GRATEFUL TO CALL THEM PART OF THE SOUTH FAMILY. THEY REPRESENT THE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS OUR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS ARE MAKING IN OUR REGION AND THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.”

Jim Moore, president of the USA
National Alumni Association Board of Directors



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD
MAJ. GEN. WILLIAM JOSEPH
“JOE” HARTMAN '89

A Mobile native, Maj. Gen. Joseph Hartman graduated from the University of South Alabama in 1989 with a bachelor's degree in political science.

Following graduation, Hartman entered active military duty as a second lieutenant and has served as infantryman, military intelligence officer and a cyberspace officer during his career.

Hartman currently commands the Cyber National Mission Force (CNMF) at Fort Meade, Maryland. CNMF plans, directs and synchronizes full-spectrum cyberspace operations to deter, disrupt and, if necessary, defeat adversary cyber actors to defend the United States.

Previously, Hartman served as deputy commanding general, Joint Force Headquarters-Cyber (JFHQ-C), Army Cyber Command. The JFHQ-C provides cyberspace support to U.S. Central Command, U.S. Africa Command and U.S. Northern Command.

Hartman's service has taken him to assignments in Liberia, Albania, Zaire, the Balkans, Turkey, South Korea and Afghanistan.

He holds a Master of Military Art and Science from Air University and the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Hartman has received numerous awards including the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Joint Commission Medal, the Army Commendation Medal and the Army Achievement Medal.

In 2018, Hartman was inducted into the McGill-Toolen Catholic High School Hall of Fame.

Hartman and his wife, Kathryn '91, have two children, Isabel and Joseph. They reside in McLean, Virginia.



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD
MR. CLYDE HIGGS '97

As the son of a master sergeant in the U.S. Air Force, Clyde Higgs grew up in locations ranging from North Carolina and Mississippi to California and Madrid, Spain.

After graduating from Ocean Springs High School, Higgs chose the University of South Alabama and earned a Bachelor of Arts in psychology in 1997. At South, Higgs was an active member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. and served as a Student Government Association senator.

He went on to complete a master's in public administration from East Carolina University and secured the prestigious James E. Webb Internship for Minority Graduate Students at the Smithsonian.

Higgs spent his early career serving in jobs supporting technology incubation, acceleration and commercialization in North Carolina and Texas before taking a position leading the North Carolina Research Campus, a multibillion-dollar economic revitalization effort.

In 2015, Higgs accepted the position of chief operating officer for Atlanta BeltLine Inc., the 22-mile trail that links 45 neighborhoods across the city with multi-use trails, parks and a modern streetcar along a historic rail corridor. After four years in that role, he was named the organization's chief executive officer and president.

When the BeltLine is completed in 2030, it is expected to have generated 30,000 new full-time jobs and 5,600 affordable workforce housing units within walking distance of the urban land use development project.



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD
MRS. MARTHA PEEK, M.ED. '78

A native of Bayou La Batre, Martha Peek received a Bachelor of Science from the University of Alabama and, in 1978, a Master of Education from the University of South Alabama.

Peek began her 46-year career in education as a teacher at Alba School in Bayou La Batre. Over the years she served as principal, assistant superintendent and deputy superintendent before being named superintendent of the Mobile County Public School System in 2012. Peek was the first female to hold this position in the school system's 180-year history.

In addition to her extensive education career, Peek has served as a volunteer leader in the community, serving on the boards of United Way of Southwest Alabama, Junior Achievement of Mobile and as a representative on the American Heart Association's National Superintendent Roundtable.

Peek is a graduate of Leadership Alabama's Class of XXVI and, in 2015, AL.com named her one of the Women Who Shape the State, which is awarded annually to individuals who are affecting position change in their neighborhoods, communities, regions and beyond.

During her tenure as superintendent, Peek established a leadership roundtable and signature academy councils that linked businesses, industry and higher education with the Mobile County Public Schools to inform curriculum design and support the development of student career pathways.

Peek and her husband, Tyler '76, live in Bayou La Batre.



V. GORDON MOULTON
DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD
 THE HONORABLE HARVEY
 “LES” BARNETT JR. ’74

The Honorable Harvey “Les” Barnett Jr. graduated from the University of South Alabama in 1974 with a Bachelor of Arts in history.

While a student at South, Barnett participated in the Model United Nations and served as attorney general in the Student Government Association.

In 1988 Barnett co-founded Omniphone, a telecommunications equipment design and manufacturing company, where he served as president and CEO until he retired in 2008. Three years later, in 2011, Barnett accepted a position of director of the Center for Forensics, Information Technology and Security (CFITS) within the University of South Alabama’s School of Computing.

For more than a decade he has dedicated his career to advancing STEM education for both higher and secondary school students. Barnett developed the CFITS Partner School Program that offers cyber-focused K-12 STEM programs through the Hands-on Learning Lab (HOLLA) and summer camps, serving more than 6,000 students annually.

In addition to his professional achievements, Barnett is active in public service. In 2007, and again in 2014, he was appointed to the Alabama Educational Television Commission for Alabama Public Television, where he will serve until 2023. Barnett is a member of the Industry Advisory Board for Baker High School, Mary G. Montgomery High School, Davidson High School and Vigor High School.

In 2012, Barnett was elected as a United States presidential elector from Alabama and currently serves as First Congressional District chair.

He and his wife, Alleen ’79, live in Mobile.



WILLIAM J. “HAPPY”
FULFORD INSPIRATIONAL
ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
 DR. CARL C. MOORE

Dr. Carl Moore began his 43-year career at the University of South Alabama in 1971 where he served in many roles, including 25 years as dean of the Mitchell College of Business.

The Mitchell College of Business experienced significant growth during Moore’s tenure. Under his leadership, the college achieved AACSB accreditation — the longest-standing, most recognized form of specialized accreditation an institution and its business programs can earn.

Moore was instrumental in establishing the Alabama Banking School in the Mitchell College of Business, as well as creating the Mitchell Learning Resource Center, the Melton Center for Entrepreneurship and the Financial Analysis Center.

Working with the Mitchell family, Moore helped establish the Mitchell Scholars Program, which offers elite business students the opportunity to develop to their full potential.

During his time as dean, Moore spearheaded efforts to establish the MBA and doctorate programs in the Mitchell College of Business.

In 2008, Moore served as the interim vice president for academic affairs. He also served as chair of the Employee Annual Giving Campaign and the Retiree Annual Giving Campaign, respectively, in 2008 and 2016.

Moore has made significant philanthropic contributions to the University as well as USA Health, establishing the Dr. Carl C. Moore Endowed Scholarship in the Mitchell College of Business and the Linda B. Moore Memorial Endowment Fund at USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute in memory of his late wife. He also served on the initial fundraising and steering committee to create the Mitchell Cancer Institute.

Moore resides in Mobile and has two grown children, Eblen ’98, MBA ’09 and Coleman Moore ’16, and four grandchildren.



COMMUNITY PARTNER AWARD
 USA HEALTH

Beginning with the founding of the USA College of Medicine in 1973, USA Health is the only academic medical center along the upper Gulf Coast.

It provides excellent healthcare to the region’s diverse population at USA Health University Hospital and the renowned USA Health Children’s & Women’s hospital, one of only five freestanding hospitals in the country dedicated to the healthcare of children and women. Continuous research and technological advancements keep USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute at the forefront of cancer treatment and outcomes.

USA Health employs 3,900 clinical and nonclinical staff members, including some 180 academic physicians who serve dual roles treating patients and teaching the next generation of medical doctors.

As an academic medical center, USA Health offers unique innovations brought about by its extensive research capabilities and education programs. This includes clinical trials and new treatments to residency programs and other opportunities for educating young medical professionals.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, USA Health partnered with the City of Mobile to establish a drive-thru testing center and provide testing at local nursing homes, correctional facilities, as well as for the entire Mobile community. Since the health crisis began in 2020, USA Health has administered more than 116,000 COVID-19 tests and provided 106,000 vaccines to the citizens of Mobile.

For almost 50 years, USA Health has continued to transform medicine along the Gulf Coast, helping people lead longer, better lives.



ENGINEERING HER FUTURE

When Keira Ross walks through Shelby Hall, every engineering student seems to know her, need her, or have something to say to her.

One junior is worried about a test Ross will be giving for one of her professors. One senior promises Ross a copy of his resumé to share with a recruiter. A group of students greet her in the common area that is her favorite hangout on the fourth floor.

“We were studying there until 2 a.m. last night,” she said, shaking her head. “I have a lot of things during the day, so I default to nights.”

Ross, a 22-year-old senior, is president of South’s chapter of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers and the National Society of Black Engineers. She’s also a student ambassador for the College of Engineering, has served as a senator in the Student Government Association and is a member of Jaguar Productions.

“I’m a member of the Vietnamese Student Association, too, which is kind of strange,” she said. “One of my friends is Vietnamese, and he roped me into it.”

“SHE’S GOING TO DO GREAT THINGS, I GUARANTEE YOU THAT. SHE’S SUCH A HARD WORKER AND WONDERFUL PERSON.”

For two summers, Ross was an intern at a Phillips 66 oil refinery in Belle Chasse, La., south of New Orleans. After graduation, Ross will begin work as a chemical engineer for ExxonMobil in Baytown, Texas, outside Houston.

In Shelby Hall, students and faculty admire her energy and enthusiasm, along with her unwavering willingness to help others.

“She’s a fantastic student,” said Dr. Kevin West, professor of chemical engineering. “She’s also an excellent leader.”



“I don’t want people to feel sorry for me. My mom raised me to be a fighter.”

Jim Moore, president of the USA National Alumni Association, is one of her biggest boosters. He helped Ross secure her first internship at Phillips 66, where he has worked for more than 30 years.

“My wife and I met her at a tailgating party for the College of Engineering,” Moore said. “We talked to a lot of bright students that day, but when we left, I asked my wife, ‘OK, which student impressed you the most?’ And she said, ‘Oh, hands down – Keira.’ And I said, ‘Me, too.’”

“She’s going to do great things, I guarantee you that,” Moore said. “She’s such a hard worker and wonderful person. I don’t have a daughter, but if I did, I’d hope she’d be like Keira.”

The Eloping Engineer

When Ross isn’t studying and leading student groups at South, she works part-time as a waitress in downtown Mobile.

“I make it fit my schedule,” she said. “I work weekends and late shifts.”

In December, Ross also found time to get married. Her husband, Thomas Benefield, is a 24-year-old Army veteran who works as an industrial radiographer.

“We were planning this big, elaborate wedding, but then I thought, this is a lot of money,” Ross said. “And it would have been right when I was graduating and starting a job in Texas.”

Ross grew up in Jacksonville, Ala., where her mother works as a supervisor at Sam’s Club. She has a younger brother, Antonio, who’s in high school, and a younger sister, Amiaya, who’s a sophomore studying hospitality and tourism management at South.

When her parents divorced while Ross was in high school, the family had to separate, living with different people. She worked two part-time jobs, at McDonalds and Waffle House, to help them afford to get back together. She doesn’t talk much about that part of her life.

“I don’t want people to feel sorry for me,” she said. “My mom raised me to be a fighter.”

When one of her Waffle House managers asked about college plans, Ross said she wasn’t sure if she was going and didn’t know what she would study. When he asked about her interests, she said math and chemistry, and he suggested she speak with a chemical engineer he knew.

“I know it’s crazy,” she said, “but that’s literally how I chose chemical engineering.”

Senior Project and First Job

Ross toured South when she traveled to Mobile during her senior year of high school. She went to prom with a friend who was a student at the Alabama School of Math and Science.

At the University of South Alabama, Ross earned the Stallworth Chemical Engineering Scholarship, along with a National Science Foundation scholarship through the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation program.

In high school, she was smart enough to get away with studying only on the night before tests. In college, she had to learn better study habits. The chemical engineering curriculum was a challenge.

“Me and my classmates have struggled together,” Ross said, “so that makes it OK.”

Ross doesn’t have much time for extracurricular activities. She and her husband live near campus. She and her sister like to dance along to YouTube videos.

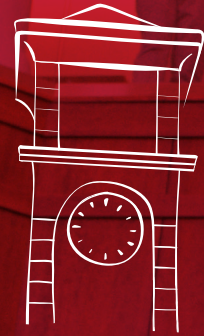
For her final semester, Ross is working long hours on a senior design project. Distractions include finding an apartment in Texas, which seems frightfully expensive.

She’s nervous about starting work, but thinks ExxonMobil will be a good career move. She’s just getting her start as a chemical engineer.

“I need to network as much as possible, and Houston is the place for that,” Ross said. “It’s Chem-E heaven.”



Watch Keira’s South Says video.



“I’M CONVINCED THAT, TOGETHER, WE CAN TAKE THIS UNIVERSITY TO THE NEXT LEVEL IN EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND HEALTHCARE AS THE FLAGSHIP OF THE GULF COAST.”

RALLYING SUPPORT

President Jo Bonner begins to share a vision of South as the ‘Flagship of the Gulf Coast.’

When Jo Bonner meets a student on campus, he wants to know three things. “What are you studying?” “Where are you from?” “How did we convince you to come to South?”

The first two questions set up the third, which gets to the big picture of what Bonner wants to know and what he’s spent considerable time trying to understand since arriving Jan. 1: How is the University of South Alabama going to grow?

The answer will determine South’s direction for the foreseeable future.

“South has come a long way. We’re still a young university whose progress is owed to the presidents who came before me, our outstanding faculty, staff and students, and the more than 90,000 alumni who serve on a daily basis as examples of South’s promise,” Bonner said. “South has a proud history, a foundation that allows us to focus on what is right in front of us. I’m convinced that together we can take this University to the next level in education, research and healthcare as the Flagship of the Gulf Coast.”

Grassroots marketing is just part of Bonner’s campaign to reintroduce South to old friends and find new audiences across the region and state. But as a former U.S. congressman and chief of staff to Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey, Bonner clearly understands its importance.

There are big plans, including shuttling high school students to campus on buses as a recruitment effort, along with small touches, such as the spirit buttons Bonner keeps in his pocket to hand out.

In May, he traveled to promote South in Alabama’s Wiregrass region, and he brought a potent weapon: Student

Government Association President Camille Bonura, who is from Enterprise and whose family owns car dealerships throughout the area.

The month before, he welcomed college counselors from area high schools to a reception at Hancock Whitney Stadium. When Bonner’s not recruiting new students, he’s working the crowd at Jaguar sporting events, thanking donors and promoting South to anyone who will listen. His calendar is full and, at the same time, open for anyone who calls.

Bonner also spent his first 100 days on a listening tour, traveling to South’s colleges and schools, administrative offices and USA Health facilities to get feedback from faculty, students and staff. An inauguration is planned for fall.

“I’m keenly aware that I’m the new guy,” Bonner said. “While I believe I can contribute, there is a tremendous amount of talent and knowledge throughout our institution. It was important to hear from members of our community about their challenges and concerns, as well as explore opportunities where we can grow – with additional students, investments and research.”

Old Hand, New Mission

At a downtown meeting of the Rotary Club, where he promised closer ties between the city and the University, Bonner needed no introduction. He’d already worked with many of the business and community leaders in attendance. He’s also a former club member who made sure to mention the “Four-Way Test,” the moral code adopted by Rotary International.



Bonner, 62, talked about feeling like he was coming home to Mobile. An old hand with a new mission.

“How many of you have a relationship with the University of South Alabama?” he asked, and saw nearly every Rotarian raise a hand. “Outstanding. That’s exactly what I was hoping to see.”

After his speech, people lined up to meet Bonner. He offered business cards and a hands-on approach.

“We need your help,” he told them. “We need you to encourage young people to consider the University of South Alabama. We want to meet your students in the president’s office.”

Elizabeth Stevens, president of the Rotary Club of Mobile, has known Bonner for more than 30 years. He’s already part of the community. Few have more experience in public affairs on the Gulf Coast.

“We’re thrilled for the opportunity to work with Jo,” she said. “He understands the city, the state, the nation. In the downtown community, we want there to be a strong relationship with the University.”

Bonner’s appearances also allow him to spotlight recent good news for the University and USA Health: \$140 million in funding for a new College of Medicine building, a new School of Marine and Environmental Sciences, the opening of a freestanding emergency department in West Mobile and the Mapp Family Campus for healthcare in Baldwin County. There was growth last year in freshman enrollment, and applications for fall are up.

“We’re thrilled for the opportunity to work with Jo. He understands the city, the state, the nation. In the downtown community, we want there to be a strong relationship with the University.”

In May, Bonner announced one of his biggest decisions yet when he named Dr. Andi Kent as provost and executive vice president.

Kent, who served in both roles on an interim basis during Bonner’s first several months, accompanied him on many of his meetings with students and faculty. He wanted to hear about the successes of the University and what it’s doing well. He also wanted to hear about the challenges facing the University and what it could do better.

“It’s been pretty powerful,” Kent said. “What I’ve learned is that he is sincere, and he is committed. I’ve witnessed him take something a student or faculty member has said to him and three days or two weeks later share it back to another group as something we need to think about, or something great that we’re doing, in an appropriate context. It means so much to him that it becomes part of his conversation.

“These tours are helping him build a broad-based team. His team is big. It’s not just the President’s Council and the people who work in his office. His team is actually 14,000 students and 8,000 employees who are looking to further the mission of the University of South Alabama and USA Health.”

Jim Moore, president of the USA National Alumni Association, didn’t know Bonner very well, but he was seated at the president’s table for an alumni dinner in March. The hall was packed and service was a little slow getting started. Finally, Bonner got up, grabbed two pitchers, and served water and iced tea to his neighbors.

“Can you imagine a university president doing that?” Moore asked. “My wife was so impressed. Little things like that give a great impression.”

Questions and Stories

In some ways, Bonner’s tours across campus and the region feel like a campaign swing, where he’s meeting constituents and asking for their support, while hearing their concerns and promising to do what he can.

After more than 40 years in politics, he’s comfortable in that role.

Bonner – the Jo is short for Josiah – enjoys shaking hands with alumni and bumping fists with students. He’s got a lot of questions. He tells a lot of stories.

When a communications student says he’s from Albertville, a small city in north Alabama, Bonner already knows that it’s called “The Fire Hydrant Capital of the World.” When the student says he works as an intern at a Mobile television station, Bonner says, “Tell Peter I said hello.”

When another student says she transferred from Alabama State University, he asks if she knows Dr. Quinton Ross, president of the university. She smiles and says why, yes, she does.

"He's an old friend of mine," Bonner replied. "He's called three times to check up on me."

Bonner enjoys sharing a self-deprecating sense of humor with students. One of his favorite stories is about finishing third in a three-man race to become Student Government Association president at the University of Alabama. He also tried and failed to become Big Al, the school mascot.

When Bonner doesn't know the answer to an academic question, he doesn't hesitate to say so. He describes himself as a nontraditional university president. He jokes that being a retired politician makes him a statesman.

When the College Republicans at South asked him to speak to their group, he said sure – if the first meeting included the College Democrats.

"I'm buying the pizza," he said. "The goal is to talk about what we can do together to make this campus a better place."

During that pizza summit, Bonner's wife, Janée, sat across from him. She's a Mobile native whose parents were longtime Jaguar basketball season ticket holders. Pictures of SouthPaw and Ms. Pawla with the Bonner's children, Lee and Robins, make regular appearances in family photo books.

"One thing that anyone who has spent any amount of time in Mobile knows is that the University of South Alabama means so much to the community," said Janée, who has jumped into her role as first lady and is often seen with her husband at University events. "It's in our region's DNA, and we're grateful to have this opportunity to work with South's students, faculty, staff and alumni."

"Jo has a talent for working with people, especially younger people and students. He is passionate about their overall success and well-roundedness, and I know he's going to bring all his energy to this job."

Listening and Talking

Dr. Alvin Williams, interim dean of the Mitchell College of Business, has seen Bonner use that energy in wooing donors, recruiting students and meeting faculty. He's made several trips to the Mitchell College in the first few months, including bringing by Alabama Labor Secretary Fitzgerald Washington to speak with students.

"The most obvious thing is his people skills," Williams said of Bonner. "He's very comfortable building relationships. He's among the most careful listeners I've encountered. It's important for him to know where the college is headed and what he can do to facilitate that. I think he sees himself as a facilitator."

Bonner talks about getting calls and visits from other university presidents in Alabama. One offered free advice on moving from state politics to higher education.

**“HE’S VERY COMFORTABLE
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS.
HE’S AMONG THE MOST CAREFUL
LISTENERS I’VE ENCOUNTERED.”**

"He said, 'Jo, you might not want to go up to a bunch of academics and just tell 'em what you want to do,'" he said. "You might want to listen to them and learn from them first."

So that's what Bonner has been doing – listening and learning. Professors from accounting to visual arts have gotten a chance to speak their minds. Along the way, his vision for supporting South's mission is taking shape: A university that punches above its weight in academics and research, with a growing student population, an active campus life and a thriving academic health system that makes South a first-choice institution.

"Our goal is to dominate the market between New Orleans and Tallahassee," Bonner said. "We can do this because we are an attractive, affordable option for students and their families across the state and beyond, especially for those living in Coastal Alabama, along the Mississippi Gulf Coast or in Northwest Florida."

"And if you're in those areas, we intend to become your university, no matter what school colors you may have in your closet."

Beth Shepard, an associate librarian and 2021-22 president of the Faculty Senate, has met with Bonner several times. She shared her concerns about University support, particularly for academic research, and public outreach, especially in the Black community. He agreed that these were important issues.

"I think he has a very unique set of skills that were honed by his previous experience in politics," Shepard said. "Community building, stakeholder development – those are things I've seen him bring to South. A real focus on bringing relevant people to the table. And that is encouraging."

"You have to recognize his enthusiasm for his new role and his love for South. I do and really appreciate it."



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USA HEALTH

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LEARNING TO EAT *for wellness*

All of us have heard, for as long as we can remember, that eating our fruits and vegetables, limiting our sugar intake and staying away from saturated fats will help keep the doctor away. As a steady stream of research findings demonstrates, that advice is even more important than we realized. And from all this comes the field of culinary medicine.

Culinary medicine is a relatively new, evidence-based field in medicine that blends the art of food and cooking with the science of medicine. The practice is aimed at helping people reach good, personal medical decisions about accessing and eating high-quality meals that help prevent and treat disease and restore well-being.

Culinary medicine falls under the USA Health Integrative Health and Wellness program spearheaded by Robert Israel, M.D. A long-time primary care provider in Mobile, Israel not only is an advocate for culinary medicine but is a practitioner himself.

“Our eating habits have a significant impact on our health, maybe even more than we initially thought,” Israel said. “Through good eating habits, we can change the course of some chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, while still being able to eat flavorful foods that are enjoyable.”

People throughout the Mobile area got a taste of culinary medicine in April when USA Health hosted John Wesley McWhorter, DrPH. McWhorter is one of the nation’s leaders in culinary medicine. He serves as an assistant professor in health promotion and behavioral sciences and director of culinary nutrition for the Nourish Program at the Michael and Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living at the University of Texas Health Science Center School of Public Health. He is an appointed faculty member at McGovern Medical School, serves as a national spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and is an advisory council member for the Teaching Kitchen Collaborative.



Watch Dr. Israel speak about the Culinary Medicine program at USA Health.



“The Gulf Coast is an area with a world of flavor but also a huge number of people affected by poor eating habits, including too much added sugar, too many processed foods and, unfortunately, foods that are devoid of nutritional value.”

During a three-day visit to Mobile, McWhorter worked with current and future healthcare providers, sharing the message of how to work with patients to understand the importance of good eating habits, and held an open forum for the public.

During one session, McWhorter utilized the USA Health demonstration kitchen located at University Commons to show medical students and providers how healthy meals can also be tasty.

“This is such a great opportunity for people in our area to hear how what we eat impacts our health conditions and how changing our eating habits can make us feel better and help prevent and/or reduce the impact of chronic health conditions,” said Margaret Sullivan, vice president for development and alumni relations at the University of South Alabama and another driving force behind USA Health’s culinary medicine efforts. “Unfortunately, Alabama ranks high in too many chronic diseases that are impacted by our diets. Dr. McWhorter’s workshops were a perfect way to further advance USA Health’s culinary medicine initiatives.”

Now, USA Health’s culinary medicine program has become part of the Teaching Kitchen Collaborative (TKC), a global network of 35 teaching kitchens. The TKC is an invitational network of thought-leading organizations using teaching kitchen facilities and concepts as catalysts for enhanced personal and public health across medical, corporate, school and community settings.

“The Gulf Coast is an area with a world of flavor but also a huge number of people affected by poor eating habits, including too much added sugar, too many processed foods

and, unfortunately, foods that are devoid of nutritional value,” Israel added. “Changing that has been shown to improve people’s health and reduce disease. Helping people learn how to make those modifications is the goal of our program.”

As USA Health expands, so does its culinary medicine effort. The physician office building on the Mapp Family Campus in Fairhope will be home to another demonstration kitchen. With the facility scheduled to open in fall 2022, people in Baldwin County will have a more convenient location to learn about the value and importance of healthier cooking and eating.

“Baldwin County has been the fastest growing county in all of Alabama for the past decade,” Sullivan said. “This influx of people has stretched the healthcare system, especially in an area that already is considered underserved. USA Health is helping to alleviate some of that strain, while at the same time bringing in new programs like the culinary medicine effort that are the hallmarks of academic medicine.”

When fully completed, the Mapp Family Campus will meld advanced medicine with wellness. Water features, walking trails, outdoor education and gathering areas will provide a serene and beautiful setting to engage patients, employees, students and others drawn to the campus by services provided in a freestanding ambulatory surgical center and a physician office building. In keeping with the teaching mission of USA Health, the Mapp Family Campus will also host wellness programming to support patients and others in the community and provide a novel practice setting for educating and training future healthcare providers.



*Luke Langlinais '23
Pre-physical therapy major
Ocean Springs, Miss.*

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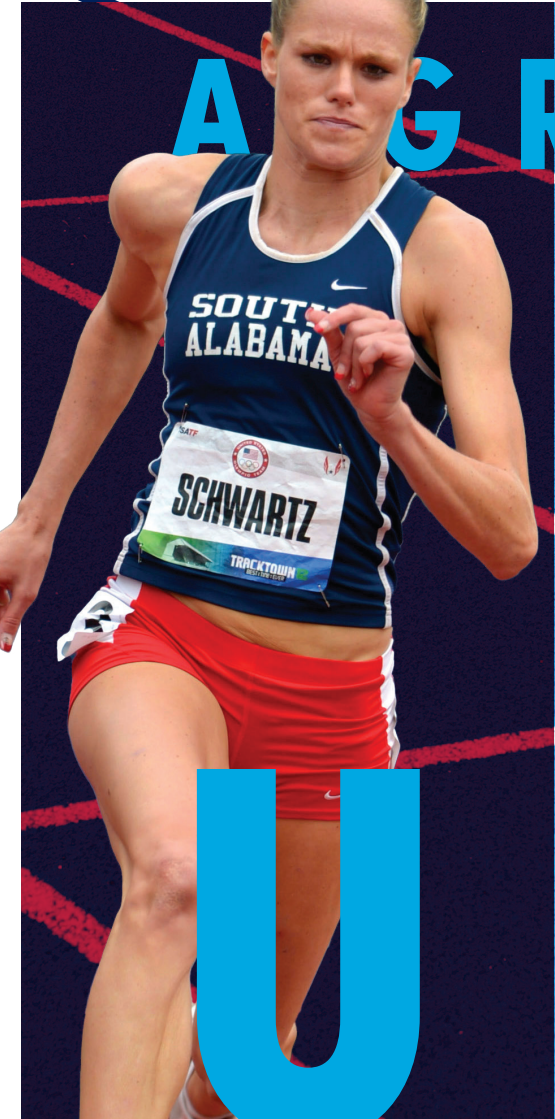


Oozeball, the annual fundraiser hosted by USA Southerners, returned on April 9 after a two-year hiatus.

Korey Shively, USA Southerners vice-president, planned the 32nd annual Oozeball Mud Volleyball Tournament: Oozelympics! Thirty teams battled for victory in the mud pits and enjoyed a day of playing in 18-32 inches of mud.

The Southerners secured more than \$11,000 in corporate sponsorships to support the Southerners' Spotting Excellence Scholarship that will be awarded in 2023.

Special thanks to title sponsor, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians. Additional sponsors include Chicken Salad Chick, USA Student Government Association, ABC Supply Co. Inc., OWA, RGG Cardiology, Gotta Go Portables, Joe Bullard Automotive Group, PPM Consultants, Traditions at South, Walters Controls, Inc., USA Center for Academic Excellence, Red Beard Outfitters, Bryant Bank, Global USA, Carpe Diem Coffee and Tea Co., Margaret and Joe Sullivan, Bellator, and Edward Jones.



A GREAT

RUN

From a star college athlete to Olympic hopeful to new mom, Lindsay Flach '12 reflects on her different roles and how South helped shape her future.



Flach holds her son, Rylan, during a workout.

“I just kept telling myself I was going out on my terms.”

Track and field star Lindsay Flach has had – as she aptly put it – a great run. The decorated heptathlete earned a slew of NCAA honors as an undergraduate at South, competed in three Olympic trials (including 2021, when she was 18 weeks pregnant), and maintained a pro career for nearly a decade.

In the physically punishing world of the heptathlon – a two-day, seven-event sport – not many athletes have the staying power to maintain such a long career.

Now, officially (mostly) retired from professional competition, Flach has eased into the next chapter of her life, juggling parenthood and her work running a gym in Victoria, Texas. From this new vantage point, she’s able to reflect on the lessons learned during her athletic career.

At the Starting Block

Originally from Wisconsin, Flach came to South Alabama as Lindsay Schwartz, a high school track star and member of the state champion volleyball team who was attracted to USA because it was one of the few schools that would let her pursue both sports. Despite those early bona fides, her college track career got off to a rocky start. “My freshman year was really rough,” Flach said. The transition from high school to college knocked her off her game: All the athletes around her were talented. She was 17 hours away from home and was juggling two sports.

Her sophomore year was a turning point. “I actually did not know what the heptathlon was until I got to college,” Flach admitted. “But I was so used to multi-sport, multi-events, that I said, this will probably fit me well. And it obviously did.” At her first conference meet, she placed second in the indoor pentathlon. At her first heptathlon, she placed first.

Her junior year, she quit the volleyball team and went all in on track, training about 20 hours a week. “We were the first ones out at the track and the last ones to leave,” she said. “School, practice and homework were my life, but I loved it.”

Throughout her college career, she had a habit of finding herself “on the bubble” – right on the cusp of having a score that would qualify her for the next round of competition. “I was not guaranteed a spot, let’s just say that. I was on the very edge of, if one more person breaks the score that I put up, I would be out,” Flach said.

Her senior year, she earned a qualifying mark that put her in that familiar spot on the bubble. This time, it was on an international stage: the 2012 Olympic trials, where she was poised to compete with South on her chest. “I was on the plane out there, and I didn’t know if I was actually going to compete, or if I was going to be sitting in the stands,” she said. It wasn’t until she got off the plane that she saw she’d been officially accepted. “I’ve had a couple of those nerve-wracking times in my career.”

Just Go Run

That fall, she came back to South for an encore season of volleyball. After that, she bade farewell to college and headed west to compete for a track club in California.

Over the course of her career, Flach competed in more national championships than she can remember – somewhere in the neighborhood of 18, though she can’t say for sure. During that time, she made nine USA teams, competing in Italy, France, Germany and Canada.

During the 2018 USA Track and Field Championships, Flach found herself in seventh place with one event to go: the 800-meter run. “Once you start to learn the ‘hep,’ you kind of know how many points and how many seconds you have to be away from someone to beat them,” she says. This time was different, though. “My coach was literally just like, go run, and things will take care of themselves. So that’s what I did. I went and ran.”

That simple directive pulled her from seventh place to the podium. “Now, looking back on it, I wish I would have done that more often,” she said.

Flach planned for 2020 to be her last year as a professional athlete. As she prepared for her grand finale, she turned over her entire life to training. She saved money, quit her job, and moved three hours away from her then-fiancé, Randy Flach, a former Jags track and field coach. Then COVID hit, casting a pall of uncertainty over the Olympics.

Like many people, Flach changed her plans. She and Randy got married and decided to start a family. And when a new date was set for the 2020 Olympic trials, she found that she would be competing four months pregnant.

“I just kept telling myself I was going out on my terms,” Flach said. Having watched many of her colleagues forced into retirement because of injuries, she was determined to write the final chapter of her pro career. She pressed on, despite months of debilitating morning sickness.

“I had a plan for my training, but I had to alter it almost every day,” Flach said. “When I would feel good, I would try to get hard workouts in, and the other days I would just do what I could. It was hard. I would do it all over, but I learned from that.”

The Road Ahead

Flach vacillates on whether she’s truly finished with her professional athletic career. “I think I’m done,” she said, followed a beat later with, “I can’t 100% say that. Right now, I say ‘definitely,’ because it’s impossible to work out with him (four-month-old son Rylan). But maybe that will change one day.”

She reflects on her years at South fondly, with a bit of wisdom gained with age. “You learn life; you learn how to be a good human being; you learn leadership skills; you learn job-quality skills,” Flach said. “It’s a combination of all these things, instead of just being a student, and you learn to push boundaries and uncomfortable zones.”

Laughing, she adds, “It’s all the lessons I wish I would have been taught at an earlier age. I learned from experience.”



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“Every dollar we are able to provide helps them to be one step closer to achieving their goals.”

Morgan VanGilder is one of the 44 students who will receive alumni association scholarships this year.

USA NATIONAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION TO SUPPORT \$100,000 WORTH OF SCHOLARSHIPS IN 2022-2023

For more than 20 years, the USA National Alumni Association has awarded merit-based student scholarships. The association will present 44 students for the 2022-2023 academic year with more than \$100,000 in scholarship funding.

The alumni association receives proceeds collected from the sale of specialty vehicle tags through the Alabama Department of Revenue. These funds, which total more than \$2 million, serve as the primary source for many of the scholarships.

Additionally, alumni have created named endowed funds to support student scholarships.

The National Alumni Association Board of Directors Scholarship, new in 2022, will award one student \$1,000 for the upcoming year.

“We are grateful to have the opportunity to award these deserving students with well-earned scholarships,” said Jim Moore, president of the USA National Alumni Association board of directors. “Every dollar we are able to provide helps them to be one step closer to achieving their goals.”

Morgan VanGilder is the newest recipient of the William Sirmon Endowed Graduate Student Scholarship, awarded annually to a graduate student at South.

“The National Alumni Association is honored to award the William Sirmon Endowed Graduate Student Scholarship to Morgan to assist her in completing her graduate degree,” said Karen Edwards, director of alumni relations. “We could not be more proud to be a part of helping her to achieve her dreams.”

VanGilder is pursuing her master’s degree in occupational therapy. She entered college with plans of eventually going to medical school until a mission trip to Honduras between her freshman and sophomore years changed everything.

It was there when she met a single mother with two young boys who were being assessed for a checkup and medication distribution. Neither of the boys would speak or interact with anyone. The mother informed VanGilder that the older boy had autism spectrum disorder and did not speak or participate in activities with other children. His younger brother did not speak or participate in social activities either, even though he did not have a diagnosis of autism.

“I tried everything I knew to play with these brothers and got nothing,” VanGilder said. “I knew that there was something I could do to increase their interactions with others. When I got home, I did a lot of research and stumbled upon occupational therapy and knew that was the career path for me.”

VanGilder will receive her master’s degree in December 2022. After that she will take her board examinations to become a registered occupational therapist. Her financial path toward her goal is a little easier thanks to the William Sirmon Endowed Graduate Student scholarship.

“The National Alumni Association, along with the development team at South, is full of amazing people,” she said. “It is an honor to accept this scholarship from them.”

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Jaguar Memoirs

Last year, hundreds of alumni shared memories of their time as students at South Alabama as part of the oral history project. These stories from alumni of all ages will be preserved for generations to come.

“I came from Hawaii, and going to the University of South Alabama was a big change for me. It had a different culture and different people, but I enjoyed the change of pace and learning new things. It was a really good experience for me.

“I’ve used my degree from South for my career, and I use the information that I learned every day. I’ve continued to grow and explore information technology. My major was computer science. It has been deeply useful to me throughout my life. Everything I learned at South served me well. South was the start of a lot of opportunities opening and broadening my horizons. I was able to expand my knowledge and experiences in the world, and I currently work in engineer security operations at Hawai’i Pacific Health.”

—Amy D. Caliboso '85
Bachelor of Science,
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