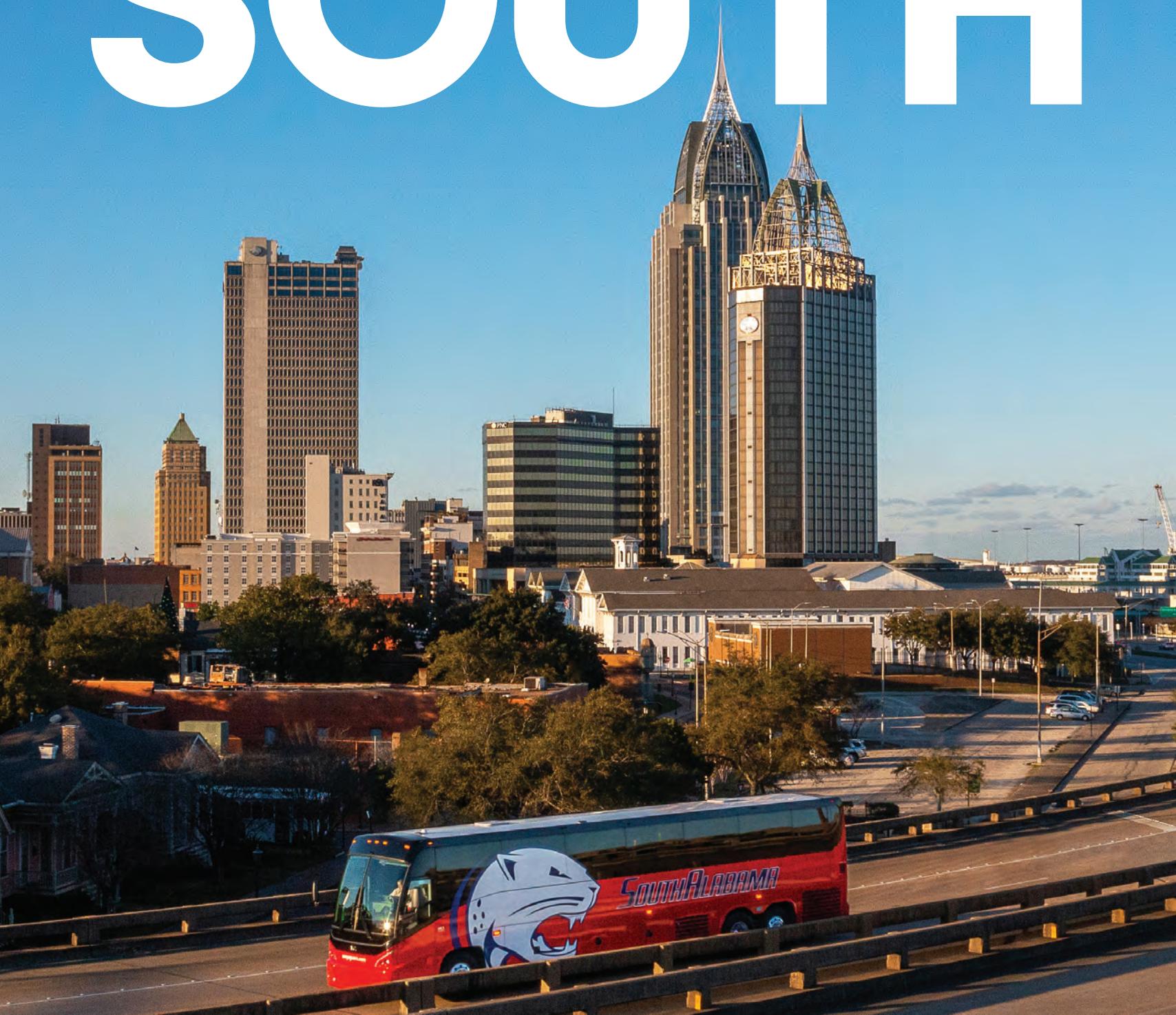


# SOUTH



## *Touring South: Flagship of the Gulf Coast*<sup>SM</sup>

### **Connect with Alumni**

Success lies in how you move forward and create it for yourself.

### **Student Recruitment**

"I feel like we are getting the VIP treatment."

### **Transforming Medicine**

Bringing academic healthcare to Baldwin County.

### **Jaguar Athletics**

Reggie Smith, a South guy through and through.

---

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

With a spirited start to 2023 and our 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a University approaching, my heart is full of gratitude and humility for the warm welcome extended to Janée and me during our first year as president and first lady. Together, we all have begun the important work of advancing our University as the Flagship of the Gulf Coast. What an exciting time this is for the South Alabama nation!

After a decade representing Alabama's First Congressional District in Washington, D.C., and several years in Montgomery working with Gov. Kay Ivey, it's good to be back home.

Our University community hit the ground running. The Winter 2022/Spring 2023 issue of South Magazine reflects what we can accomplish in partnership to advance the University's mission of promoting discovery, health and learning.

Our enrollment team continues to roll throughout the region on sparkling new Jag Athletics buses, bringing prospective students to campus and giving them a VIP tour. This semester, we've added even more schools elsewhere in Alabama and expanded into Coastal Mississippi.

In an effort to help our students succeed, we launched a second-year retention program. Early indications are extremely encouraging. At the same time, South Alabama was recognized by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities as one of only four finalist institutions nationwide for its 2022 Degree Completion Award. While recruiting new students is a top priority, we will never lose focus on helping our current students graduate on time, earning that first-class ticket to a brighter future.

New programs, such as our undergraduate classes in the School of Marine and Environmental Sciences, are a magnet to attract students from all over the country.

The vision of and investment in this new school, led by Dr. Sean Powers, helped us recruit several new faculty, including two alumni, and its programs have already had a record year in new grant funding.

Speaking of alumni, we visited with them at events last fall all the way from the Potomac River to the Pacific Ocean. I was also fortunate to meet with many of our alumni at sporting events, including during Alumni Reunion Weekend, as our Jaguar football team was well on its way to a record-breaking 10-3 season that included a trip to the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl!



The University Board of Trustees welcomed new leadership, including its first female chair pro tem in the University's history, along with a new trustee from Central Alabama.

On the Eastern Shore, the Mapp Family Campus continues to take shape in Fairhope – a testament to the generosity of Louis and Melinda Mapp and our commitment to expanding patient access to meet the needs of our community. Both our College of Nursing and the Whiddon College of Medicine celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries this year. We will also be breaking ground in the fall on a new, state-of-the-art medical school building.

Last September, I had the honor of being inaugurated as the fourth president of the University of South Alabama. I pledged then that, as a University, we will be student-minded and student-focused and ensure all are welcome at South. We will invest in our faculty, programs and state-of-the-art facilities to attract students, conduct research and treat patients. We will connect with our alumni and communities along the Gulf Coast. As a University with the only academic health center in our region, we will transform medicine to fit the unique needs of our community while educating and training the next generation of providers.

In short, the University of South Alabama will be the leading academic institution and healthcare provider throughout our region. I look forward to continuing this journey with you and always welcome your input and support for your University.

Go Jags!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jo Bonner". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jo Bonner, President  
University of South Alabama

  @jobonnerusa



# SOUTH

SOUTH Magazine is a publication of the Office of Development and 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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**Vice President for Marketing and Communications**  
Jim Berscheidt

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## Inside

- 5 View from the Bell Tower
- 6 News Briefs
- 10 Connect with Alumni: Dan Ollis '80
- 14 Student Recruitment: Jags on Tour
- 18 Alumni Reunion Weekend 2022
- 20 Transforming Medicine: A new medical office building at the Mapp Family Campus
- 24 Athletics: South Alabama Football's Reggie Smith
- 26 The Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine Turns 50
- 28 Program Feature: The School of Marine and Environmental Sciences brings alumni home
- 30 USA Board of Trustees: Making History



# 10

### Connect with Alumni

Dan Ollis '80 - Los Angeles, CA - Swanson-Ollis Interiors



# 30

### Arlene Mitchell

First female chair pro tem of the USA Board of Trustees



# 20

### Transforming Medicine

Medical office building opens at Mapp Family Campus

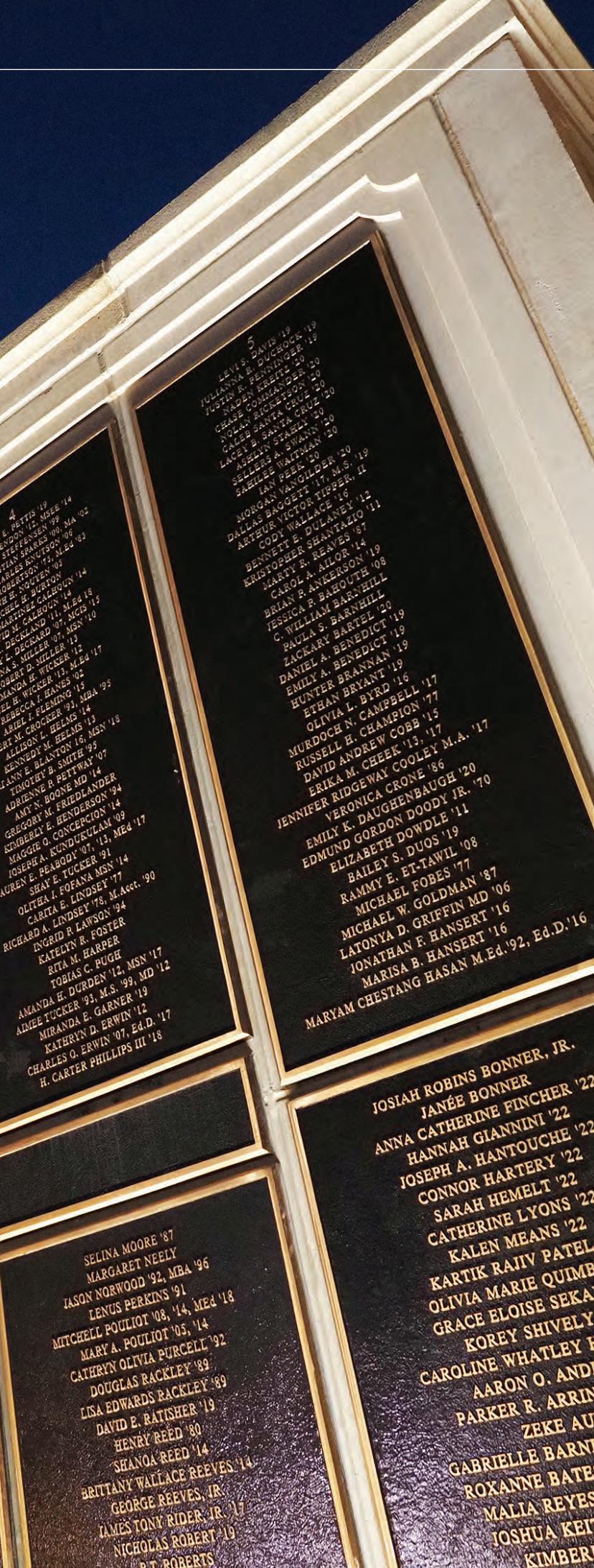


### A South Guy Through and Through

Reggie Smith, a walk-on from Pensacola, earned a scholarship before his fifth season of football at South Alabama.

# 24





In his Message from the President, President Bonner states, “Together, we all have begun the important work of advancing our University as the Flagship of the Gulf Coast. What an exciting time this is for the South Alabama nation!”

I couldn’t agree more!

President Bonner continues with saying that as a university, we will connect with alumni and communities. Likewise, the mission of the South Alabama National Alumni Association is to support and positively influence the goals of the University through an active relationship with the University, its alumni, students and friends.

This mission is guided by the association’s officers and board of directors led by President Kim Lawkis ’11, M.P.A. ’13. She and the board of directors will be working alongside the alumni staff as we begin planning for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the association in 2024. Read more about Kim’s goals in the News Briefs section.

In this issue, we’ll show you how the University invests in its faculty and programs to attract students and conduct research by connecting with the School of Marine and Environmental Sciences. Two South alumni are now part of the faculty, researching the living shorelines of Mobile and Baldwin counties, and working in the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta, North America’s most bio-diverse habitat.

You’ll also read about the new medical office building on the Mapp Family Campus that supports the University’s commitment to transforming medicine in the region. The story further illustrates the legacy of the Mapp family’s longtime investment in academic medicine.

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the University of South Alabama football team on their winning 10-3 season and appearance in the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl! Be sure to check out the story on the team’s offensive lineman Reggie Smith, “A South Guy Through and Through.” Also, I would like to congratulate Jeremy Reaves ’17 of the Washington Commanders, our very first Jag to be selected for the Pro Bowl!

The 2023 Distinguished Alumni and Service Awards Gala was held March 2. Please join me in congratulating this year’s recipients, Robert Edward Battles, Sr. ’69, Christopher M. Blankenship ’92, James B. “Jim” Estabrook, Jr. ’68, Poarch Band of Creek Indians, John Ethan Bonds “Jeb” Shell ’00, Drs. John W. and Sally Steadman and Margie Malone Tuckson ’73. You’ll meet each recipient in the next issue of SOUTH.

The South Alabama National Alumni Association is more than 93,000 alumni strong, and I’m so proud to serve as its executive director.

Go Jags!

Karen Edwards ’80, Executive Director  
USA National Alumni Association



***Kim Lawkis Announced as President of the National Alumni Association***

The South Alabama National Alumni Association is pleased to announce its president and officers for 2022-2024, as well as new members of the Board of Directors that were inducted at the fall board meeting. Kim Lawkis '11, M.P.A. '13, chief operating officer of Feeding Alabama, serves as president. "I'm honored to serve as president of the South Alabama National Alumni Association Board of Directors. During my tenure, I plan to work with University leadership to usher in a new era of alumni involvement. Belonging to the South Alabama National Alumni Association means supporting your institution, fostering

ongoing student success and staying connected with alumni around the globe. So whether you live in Lower Alabama or Los Angeles, I hope you make 2023 your year to give back to your University," said Lawkis.

Ronnie Stallworth '03, senior director of business development at Hargrove Engineers + Constructors, will serve as vice president. Neil Christopher '07, chief financial officer with the Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce, will serve as secretary/ treasurer. Jim Moore '90 is immediate past president.

**New members of the NAA Board of Directors:**

**Mr. Terrence Lewis '06**  
 B.S. Civil Engineering  
 Sr. Engineer/Project Manager  
 Atmos Energy Corporation  
 Red Oak, Texas

**Mrs. Kristin Odom '09, M.S. '14, Ph.D. '19**  
 B.A. Organizational Communication  
 M.S. Instructional Design and Development  
 Ph.D. Educational Leadership  
 Director of College Counseling, UMS-Wright Preparatory School  
 Mobile, Alabama

**Mr. Peter Susman '20**  
 MBA, Mitchell College of Business  
 Assistant VP for Finance & Administration  
 University of South Alabama  
 Mobile, Alabama

**South Alabama selected as a finalist for 2022 Degree Completion Award**

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities named the University of South Alabama one of four finalists for its 2022 Degree Completion Award.

"This award showcases the intentional and continuous hard work of so many people," said Dr. Nicole Carr, associate vice president of student academic success. "Together with our students, we celebrate their graduations. These individual moments reinforce our 'whys' and inspire our team to find more solutions to continue to remove barriers for degree completion."

The award identifies, recognizes and rewards institutions that employ innovative approaches to improve degree completion while ensuring educational quality.

## ***\$2.25 Million Grant Awarded for Second Year Experience***

The Second Year Experience program is a five-year program funded by a \$2.25 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The investment includes stipends for faculty mentors and redesigned tutoring spaces on the second floor of the Marx Library. The goal is to improve student retention with academic coaching and experiential learning.

“There’s a lot of research that shows the second year is when students need a lot of support,” said Kristi Clayton, assistant director of Student Academic Success.

The ultimate goal for the Second Year Experience is to prepare students to work toward internships and jobs after graduation. The program includes field trips to regional employers.

## ***USA Administration Names Berscheidt, Billingsley and Stokley Vice Presidents***

**Jim Berscheidt**, a veteran leader in higher education with success in brand awareness, student recruitment and fundraising, has been named vice president for marketing and communications. Berscheidt most recently held a similar position at the University of North Texas, a 42,000-student institution in the Dallas metro area.

Prior to his position as vice president for brand strategy and communications at North Texas, Berscheidt held senior leadership positions at Creighton University in Omaha, Oklahoma State University Foundation and University of Denver. He began his career in broadcast news as a reporter, anchor and manager before working in nonprofit public relations.

**Dr. Joël Billingsley** has been named vice president for Diversity and Community Engagement.

Billingsley now oversees the Office of Diversity and Inclusion that creates strategies and initiatives to increase the number of students,

faculty and administrators from African American and other underrepresented groups.

Billingsley, an associate professor of Instructional Design and Development, creates multimedia resources to teach others about racial equity and structural racism in Mobile. Her efforts resulted in the production of the documentary *Mobile in Black and White* in 2013 as well as a feature-length documentary on the survivors of the Clotilda slave ship, who subsequently founded the community in north Mobile known as Africatown.

**Polly Stokley**, CPA, has been named vice president for Finance and Administration.

Stokley’s experience with the University started 24 years ago, serving as assistant to the vice president for Financial Affairs. Thereafter she’s held the positions of controller and assistant vice president, Finance and Administration, to name a few, before accepting the vice president position in September 2022.

Additionally, Stokley’s professional experience includes being a certified public accountant, three years of audit experience with the National Credit Union Association and 10 years of banking experience with Regions Bank.

## ***Celebrating Dr. Johnson Haynes’ Lifelong Commitment to Healthcare***

Johnson Haynes Jr., M.D., a longtime, well-respected member of the University of South Alabama community, passed away in December.

Dr. Haynes will be remembered as an excellent clinician and scientist who was passionate about his patients, and a trailblazer who paved the way for young African Americans to follow in his footsteps and become physicians.

He served as a professor of internal medicine at the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine, assistant dean of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, director of the USA Comprehensive Sickle Cell



JIM BERSCHIEDT



JOËL BILLINGSLEY



POLLY STOKLEY



JOHNSON HAYNES

Center and a pulmonologist with USA Health.

Since August 2001, Haynes led the USA Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center. Sickle cell disease is an inherited disorder which causes red blood cells to lose their ability to carry oxygen. As a leading authority, Haynes cared for most of the adults with sickle cell disease in the southern half of Alabama.

In September 2022, the USA Board of Trustees authorized the naming of the center as the Johnson Haynes Jr., M.D., Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center in recognition of his longstanding commitment to the treatment, research and education of sickle cell disease.

A 1980 graduate of the Whiddon College of Medicine, Haynes joined the faculty in 1984 as the University's first African American clinical and basic sciences faculty member.

In 2011, he established the USA Office of Diversity and Cultural Competence, which was renamed the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in 2014. Haynes also served as the faculty sponsor for the Whiddon College of Medicine's newly established chapter of Black Men in White Coats, which aims to increase the number of Black men in the field of medicine.

Memorial gifts will benefit the Johnson Haynes Jr., M.D. Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center. Visit [giving.usahealthsystem.com/haynes](http://giving.usahealthsystem.com/haynes).

***100 Black Men of Greater Mobile Scholarship Honors an American Hero***

The University of South Alabama has collaborated with the 100 Black Men of Greater Mobile in establishing a new endowed scholarship honoring one of the city's most prominent citizens, Maj. Gen. J. Gary Cooper.

"I am humbled by this honor," Cooper said. "My goal has always been to provide opportunity to young people through education, and I hope this scholarship will make a difference in the lives of students at the University of South Alabama for many years to come."

The 100 Black Men seeded the scholarship with \$10,000, making it eligible for the Mitchell-Moulton Scholarship Initiative matching funds. President Jo Bonner and first lady, Janée Bonner, committed an additional \$2,500.

You may contribute to the 100 Black Men of Greater Mobile Major General J. Gary Cooper Endowed Scholarship by visiting [giving.SouthAlabama.edu/cooper](http://giving.SouthAlabama.edu/cooper).

**Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey Appoints the Honorable Bill Lewis to the University of South Alabama Board of Trustees**

Lewis currently presides as a circuit court judge for the 19th Judicial Circuit, serving Autauga, Elmore and Chilton counties. "I am honored to be selected as a member of the Board of Trustees for the University of South Alabama," Lewis said. "I would like to express my appreciation for Gov. Ivey and the assurance she has placed in me. I am humbled by the kindness of the current board and University family who have been gracious in assisting me in preparation for the position. I look forward to giving my best efforts to the University to create a larger footprint as a premier university in the Southeast and the nation."

**Chronister Named National Council on Research Chair**

Lynne Chronister, vice president for research and economic development at the University of South Alabama, has been named chair of the Council on Research for the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities. The Council on Research provides an opportunity for university administrators to share information and coordinate strategies and policies in response to government policy and regulations affecting research and innovation. "The biggest benefit to me serving in this role is that it gives the University more visibility," Chronister said. "It gives the University a voice. We get to have some input in research policy."





*Quiet Academic, Disciplined  
Administrator and Third President  
of the University of South Alabama  
Dr. Tony G. Waldrop Passes Away*

**D**r. Tony G. Waldrop, who helped raise academic standards, elevate research and usher in a new era at USA Health as the third president of the University of South Alabama, died in December in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, after a long illness.

During his presidency, the University started an Honors College, developed the School of Marine and Environmental Sciences and constructed Hancock Whitney Stadium. South significantly increased retention and graduation rates, bolstered study abroad programs, added more than a dozen degrees to its offerings and launched the Pathway USA program for transfer students, increasing access to and affordability of a four-year degree.

South also completed the Upward & Onward comprehensive fundraising campaign that raised more than \$160 million for the University and USA Health.

Launched in October 2015, the Upward & Onward Campaign supported five strategic priorities: Student Access and Success, Enhancement of Research and Graduate Education, Global Engagement, Excellence in Healthcare and University-Community Engagement.

*Five strategic priorities:*

**Student Access and Success**

By creating new pathways to education through scholarships and enhanced academic support, this strategic priority saw 433 new or enhanced endowed scholarships, raised \$176,212 for pandemic emergency funds, built three new facilities and watched 126 students graduate from the Honors College.

**Enhancement of Research and Graduate Education**

By enhancing graduate education and giving faculty and students the tools and infrastructure to promote quality research, this strategic priority raised \$11 million to support graduate education and \$1.2 million to improve access to healthcare as well as created eight new research endowments and nine new endowed faculty positions.

**Global Engagement**

By strengthening connections and collaborations between USA and the rest of the world, this strategic priority saw the creation of 16 scholarships for Study Abroad opportunities, seven scholarships for international education, impacted 600 students through those programs and scholarships leading to students experiencing learning in 52 countries since 2015.

**Excellence in Healthcare**

As a leader in serving the health needs of the region, we expanded our medical research and advanced treatment options. This strategic priority raised \$5.5 million, created or expanded four facilities, served 16,000 cancer patients and saw more than 11,400 USA Health employees donate to the campaign.

**University-Community Engagement**

Through ongoing community relationships, significant educational benefits were made. This strategic priority raised \$7.7 million by 6,356 USA employees and retirees, \$4.8 million by alumni to build the MacQueen Alumni Center, \$17 million for USA Athletics, grew membership of the National Alumni Association to 5,294 and documented 31,367 volunteer hours in the community by students and faculty.

“Dr. Waldrop lifted research activity and academic standards at the University of South Alabama and set it on a course for future growth and success,” said President Jo Bonner. “His legacy lives on in each of us through this commitment to education, research, service and healthcare. We will honor him as we build on his contributions at the Flagship of the Gulf Coast.”

If you would like to honor President Waldrop’s memory, support the Drs. Tony and Julee Waldrop Endowed Scholarship at [giving.SouthAlabama.edu/waldrop](https://giving.SouthAlabama.edu/waldrop).

# DAN OLLIS

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*Los Angeles, CA*  
*Swanson-Ollis Interiors*



**D**an Ollis '80 was born in Virginia, but his parents moved the family to Mobile before Dan was even conscious of what life was like in Virginia. A graduate of Davidson High School, he attended a small, Jesuit college just down Old Shell Road from the brand-new University of South Alabama campus, where he eventually transferred.

"In the beginning, I wanted to study medicine, like many people at South Alabama," he said. The medical school, also in its infancy, was hyper-competitive, with students far more intelligent than those Dan was used to studying with. "I went to the business school and I asked, 'What is the best major with the best jobs to make the best money?' And the counselor said accounting." Not having an actual idea of what "good money" meant, Dan was told that with his grades, he would pass the CPA exam on the first try, even though the major was highly difficult, making South Alabama a competitor among older colleges and universities.

Like most students his age, Dan had a job during college, at First National Bank in downtown Mobile, where he worked every afternoon. His sophomore year, he met the managing partner of a major accounting firm also located in the building and was offered an internship. "I didn't go back the next quarter; instead, I interned – I hated every minute of it."

Dan found that the accounting classes grew more unappealing and his usual straight As became only As in the classes where he did find interest. It was when he discovered the Small Business Institute program at South Alabama, where students learned about starting and running a business of their own. "The idea of entrepreneurship was interesting to me. I didn't know how to start or run a business."

Dan interviewed for and started from scratch as a salesperson for Masland Carpets in Richmond, Virginia. The regional manager learned that Dan was born in Virginia and wanted to hire someone who Virginians would trust and find relatable. He quickly became a leading salesperson in the company. "I desired to make the money that people were making in big cities. I wanted the opportunity to travel outside of the rural roads of Virginia," Dan said. Just as Dan was considering moving to New York City – "just like the song, if I can make it there, I can make it anywhere," he said – the company offered him a position as big-city as it comes.

The position was in Los Angeles. "I moved there, not knowing the first person."

Dan Ollis met Hal Swanson in 1990, at a party in L.A., given in Hal's honor. Hal grew up on a farm in Kansas, where his entire family lived and worked. But by 1990, Hal had a successful interior design company in Kansas City and was making a name for himself.

Dan and Hal became close almost immediately. As Dan traveled from L.A. to Kansas City, the pair realized they had mutual friends in and around Kansas City, some even from South Alabama.

Since the party in 1990, Dan and Hal have been together in every aspect of life, including their business, Swanson-Ollis Interiors, now in its 33<sup>rd</sup> year of operation.

They decided to open an office in L.A. after being one of the top two firms in Kansas City. Dan says, "Kansas City, some don't know, is a very wealthy, very spectacular city." When a client convinced the pair to join her at the premier world opening for the New York City Ballet, she told them they were too talented for Kansas City. She said they should only consider New York City or Los Angeles. "So, we went to L.A."

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*"The most important thing in life is imagination. If you can close your eyes and have a vision of something you may want, what it means is that it exists. Thoughts are things, thoughts are real."*

– DAN OLLIS

In L.A., Dan and Hal shared a duplex with a friend in an area of square city blocks featuring 100-year-old homes lending splendid charm and inspiration to design. Since the two traveled to and from Kansas City, their roommate frequently held lavish parties, featuring intricate, purposeful design. "The idea of the duplex was to show people our work," said Dan. Hal agrees, saying, "We had a terrific time, showing it off while having fun."

Dan recalls a former professor in the business school at South Alabama, previously the CEO of a large company, who came to the school to teach senior-level courses. "He was so old-school that we had assigned seats. He would call on whomever he liked, regardless of whether you raised your hand."

In one of the classes, the professor asked, "What is the purpose of a business?" While fellow students guessed that it was to create jobs or provide services, Dan said he finally spoke up. "I shouted, 'Just to make money!' And that professor said 'YES! Until you can make money, you can't provide the jobs and services. Bring in more than you spend, it's just as simple as that.'"



ELIZABETH FEIRSTEIN

When Dan was alone in Virginia, traveling the state as a salesman, he read about the art of manifestation. That is, how to create a successful life from a place within, where joy, peace and true love reside. Dan realized success lies in how you move forward and create it for yourself.

“I think it is important for students at South Alabama to know, and what I would want to say, is you don’t know where that road is going to take you. You have to have your eyes wide open. Once you start living, thinking, doing that, you become magnetic to things. Each of you are equal to what could be for you.”

Dan and Hal both feverishly agree that their desire never wavered to do something bigger and better, even as the world around them changed drastically. One thing Dan said he learned in business school is the ability to remain flexible, regardless of your industry. “We didn’t anticipate September 11, the recession, COVID. We continually had to reinvent ourselves.”

During the COVID lockdown in the U.S., Dan and Hal knew they would have to not only be flexible but remain vigilant as to how their market and industry would be affected.

“The super wealthy were buying second and third homes in areas that had private security and five-star chefs in their private clubhouses. They could have these places to go where they could get to and have all their luxuries and not have to be around any other people. But they also wanted to be next to world-class medical care should they need it.”

While most of their friends are downsizing and settling in, Dan and Hal say they have never been more excited to do everything they want to do in

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*“You have to have your eyes wide open. Once you start living, thinking, doing that, you become magnetic to things.”*

— DAN OLLIS

life. Through the firm, the pair are working in the U.S. Virgin Islands to develop a private, gated, remote community, away from crime and whatever the “next pandemic” will be.

They are also beginning to transition to living part-time in France and have found a chateau in Nice. “We love antiques,” Dan said. “There is something about seeing an object that is centuries-old, that is just beautiful. We wanted something that has history in it.”

“My whole life philosophy has become ‘Je dois habiter Paris ou Nice,’” Dan quipped. Translation: I have to live in Paris or Nice.

“Each project of ours has joy, frustration, everything in between,” Hal said. “Every day is unique and very different. We have all kinds of projects and clients.”

Overall, arriving at South Alabama with a major that did not excite him taught Dan one of his most important lessons in life. “You have to have an imagination. In that, you have to create something. There is success there.”



# USA

AN EVENING UNDER THE STARS  
*Los Angeles | September 2022*



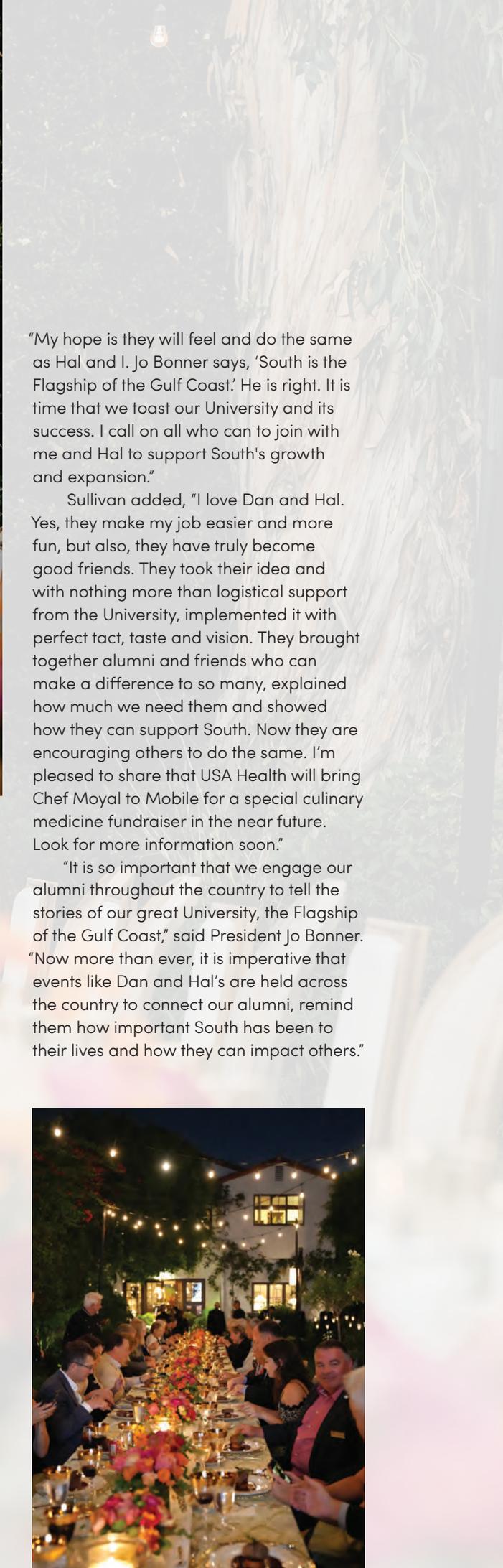
*The Jaguars football game against UCLA in Los Angeles this past September was the perfect opportunity to pair sports and fundraising for South.*

Local alumnus Dan Ollis and Hal Swanson hosted an evening at their home in the Hancock Park neighborhood of Los Angeles. South alumni from across the country mingled with President Bonner and USA leadership to hear what South is doing and, critically, what alumni can do for South. Dan and Hal's wishes were to spread the message that to whom much has been given, much is expected.

Dan and Hal worked for months with Vice President for Development and Alumni Relations Margaret Sullivan and National Alumni Association Executive Director Karen Edwards to plan the perfect evening. Alumni from Los Angeles, Phoenix, Atlanta, Pensacola, San Francisco, Tucson and Mobile attended this special event. From the save the date and engraved invitations to the swag bags given to every guest upon leaving, the evening was exquisite.

Celebrity Chef Edouard Moyal, who cooks for Eric Clapton, Joe Walsh and Ringo Starr, among others, created a spectacular outdoor, seated, seven-course French dinner. The evening combined food, drink and fellowship to discuss the upcoming football game at the Rose Bowl and to further alumni connections. But most importantly, it showcased and celebrated how the University contributed to the accomplishments of those in attendance.

The evening was the first of its kind in the University's history. But if Dan has his way, not its last. Part of Dan and Hal's vision is for alumni across the country to host similar evenings to then encourage others to engage with and support the University. Dan shared, "I saw an opportunity to share how I feel about the University. My education impacted my life. I know South has done the same for many others."



"My hope is they will feel and do the same as Hal and I. Jo Bonner says, 'South is the Flagship of the Gulf Coast.' He is right. It is time that we toast our University and its success. I call on all who can to join with me and Hal to support South's growth and expansion."

Sullivan added, "I love Dan and Hal. Yes, they make my job easier and more fun, but also, they have truly become good friends. They took their idea and with nothing more than logistical support from the University, implemented it with perfect tact, taste and vision. They brought together alumni and friends who can make a difference to so many, explained how much we need them and showed how they can support South. Now they are encouraging others to do the same. I'm pleased to share that USA Health will bring Chef Moyal to Mobile for a special culinary medicine fundraiser in the near future. Look for more information soon."

"It is so important that we engage our alumni throughout the country to tell the stories of our great University, the Flagship of the Gulf Coast," said President Jo Bonner. "Now more than ever, it is imperative that events like Dan and Hal's are held across the country to connect our alumni, remind them how important South has been to their lives and how they can impact others."



# Jags ON TOUR

Outreach program features music, mascots and cheerleaders on South recruiting trips and campus tours by high school groups.



## STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Highlights of a Baker High School tour at the University of South Alabama included engineering labs, the birth of a baby manikin in the Health Simulation Building and a race across the football field at Hancock Whitney Stadium.

Also fresh waffles in the student dining hall.

The Baker seniors enjoyed lunch, just like South students, choosing everything from soup and salad to pizza and pasta. When one student kept looking over at the waffle-making station, his classmates shamed him into finally going over and making himself dessert.

“I feel like we’re getting VIP treatment,” said Nicholas Cubitt, who’s toured several Alabama universities. “At some colleges, you’re lucky to get a bottle of water.”

First-rate tours for high school groups are part of a renewed focus on student recruitment, with brand-new Jag buses picking up the students and delivering them to campus. They get to meet professors and, usually, President Jo Bonner, along with mascots and cheerleaders. By fall’s end, South had delivered students from more than a dozen Alabama high schools to campus. This spring will bring an expansion into Coastal Mississippi.

*“I feel like we’re getting VIP treatment.”*

**-NICHOLAS CUBITT**

The University also has taken the show on the road to deliver Jag spirit and enrollment information to high school campuses farther away. In October, members of the Jaguar Marching Band joined University leadership and recruiters for pep rallies at Clarke County high schools.

A month later, one of South’s luxury motorcoaches with a custom red-white-and-blue paint job pulled up to Baker, the University’s largest feeder school. The students loaded onto the bus, leaned back in their seats and watched a South hype video on overhead monitors. The Hornets began to find out what it would be like to become a Jaguar.

“I’m impressed,” said Kristie Matthews, a senior counselor at Baker. “Really impressed.”

After breakfast in the Student Center, where the seniors learned about enrollment and scholarship opportunities, the group headed to the Health Simulation Building. In one ward, students crowded around a high-tech simulated patient used for clinical training.

An instructor asked for help and Ramani Westerfield, a Baker senior, volunteered to help pull a baby manikin from the artificial womb of a synthetic mother. Students were buzzing. The patient pushed, the head crowned, and Westerfield caught the baby and held it up to her classmates.

As the tour prepared to move on, she remembered something important.

# FRESHMAN CLASS *by the numbers*



## ACADEMICALLY

**3.75**

Average high school GPA  
*a record for South*

**23.1**

Average ACT score



## GEOGRAPHICALLY

**31**

U.S. States

**29**

students are from  
international locations



## DEMOGRAPHICALLY

62% female, 38% male

**73%**

from Alabama

10% from Mississippi  
7% from Florida

Next states in popularity:  
Louisiana, Illinois, Georgia,  
Missouri, Tennessee,  
Maryland and Ohio

**21%**

First-generation students

*(Students who completed FAFSA)*





“Wait,” Westerfield told her friends. “I need to take a picture with this baby I just delivered.”

A few minutes later, in Shelby Hall, the Baker students visited a wave simulator in the Coastal Hydraulics Laboratory. South is one of just 12 universities in the country with a coastal engineering program. The tour also stopped at the workspace where South students helped design and build a small satellite that was launched in July by the SpaceX rocket.

In the Shelby lobby, the seniors met President Bonner, who handed out souvenir buttons featuring SouthPaw, South’s mascot. He urged them to consider South for their university education. He hoped they were enjoying their tour.

“Who delivered the baby in the Sim Lab?” Bonner asked, smiling. “I just want you all to know that whether it’s healthcare, engineering or any other field, there’s something for everyone at South.”

### JAGUARS TOUR JACKSON

In October, instead of taking high school students to South, the University brought a little bit of South to them. Call it the Jaguar Road Show.

The tour made its first stop at the Jackson Academy gymnasium. The band played fight songs as cheerleaders tossed souvenir cups and T-shirts into a crowd of students. Bonner asked seniors to visit the South campus and consider going to college in Mobile.

After a 40-minute program, Headmaster Joe Jones thanked the South group for visiting the academy.

“This is the first time a university has made a presentation like this at our school,” Jones said. “No other school has done this. And we appreciate it.”

The South students and administrators jumped back on their bus and visited three other Clarke County high schools. In between music and cheers, they promoted everything from the Mitchell College of Business to the largest nursing

program in the state to the new School of Marine and Environmental Sciences.

Students asked about admissions, financial aid and taking a tour. Teachers talked about their connections to South.

Tiffany Newsom, a counselor at Clarke Prep School, said her daughter was a Jaguar. She got a kick out of the South traveling show.

“We’ve had different colleges come here,” Newsom said, laughing, “but they weren’t as much fun.”

### BAKER LEGACY ON CAMPUS

The campus tours are a South 101 course for prospective students – an introductory mix of campus spots, academic programs and school spirit. Over a breakfast of chicken biscuits, Amanda Owens, an admissions officer and recruiter, gave Baker students a brief overview before leading them in a chant of “Go Jags.” She showed them how to hold their thumb and index finger to form the letter J for Jaguars.

“Use your left hand,” she said. “Your left hand.”

“I know a lot of Baker graduates who are leaders at South,” she told them. “They’re involved in things. You see them on campus. Baker has a legacy at South.”

Ashleigh Taylor, a South tour guide who lives on campus, took over the second half of the campus tour. She showed the students around Camellia Hall, a residence hall that is home base for many entering first-year students. She emphasized building security, with a system of keys and swipe cards, and answered questions about choosing rooms and roommates.

Leading lots of tours has taught Taylor what engages high school students. She hits the highlights. She knows what they’ll be talking about the next day at school.

“Definitely the Rec Center pools and climbing wall,” she said. “And they also love getting to walk on the turf of the football stadium.”



# POV: You live in another state, but South Alabama feels like home.

Students who live outside the state of Alabama and are awarded one of the freshman admissions scholarships will be granted in-state residency for tuition purposes for the duration of their scholarship. Visit [SouthAlabama.edu/freshscholarships](https://SouthAlabama.edu/freshscholarships) to see if you qualify. We look forward to welcoming you home.



UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTH ALABAMA

FLAGSHIP OF THE GULF COAST

2022

# ALUMNI REUNION

*University of South Alabama*

OCTOBER 13-15

**Oh, the memories we made at Alumni Reunion Weekend 2022!**

From tailgates to campus tours and reunion parties, everyone had a great time reconnecting with their South Alabama family!

To view the photo galleries from Alumni Reunion Weekend 2022 visit [SouthAlabama.edu/alumni](https://SouthAlabama.edu/alumni) and click on Event Photos in the left hand menu.

**Save the Date for Alumni Reunion Weekend 2023, September 21-23!**





MEDICAL OFFICE BUILDING OPENS AT

# *Mapp Family Campus*



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*“The Mapp Family Campus will be another important location for educating and training the next generation of healthcare providers.”*

**-JOHN V. MARYMONT**

**D**ressed in a red cardigan, Louis Mapp laced his fingers and grinned as he took the podium to a standing ovation.

“God has richly blessed our family,” he told those gathered to dedicate a new medical office building in Baldwin County in November. “It has been an honor to share His blessings with USA Health and this wonderful medical campus.”

Mapp, leaders from USA and USA Health, and local dignitaries then cut a red ribbon to dedicate the three-story, 50,000-square-foot medical office building located on a medical campus named for the Mapp family.

USA Health’s Owen Bailey recalled conversations around the Mapps’ kitchen table when the idea for the new campus was taking shape. “Louis has a vision to bring academic healthcare to Baldwin County,” said Bailey, chief executive officer and senior associate vice president for medical affairs. “It was important to him that the campus be focused on wellness, nutrition and disease prevention – concepts he has embraced throughout his life.”

The Mapps' donation of eight acres for the campus was a continuation of the family's longtime investment in academic medicine – from financial support to provide special services for hospitalized children to the gift of volunteerism when Louis Mapp rocked babies in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Children's & Women's Hospital.

When the time came to choose the parcel to donate, the Mapps generously insisted on the property at the corner of state highways 181 and 104, Bailey said. Today, the campus's prominent location puts it within 15 miles of approximately half of the population of Baldwin County, one of the fastest growing counties in America.

In recent years, USA Health has steadily widened its footprint in Baldwin County, opening a second site for the Mitchell Cancer Institute in 2017 in Fairhope and adding other patient care services in locations from Spanish Fort to Foley.

The new medical office building enables the region's only academic health system to bring a number of specialties under one roof and to roll out new offerings for the area such as pediatric pulmonary and pediatric endocrinology care, expected to open this spring.

Anchoring the first floor of the medical office building is Baldwin Family Medicine, which serves as a demonstration of USA Health's strong connection and collaboration with other healthcare providers in the community.

"Collaborating with community physicians, providers from USA Health are bringing their specialized expertise to meet the healthcare needs of people in the region," Bailey said. "As the only academic healthcare system in the region, USA Health continues to expand relationships with community providers and other partners as we strive to provide increased access to the care that people need and deserve."

With more than 65 exam rooms, the medical office building is equipped to provide 70,000 patient visits each year. The building also will house a full array of imaging technology, including X-ray, mammography, ultrasound and CT.

Services will include endocrinology, urology, gastroenterology, urogynecology, colorectal surgery and general surgery, with room to add other specialties. In addition to pediatric pulmonary and endocrinology, specialty services for children will include surgery, urology, gastroenterology and cardiology.

Within the facility, USA Health physicians and other providers will incorporate health and wellness strategies for patients along with traditional medicine. A demonstration kitchen located on the third floor gives patients and caregivers the opportunity to



If you would like to support the Mapp Family Campus please visit [SouthAlabama.edu/giving/mappcampus](https://SouthAlabama.edu/giving/mappcampus).

engage in healthy-eating classes – a way to fulfill the health system's mission of helping people lead longer, better lives.

The plan for the campus includes multiple water features, walking paths, and outdoor educational and gathering areas — all designed to create a peaceful environment.

Later this year, a 24,000-square-foot ambulatory surgery center is scheduled to be completed, which will round out the campus as a powerhouse for medical services and medical education in Baldwin County.

"The Mapp Family Campus will be another important location for educating and training the next generation of healthcare providers," said John V. Marymont, M.D., MBA, vice president for medical affairs and dean of the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine at the University of South Alabama. "Having this additional site also will allow USA Health to help alleviate some of the healthcare provider shortages being faced in our region."

At the dedication of the new medical office building in November, Natalie Fox, D.N.P., executive director of academic physician practices, provided insight into the difference that academic medicine brings to a community.

"It brings together a team of healthcare professionals – our physicians who can deliver high-quality expertise along with our medical students who are continually learning and our residents – in a rich environment where we have the latest in innovation, treatments and management," Fox said.



## Your Jag pride can turn dreams into reality.

When you purchase a University of South Alabama license plate, 100% of net proceeds benefit USA student scholarships. Since 2013, USA license plates have raised more than \$1 million for students to follow their dreams.

Through the Mitchell-Moulton Scholarship Initiative, the proceeds from your Jag Tag are automatically matched.

**Get your Jag Tag today!**

**[SouthAlabama.edu/Alumni](https://SouthAlabama.edu/Alumni)**

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

## JAGUAR JOURNEYS

*Set out on a grand holiday adventure through the winter wonderland of the Imperial Cities of Central Europe – Prague, Vienna and Budapest – with Jaguar Journeys, **December 4-12, 2023**. Along the way, immerse yourself in festive Christmas markets, enjoy traditional entertainment, sample local cuisine and glimpse this region's rich history. **For more information visit [SouthAlabama.edu/JaguarJourneys](https://SouthAlabama.edu/JaguarJourneys).***





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# SOUTH GUY

*Reggie Smith, a walk-on from Pensacola, earned a scholarship before his fifth season of football at South Alabama.*

After four years as a walk-on at the University of South Alabama, Reggie Smith finally earned a starting position – and full scholarship – for what turned out to be a stunning 10-3 season ending with the Jaguars playing in a bowl game.

“This is like a dream come true,” said the senior from Pensacola, Florida. “Of all the teams playing Division I football, only 13 had 10 wins this year, and we were one of them. We’re riding high. It’s been so much fun.”

A final treat for Jaguar players and fans came with the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl in the Superdome on Dec. 21.

Smith, 23, has teammates who were in junior high school five years ago. That’s when he began his football career at South. The Jaguars had a losing record and played in old Ladd-Peebles Stadium near downtown Mobile. He was an undisciplined teenager with a lot to learn.

“I was kind of a goofball, trying to make everyone laugh,” he said. “Now I’m more serious.”

Now the Jaguars play in brand-new Hancock Whitney Stadium on the South campus in west Mobile. Now Head Coach Kane Wommack has begun a new era. Now the football program has grown up just as Smith did.



Gordon Steele, offensive line coach for the Jaguars, knows what he has at right guard.

“It helps that Reggie has been here so long,” Steele said.

“He carries himself like an adult. He’s totally bought into what we’re trying to do here. And he’s a South guy through and through.”

Smith, who plans to graduate this spring, is majoring in leisure studies and thinking about becoming a football coach. He spends long hours each week training and practicing. Then he watches film of games and practices.

At South, Smith has matured as a student, too. He’s more disciplined and focused. He has a favorite instructor, Leigh Delaney-Tucker, in the biology department.

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*“If the game’s not fun,  
there’s no sense playing it.”*

—JAMES JACKSON

“She makes class so enjoyable,” he said. “And she’s probably the nicest person on the planet. She enjoys her career and makes it fun for us, too.”

James Jackson, who plays center on the Jaguar offensive line, calls Smith one of the most outgoing members of the football team. In and around the locker room, he talks and jokes with everyone. He’s also a student of the game.

“Reggie’s probably one of the smartest offensive linemen we have,” Jackson said. “He knows what everyone does on every play, even the backs and receivers. The whole offense. It’s crazy.”

During a game, Smith and Jackson line up side by side. They share victories and defeats, touchdowns and turnovers. Competition is fierce, but there are light moments.

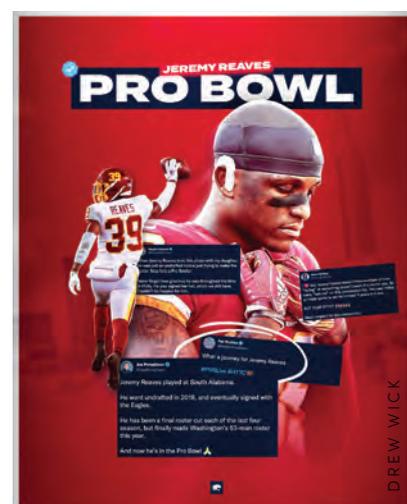
“We’ll be running down the field on a screen and be talking and laughing about something,” Jackson said with a grin. “If the game’s not fun, there’s no sense playing it.”

Smith grew up in Pensacola and attended Escambia High School. He loved playing football, like his father and grandfather before him.

His mother, Teresa Smith, is a registered nurse. His father, Reginald Smith II, works in construction. He helped build Stokes Hall on the South campus.

That’s where his son lived for three years while working and waiting for his turn to play for the Jaguars. “He’s never been a quitter,” said Reginald Smith. “He took this opportunity to walk on and try to earn a scholarship. I told him whatever you decide, that’s fine with me.”

The younger Smith — Reginald Smith III — enjoys having his parents in the stands at Jaguar games each Saturday.



Congratulations to Jeremy Reaves '17 who made the NFL Pro Bowl. He's the first South Alabama Jaguars football player to have ever been selected for this honor. Reaves plays for the Washington Commanders and is a native of Pensacola, Florida.

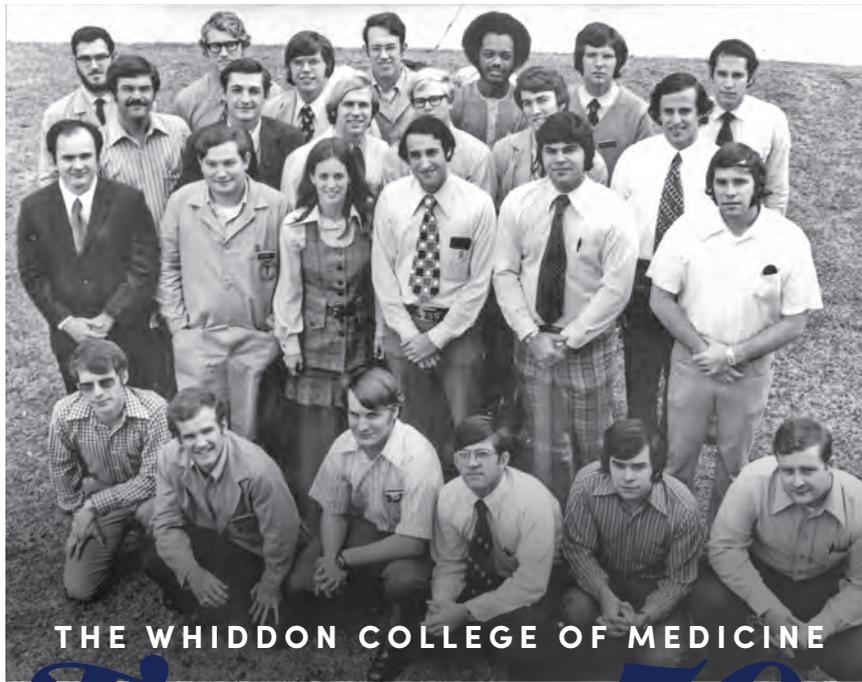
“They’re super fans,” he said. “They even went to the UCLA game at the Rose Bowl out in California. At home games, they sit in Section 304 and they usually have my 3-year-old nephew. I always look up at them. Sometimes they come down to the wall and give me a high-five.” Smith thinks that UCLA game, which South lost 32-31, helped the Jaguars build a winning season.

“We should have won that game and that was good for our confidence,” he said. “That’s when we knew we were a good team.”

Smith is already thinking about returning to South for a sixth season, thanks to an NCAA rule that allows an exemption for the season marred by the coronavirus pandemic. In the meantime, he’s savoring this season. The South team has earned a place in Jaguar football history.

During an interview in the athletic department offices, Smith admired the view looking down on the field at Hancock Whitney Stadium. It offered a different perspective. Sometimes he sounded like an alumnus planning Saturday nights in the future.

“I can’t wait,” he said, “to come back here and watch a game.”



THE WHIDDON COLLEGE OF MEDICINE  
*Turns 50*

This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the entry of the charter class of the University of South Alabama Whiddon College of Medicine. In an article published in the *Journal of the Medical Association of the State of Alabama* in 1983, the writer stated, “We were welcomed to our orientation to the hospital by a professor of pathology who, surveying our 25 eager faces, spoke a few words about the importance of inference in clinical practice. By way of illustration, he observed that he could infer that we were all ‘Pretty smart, but not real smart.’ This caused some consternation in the ranks, so he quickly explained: ‘You see, I know you have to be pretty smart to be admitted to medical school, and not real smart to want to be.’ We soon discovered what he meant.”

Shortly after the University of South Alabama opened in 1964, President Frederick P. Whiddon saw the need to educate physicians who ultimately would practice in Alabama and care for its citizens,

particularly those in rural and underserved areas. He began to share his vision with community and state leaders about establishing a medical school in Mobile. His tenacity and determination prevailed. On January 3, 1973, the USA Whiddon College of Medicine welcomed its charter class of 25 medical students.

The Whiddon College of Medicine quickly developed a strong reputation for providing students with a high-quality medical education and has maintained this reputation for the past six decades. It also served as the foundation for a growing academic healthcare system, leading to the creation of the College of Nursing in 1973, the Covey College of Allied Health Professions in 1975 and the initiation of its first Ph.D. program in basic medical sciences in 1978. Dean of the Whiddon College of Medicine and Vice President for Medical Affairs, Dr. John Marymont, shares, “We are a diverse community focused on the science and practice of medicine for Alabama, the Central Gulf Coast and beyond. We educate, we discover, we serve.”



An all-class Whiddon College of Medicine Alumni Reunion will be held at the Grand Hotel Golf Resort & Spa, Autograph Collection, June 8-11, 2023. The weekend culminates with a special 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration honoring 50 People of Influence. In addition, alumni, faculty and staff are invited to share their favorite memories and personal stories through a special edition book commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. For more information, visit [SouthAlabama.edu/com50](https://SouthAlabama.edu/com50).

Plans are underway for a new 250,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art education and research building. It will provide an environment to expand the class size from a maximum of 80 first-year medical students to 100 and ample laboratory space to support our growing portfolio of research studies.

To celebrate the rich 50-year history of the Whiddon College of Medicine, the USA Medical Alumni Association, in coordination with the Whiddon College of Medicine, has planned several regional alumni events, continuing medical education seminars and a Whiddon College of Medicine Alumni Reunion.



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# PATHWAY TO PURE DISCOVERY

*From the Marianas Trench to the Space Station, the School of Marine and Environmental Sciences sees growth from grants to bring alumni home to South.*



**F**or 30 years, the Marine Science Department, now the School of Marine and Environmental Sciences, worked out of one office in the basement of the Life Sciences building. “We started as a few biologists to make up the department,” said Sean Powers, Ph.D., and director of the school. “However, Marine Science was only the second Ph.D. program at South, which shows a sign that we are serious about research.”

At its inception, the program was intended for graduate education and research, alongside a solid partnership with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, located just 35 miles away from campus. The department has always excelled at research, largely due to the proximity of campus to the shoreline. “We consistently have more applicants than we can ever take – the graduate program gets six applicants for every spot available.”

With the University’s executive leadership ready to spend money on marine scientists and host a world-renowned program, grant funding became more valuable than before. “Most faculty are experienced, and we’re so well known in our field, that one in three faculty grant applications are accepted,” Powers was proud to say. “More grant money, more grad students.”

New facilities, classrooms and laboratories are being renovated on campus, in the former cancer center, supported by a \$2.1 million grant from the state of Alabama and with University fund allocation.

Around 2012, the department was seeing grants awarded at an average of \$1 million a year. This last year, the school hit a record \$13 million in new grant funding and has an overall research budget of \$20+ million, second only to the entire Whiddon College of Medicine. Powers and staff knew exactly where to put their hard-earned dollars. “Undergrads wanted the majors.”

South Alabama is the only four-year public university located on the Gulf Coast. This strategic location makes the school prime real estate for those who have a passion for marine and environmental sciences. The decision to balance graduate and undergraduate studies simply made good sense. In 2021, with the goal of 20 students, the school launched the undergraduate studies program. “We got 47 students and have 140 applicants accepted [to the University] at this point.”

Students are not the only ones attracted to the idea of a revitalized program in such close proximity to hands-on research. The expansion required recruiting faculty who share the passion for this new vision. Two of those new hires are USA alumni. “Both had very successful early careers at great universities. Steven at Northeastern in Boston, one of the most prestigious in the nation, where he just got tenure. And Charlie at the University of Florida, which routinely rates in the top 10 of public universities,” said Powers. “They were secure and had many accolades. But we convinced them both to come back and be a part of the new school and programs.”

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*“Mobile, South and Dauphin Island are my special places. If I could write a book, it would be about the Delta.”*

**CHARLIE MARTIN, PH.D. 10**

Steven Scyphers, Ph.D. '12 came back home to South in August after 10 years building a marine science program and well-established lab at Northeastern. He gave up tenure at the university to continue his research on the living shorelines of Mobile and Baldwin counties, research he began in the Ph.D. program. “The ability to come back and teach environmental sustainability from a sociological perspective was what really drew me into the revitalized program here at South Alabama,” said Scyphers.

Scyphers’ research includes areas such as the Bayou La Batre fishing community, the Causeway and, of course, Mobile Bay.

“Understanding how people use the shorelines of Mobile Bay using a social science approach is truly at the heart of understanding these living shorelines,” he said. Scyphers’ research will include taking a deep dive into understanding who has access to and relies on places like parks and the Causeway. “Different groups have more or less access and depending on what the conditions those places are in.”

He is also interested in collaborations on habitat qualities on the coastlines and how people interact with the systems.

Fun fact about Scyphers: His passion and enthusiasm for the living coastline research he will conduct convinced two of his Northeastern graduate students to also leave Boston for South Alabama and Mobile.

Charlie Martin, Ph.D. '10 joined the program in January from the University of Florida, where he built a brand-new marine lab on Cedar Key. Powers says the University recruited Martin specifically so USA can do more work in the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta, North America’s most bio-diverse habitat.

Martin is originally from Gadsden in north Alabama and says trips to Mobile and the beaches of Baldwin County inspired him to come to South as a student and he is eager to return as a professor. He will have both a new lab and office at South.

As a fish scientist, Martin has worked and researched in some of the region’s most biodiverse areas such as the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, at Coastal Carolina studying biology and he was part of the precedent setting examination at Louisiana State University of the Gulf Coast shorelines after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. “Mobile, South and Dauphin Island are my special places,” he said. “If I could write a book, it would be about the Delta.”

Fun fact about Martin: He believes it is great to see the growth and the new facilities being renovated for research but is certain that the trajectory of the program is what makes young faculty want to be a part of USA.

Each of these scientists is enthusiastic about the new future in Marine and Environmental Sciences at USA. Whether it is environmental partnerships, working with state and federal agencies, intern opportunities or finally being able to provide teaching assistantships to graduate students, there is an unmistakable tone of excited expectation for the research outcomes.

As Powers says, “One of our most important goals is to guide responsible development while protecting essential areas.”

If you would like to support the School of Marine and Environmental Sciences please visit [SouthAlabama.edu/giving/somes](https://SouthAlabama.edu/giving/somes).

# Madam Chairwoman

ARLENE MITCHELL TAKES THE HELM AS THE FIRST FEMALE CHAIR PRO TEM IN THE UNIVERSITY'S HISTORY



**F**or someone who has flown around the world and met with presidents, Arlene Mitchell is firmly grounded in family – both immediate and her adopted one at the University of South Alabama.

In an interview at her home in Spring Hill, the newest chair pro tem of the Board of Trustees discussed everything from the importance of the University and USA Health to the partnership with her late husband, Mayer Mitchell.

And when Arlene Mitchell was selected this summer to her new role – as the first female chair pro tem in the University's history – she thought about setting an example for members of her own family.

“I have three daughters, and lots of granddaughters, and I know it means a lot to them,” Mitchell said. “That makes me proud.”

When Mitchell joined the board in 2007, there were two women serving as trustees. Now there are five, including Vice Chair Katherine Alexis Atkins, which means women lead the board that governs the University. Gov. Kay Ivey serves as ex officio president. Lenus Perkins, who came to South as an international student from West Africa before graduating in 1991 with an engineering degree, is secretary.

“We’ve come a long way,” Mitchell said. “The board has gotten more diverse.”

Members of the Mitchell family have been philanthropic leaders at the University of South Alabama for half a century, making their family one of the most generous private donors to higher education in the history of the state of Alabama. The Mitchell Center, the Mitchell College of Business and the Mitchell Cancer Institute have been named in their honor.

Arlene Mitchell was married to Mayer “Bubba” Mitchell, a USA trustee who built a Mobile-based real-estate empire with his brother, Abraham “Abe” Mitchell. She was appointed to the USA Board of Trustees after the death of her husband.

She grew up in Atlanta and met her husband at the University of Pennsylvania, where he and his brother were studying finance. Years later, Abe Mitchell served on the board at the Wharton School of Business.

The family’s pull to South has made a transformational impact through education in Mobile, where there are not as many big-dollar donors compared with larger universities with long histories and wealthy alumni.

Arlene Mitchell, a winner of the Mobilian of the Year award, is active with the Ahavas Chesed Synagogue. Her civic work includes support of the Gulf Coast Exploreum Science Center, Senior Citizens Services of Mobile and the Boys and Girls Club of South Alabama.

The family’s work with the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute began with her husband, who was first diagnosed with cancer in his 30s. He was given just six months to live, but lived to be 74, surviving five different cancers.

Mitchell believes that experience made her a stronger person. There were hard times. Yet she laughs when she tells the story of a low moment that became a turning point.

Her husband spent time at the University of Rochester Medical Center, so they rented an apartment in Rochester, New York, where the weather was often miserable. She remembers going grocery shopping in the snow, then slipping and falling on their front steps, with bags spilling everywhere.

Just then, Mayer opened the front door, frustrated with their time in Rochester, saying that if he was going to die, he might as well go home to Mobile.

“You’re not going to go home!” Arlene insisted. “You’re going to stay here and take all that medicine!” And he just looked at me, because I’d never screamed at him like that before. And he decided to stay.”

Her husband lived long enough to join his wife and brother at the “topping out” ceremony for the MCI, signing a beam during construction of the Mitchell

Cancer Institute, a place other cancer patients could go to for academic healthcare treatment close to home. In the last 15 years, South and the USA Health system have continued to grow, with new buildings and programs.

“It’s mind-boggling to me,” she said. “So much had changed since Mayer was on the board.”

In their marriage and in Mobile, Arlene and Mayer Mitchell were a team who complemented each other and worked together in community projects and philanthropic endeavors. The couple raised three daughters and a son.

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*“I have three daughters, and lots of granddaughters, and I know it means a lot to them. That makes me proud.”*

— ARLENE MITCHELL

Through the years, the family traveled the world for pleasure and in advocacy, visiting the White House and meeting heads of state. Along the way, they also picked up an appreciation and knowledge of art. When asked about pieces they collected, Mitchell’s answers almost always include a family story about where they were going and what drew them to a scene.

“A lot of our paintings have children in them,” she said. “In fact, one of Mayer’s favorite pictures is at South right by the president’s office.”

Mitchell is a strong supporter of Jo Bonner, the former Alabama congressman who in January 2022 became the fourth president of the University. His experience is something she relies upon as the new chair of the USA Board of Trustees.

“I think Jo is going to be such an asset,” she said. “I think Jo will make sure we have these contacts in the state and beyond to get the support we need.”

She approaches her own job with humility.

“It’s an interesting experience, and I hope I’m up to fulfilling it,” Mitchell said. “It’s a little overwhelming, but I’m learning. Just learning to be with a lot of different people, dealing with different personalities, and being able to handle that and not step on too many toes.”

That shouldn’t be a problem for the new chair of the Board of Trustees. In a way, she’s been preparing for this job her whole life.

# Leader Profiles



**ALEXIS ATKINS**

*Vice Chair of Board of Trustees sees change and growth*

As a working mother taking night classes in the 1990s, Alexis Atkins did not have much time to invest in extracurriculars at the University of South Alabama. She's certainly made up for that since.

Her contributions at South include membership on the Executive Advisory Council of the Mitchell College of Business and the Board of Directors of the Jaguar Athletic Fund. She was president of the National Alumni Association and is currently vice chair of the University's Board of Trustees.

She's seen great change at South.

"Today, it's incredible, with all the new buildings and beautiful grounds," said Atkins, who studied human resources development and earned a bachelor's degree in 1997. "And there's USA Health and all of the hospital facilities. It's been very exciting to be a part of that."

Atkins, vice president of human resources and co-owner of Budweiser Busch Distributing Inc. of Mobile, is past chairman of Feeding the Gulf Coast (formerly the Bay Area Food Bank) and past president of Executive Women International. Recently, she was honored by the Yellowhammer news outlet as an Alabama Woman of Impact.

In 2016, Atkins was nominated to replace Sandy Stimpson, the mayor of Mobile, on the Board of Trustees. She considers it an honor to serve the University. She's proud of having served as chair of the board's search committee that recommended Jo Bonner, the former congressman from Mobile, become the fourth president of the University of South Alabama.

"He will make us the Flagship of the Gulf Coast," Atkins said. "His background in state and federal affairs will be a great help in moving the University forward."

Atkins and her husband, Michael, live in Mobile and together have five children.



**LENUS PERKINS**

*From Birmingham business executive to secretary of the USA Board of Trustees*

On the day after Christmas, 1985, Lenus Perkins left West Africa to study civil engineering at the University of South Alabama.

His biggest problem was the language barrier.

Perkins spoke fluent English, coming from Liberia, but had never heard a thick Southern drawl.

"It was a cultural shock," he said, laughing. "I really did struggle to understand Southerners. I remember one of my professors in chemistry had a thick accent. Finally, I went to him and said I couldn't understand what he was saying, and he spent some extra time with me."

More than 30 years later, Perkins is a South graduate and Birmingham business executive who serves as secretary of the USA Board of Trustees. It's an honor he never expected. Along the way, he's learned how to say "y'all," talk about American food and football, and value the culture of opportunity in his adopted country.

He continues to keep in touch with his mentor, Dr. Kevin White, emeritus professor of civil, coastal and environmental engineering.

"Going to South, I learned to appreciate so much," he said. "Even now, that's my perspective. I want to do everything in my power to make the institution grow and draw international students and students from less fortunate families."

After earning his civil engineering degree from South in 1991, Perkins began a career with Bhate Environmental Associates. As the company's executive vice president, he is responsible for corporate oversight and program management for business units of the company – environmental remediation, compliance, construction, and business development strategies for local, state and federal contracts, including with the U.S. Defense and State departments.

Perkins and wife, Michelle, live in Birmingham; the couple has two children and a niece they raised from Liberia.

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