

# South

**SOUTH MAGAZINE** is published twice a year by the University of South Alabama and distributed to alumni and friends.

UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT Jo Bonner

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND PROVOST Dr. Andi M. Kent

VICE PRESIDENT, DEVELOPMENT AND ALUMNI RELATIONS Margaret Sullivan

VICE PRESIDENT, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS Jim Berscheidt

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC AND EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS Jeb Schrenk

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND CREATIVE SERVICES Diana Nichols

### CONTRIBUTORS

Casandra Andrews Thomas Becnel Lance Crawford Amber Day Lindsay Hughes Mike Kittrell Seth Laubinger Kim Lovvorn Michelle Matthews Sarah McEnemy Steve Millburg James Palomo Kylie Scioneaux

### **ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Jim Berscheidt Lance Crawford Karen Edwards Kim Lovvorn Diana Nichols Jeb Schrenk Margaret Sullivan Joy Washington

### **ON THE COVER**

A visual tribute by Beatriz Ortiz to University of South Alabama celebrations and traditions.

### THE 34TH ANNUAL

OOZEBALL tournament in April raised \$14,000 to support the Southerners and the Spotting Excellence Scholarship. For more University of South Alabama traditions, see page 10.

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PANCAKES WITH THE PRESIDENT has become a much-anticipated highlight of finals week.

# Pomp, Pancakes and Pride

At the University of South Alabama, traditions connect us while our energy keeps us creating experiences for the next generation of Jaguars.



HERE'S PLENTY OF POMP and circumstance during Commencement, and not just the timeless composition by Sir Edward Elgar.

The regalia. The ceremonial mace held by the Faculty Senate president. Our new graduates moving their mortarboard tassels from the right to the left after the conferring of degrees.

The entire ceremony is steeped in tradition, and it's one of my favorite events. I'm humbled to have the opportunity to shake each graduate's hand and celebrate with them the culmination of years of diligence and sacrifice.

Many of our graduates participate in a relatively new tradition — the decorating of their mortarboards. I especially get a kick out of seeing our Jaguar spirit buttons incorporated.

In this edition of South Magazine, we pay tribute to beloved traditions, other experiences that connect us and the yearly rhythms of living on the Gulf Coast.

For a university just 61 years old, we're quite good at creating and celebrating new customs.

In my interactions with thousands of high school students each year, I proudly offer

this truth: The University of South Alabama is big enough to offer all the things a large institution can offer, but small enough – and young enough – to be nimble. At South, *you* build the traditions.

Our students are the force behind the Battle for the Belt, Junk the Jungle and the annual Oozeball tournament.

Recent additions to the USA calendar include the Jaguar Senior Medallion Awards, which recognize some of the best and brightest of our graduating seniors, along with Pancakes with the President, which gives University leadership an opportunity to serve our students a late-night breakfast during finals week.

A Night Honoring Healers celebrates our USA Health care team and partners, while for nearly two decades the Distinguished Alumni and Service Awards gala has recognized the accomplishments of our alumni and friends.

Altogether, these are some of the things that make us uniquely South. And together, we will continue finding new ways to show what it means to be a Jaguar.

Jo Bonner President



## ROTC GETS A GLOW UP

U.S. ARMY AND U.S. AIR FORCE ROTC cadets have a newly renovated, 15,925-square-foot facility on the University of South Alabama campus repurposed especially for them.

The Jaguar Battalion of Army ROTC and the Air Force ROTC Detachment 14 had been located in Alpha Hall South, which was demolished to make room for the new Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building.

The ROTC facility off Aubrey Green Drive houses everything the cadets could possibly need under one roof.

Army ROTC is at one end of the building, and Air Force ROTC is at the other, each with their own offices, classrooms and kitchens. Shared spaces include an auditorium, a workout room, locker rooms, a computer lab/lounge with a TV and a 4,800-square-foot covered outside area for physical training, ceremonies and more. Two supply rooms offer space to store and check out camouflage gear and dress uniforms.

Staff members and cadets moved into the new space in March.

### JAG DAYS DELIVER

**IF FREQUENT JAGUAR MILES** were a thing, the University of South Alabama's Admissions team would rack them up.

So would President Jo Bonner and Executive Vice President and Provost Dr. Andi Kent, who also hit the road recruiting students. One of the main events: Jag Days.

On Jag Days, the team picks up high school students and delivers them to campus aboard red and blue Jaguar Athletics buses for VIP tours. These innovative tours were featured in an Inside Higher Ed story, "The College Tour That Comes to You."

During the 2023-24 academic year, there were 36 of these Jag Days. And when the team isn't giving students a lift back to campus, they're visiting with even more schools across the country in hopes of bringing more students to South.

### Vroom, Vroom

THE UNIVERSITY OF South Alabama chapter of SAE International's automotive engineers spent the academic year preparing "Panthera onca" (the scientific term for jaguar) to compete at the Formula Hybrid + Electric competition at the New Hampshire Motor Speedway. USA Jag Racing placed third and will continue to fine-tune its hybrid car for next year's contest. The designed top speed: 70 mph.





UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA Executive Vice President and Provost Dr. Andi Kent was selected as one of 25 honorees for This Is Alabama's Women Who Shape the State award.

The 2024 honorees were recognized during Women's History Month in March. The program focused on women who are influencing Alabama through their efforts in business, community, service and philanthropy.



# A NEW CHAPTER AT THE USA BOOKSTORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA Bookstore is getting a \$1 million makeover that should be completed by August. Renovations will include aesthetic changes and environmental graphics that highlight South's campus and culture, along with a complete reorganization and relocation of all merchandise sections. Also new: a dedicated area for student JagPack pickup along with a social hub (complete with selfie spot) for relaxing or studying between classes.

The update will include cool new carpeting, according to Elizabeth Hall, an interior designer for the University. "The colorways in the Aerial collection best represented our University color palette and provided the impact and wow factor that our team was looking for in this project," she says.

The bookstore remains open while renovations continue, and Jag gear can always be purchased online at SouthAlabama.BNCollege.com.

In addition, this summer also brings with it a renovation of the dining hall's Fresh Food Company, which opened in 2010, including an expansion of the salad station and the allergen-friendly station. It will be open for the fall semester.



# South Professor Celebrates Passion for Poetry as First Mobile Poet Laureate

**DR. CHARLOTTE PENCE**, director of the Stokes Center for Creative Writing at the University of South Alabama, received a new title and fresh direction for writing poems and celebrating poetry when she was named the first Mobile Poet Laureate earlier this year.

As poet laureate, Pence will share poems and lead programs that enrich life and language in the Port City.

"This position, in particular, will allow me to focus on poetry, which is my first passion," she says. "What I'm hoping to do is be able to bring poetry and its transformative power to as many people as possible. This is the ideal platform to do that."

Pence, an associate professor of English at South, joined the faculty in 2017. Her poetry has been published in Harvard Review, The Sewanee Review, Poetry magazine and other journals. Her books of poetry include "Code," from 2020, along with "Many Small Fires." She's edited books such as "The Poetics of American Song Lyrics."

She's completing a nonfiction book about growing up through difficult times in Rome, Georgia. It's called "Gardening in the Dark: A Memoir on Raising Resilience."



A quick guide to a selection of books written by members of the South community

### **"Treeborne: A Novel"** By Caleb Johnson, assistant professor, English; Picador, 2018

Janie Treeborne lives on an orchard at the edge of Elberta, Alabama, and in time, she has become its keeper. A place where conquistadors once walked, and where the peaches they left behind now grow, Elberta has seen fierce battles, violent storms and frantic change — and when the town is once again threatened from without, Janie realizes it won't withstand much more, so she tells the story of its people.

### **"Four Augustan Science Poets: Abraham Cowley, James Thomson, Henry Brooke, Erasmus Darwin"** By Richard Hillyer, professor, English; Anthem Impact, 2020 Focusing on four poets who, because of their distinctive profiles, illustrate especially well

the opportunities and pitfalls of writing science poetry during the long 18th century, "Four Augustan Science Poets" offers numerous close readings that shed light not only on standard versions of the sublime but also on these idiosyncratic variants: the apologetic (Cowley), the illicit (Thomson), the perverse (Brooke) and the atheistic (Darwin).

**"Soundtracked Books from the Acoustic Era to the Digital Age: A Century of 'Books That Sing'"** By Justin St. Clair, professor, English; Routledge, 2022 What, exactly, is a soundtracked book? Quite simply, it is a book — a physical, print publication or its digital analogue — for which a recorded musical complement has been produced. First patented in 1917, "books that sing" have been hiding in plain sight for more than a century. Offering both a short history and a theoretical framework, this project is the first extended study of the soundtracked book as a media form.

### "Hysteria, Perversion, and Paranoia in 'The Canterbury Tales': 'Wild' Analysis and the Symptomatic Storyteller" By Becky Renee McLaughlin,

professor, English Beginning with the spectacle of hysteria, moving through the perversions of fetishism, masochism and sadism, and ending with paranoia and psychosis, this book explores the ways that conflicts with the Oedipal law erupt on the body and in language in Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales."

### "The Southernization of America: A Story of Democracy in the Balance"

By Frye Gaillard, former writer in residence, and Cynthia Tucker, journalist in residence; NewSouth Books, 2022 In 1974, John Egerton published his seminal work, "The Americanization of Dixie." Pulitzer Prize winner Cynthia Tucker and award-winning author Frye Gaillard carry Egerton's thesis forward in "The Southernization of America," a compelling series of linked essays considering the role of the South in shaping America's current political and cultural landscape.

### "Swimming Pretty: The Untold Story of Women in Water"

By Vicki Valosik, M.A., sociology, 2008; W.W. Norton, June 2024 "Swimming Pretty" traces a century of aquatic performance, from vaudeville to the Olympic arena, and brings to life the colorful cast of characters dating to the 1800s — who not only laid the groundwork for the sport of synchronized swimming but also forever changed women's relationships with water. Far more than bathing beauties, these swimming starlets ushered in sensible swimwear and influenced lifesaving and physical education programs, helping to drop national drowning rates and paving the way for new generations of female athletes.



### **FASHION, FAMILY AND A SOUTH FOUNDATION** *Picture sparks memories for two-time graduate*

WHEN DR. CAROL SCOTT CASH turned to page 19 in the Fall 2023 edition of South Magazine, she discovered a moving-in picture that reminded her of life in the Alpha residence halls during the early days of the University of South Alabama.

Only on second glance did Cash, an education professor at Virginia Tech, realize that one of the people in the 1966 photograph seemed familiar.

"I went back and thought, 'Oh, that looks like me,'" she says, laughing. "I asked my husband, and he said, 'That is you.' It was a real surprise. I'd never seen that photo before."

She stands second from the right, with a double armful of books and a flip curl, while her mother carries a sheaf of dresses by her side. It was the opening of South's first dormitory. Cash was a freshman from tiny Bagdad, Florida, east of Pensacola. Even in a small town, fashions were more formal back then.

"Everyone in my family laughed," she says, "at how dressed up we were."

At South, Cash played oboe in the student orchestra, competed on the debate team and earned an education degree in mathematics. After marrying a Navy pilot and starting a family, she earned a master's degree in counseling from South in 1972.

She and her husband moved to military bases across the country and in Japan, but Cash was always able to find work as a teacher. In Virginia, she became a school principal and then a college professor.

All of this started at South, where her grandson Michael Cash earned a biology degree in 2023.

"For me, it was perfect," Cash says. "South was the foundation of my career. It gave me confidence and taught me how to be a leader. How often do I think of it? Quite often. I'm very proud that I went to the University of South Alabama."

# Spring Semester Starts with Two New Academic Deans

TWO NEW DEANS started Jan. 1 at the University of South Alabama. Dr. Angela Barlow is guiding the College of Education and Professional Studies, while Dr. Michael Capella took the reins at the Mitchell College of Business. Both Barlow and Capella served as deans at their previous institutions.



A native Alabamian, Barlow most recently served as professor of mathematics education and dean of the Graduate School at the University of Central Arkansas. She received her doctorate in mathematics education from Auburn University.

"My personal priority will be to engage with College of Education and Professional Studies faculty and staff to understand their perceptions of the college's strengths and opportunities for growth," she says. "This information will support me as I speak with potential donors, potential students and our community stakeholders."



Capella spent nearly a decade working in sales before earning his doctorate in marketing from Mississippi State University. He has spent the past 20 years in higher education and most recently served as dean of the College of Business at Loyola University New Orleans.

"The faculty and staff here have developed a tremendous foundation, and my goal is to leverage our existing assets to grow enrollment within the Mitchell College of Business," he says. "The Mobile economy is vibrant and diversified, with multiple key industries, so I am enthusiastic to engage with the local business community and USA alumni in the region and beyond."



AFTER A DECADE-LONG hiatus, the Miss University of South Alabama program is planning a comeback.

The competition could return as soon as October and is being organized by USA staffer Meredith Moody, who grew up competing in pageants before attending college in Mississippi and volunteering behind the scenes for a Miss Mississippi preliminary there.

The event on South's campus would be a preliminary leading to the Miss Alabama program. Miss Alabama then competes in the Miss America National Competition. The current Miss Alabama, Brianna Burrell, is a USA graduate.

"It's exciting to see what lies ahead for the program," Moody says. "It's a wonderful opportunity to empower and inspire young women."

# SENDING

SENTI

IN ADDITION TO RELYING ON data from more expensive Sentinets, engineering professor Dr. Bret Webb will deploy smaller storm surge and wave gauges in advance of a hurricane. They can be affixed to structures such as this pier on Dauphin Island.

### "For as much as we know about hurricanes, we don't have many continuous measurements of surge and waves right at the shoreline during landfall."

WHILE EVERYONE ELSE is fleeing an approaching storm this hurricane season, Dr. Bret Webb and University of South Alabama colleagues will be heading toward it.

Webb, a professor of coastal engineering, doesn't have a death wish; he has a data wish. He's part of a research effort that, for the first time, is gathering detailed information about what happens when a hurricane hits the shore. He and his team will set up an array of sensors at the water's edge, then head to safety before the storm arrives.

"For as much as we know about hurricanes, we don't have many continuous measurements of surge and waves right at the shoreline during landfall," Webb says. "We honestly don't know what happens there during these extreme events."

Finding out will improve management of coastal threats. South is working with the University of Florida and other institutions, using 33-foot portable masts called Sentinels. Rugged instruments on the mast and the base measure wind speed and direction, wave height, rainfall, barometric pressure, humidity, water temperature and salinity, water quality and more. The Sentinels livestream the readings, along with a video feed, via a cellular signal.

The total project award, about \$550,000 over three years, will include money to build one Sentinel, finish construction of another, buy water quality sensors, and pay for faculty, student and staff time. The funding comes from the U.S. Coastal Research Program in conjunction with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Engineer Research and Development Center.

Crews will trailer the Sentinels to the water's edge at the projected landfall area of any named storm. Four 19-foot helical piles will screw the base of the mast into the sand. Setup takes just 30 minutes. The rig can survive and keep transmitting even during a direct hurricane hit, Webb says. The mast is made of carbon fiber by a company that primarily builds masts for highperformance sailboats.

Webb coordinates the network for Mississippi and Alabama. Other research teams cover other stretches of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. The regional coordinators are responsible for lining up in advance where to deploy the Sentinels — either public lands or private tracts where owners have granted permission.

Three Sentinels are ready to roll, with more being built. "The idea is that they would be spaced at roughly five-mile increments along the coast within the expected landfall area of a hurricane," Webb says.

His research group at South, which includes an engineering graduate student, plans to augment the Sentinels' data by deploying its own home-built storm surge and wave gauges nearby. Commercial gauges cost \$3,000 each; South's cost \$200.

The bargain price means the team can make lots of them. "So we're going to either cover a really broad area with a bunch of gauges or focus all of our instruments in one smaller area but collect a lot of high-resolution data," Webb says.

South has what he calls "a rather robust extreme events deployment group" of faculty and students, concentrated in the Department of Civil, Coastal and Environmental Engineering, who are on call to help set up the instruments as winds and waves kick up from approaching storms.

In other words, South has sentinels to set up Sentinels, in pursuit of knowledge about one of the coast's most destructive threats.

# Faculty Take Flight on Fulbrights

**TWO UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA** faculty members have received 2024-25 Fulbright U.S. Scholar Awards. Fulbright is the world's largest and most diverse international educational exchange program.



Bioarchaeologist Dr. Lesley Gregoricka, professor of anthropology in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work, will travel to the United Arab Emirates, where she will examine prehistoric human skeletons dating to the Early Bronze Age in order to answer questions about how ancient communities successfully adapted to their surroundings during periods of social and environmental stress.



Dr. Matthew Pettway, associate professor of Spanish in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literature, will conduct archival research on the philosophical and ethical foundations of Black Brazilian manhood, sexuality and kinship in the 18th and 19th centuries at the Brazilian National Archive and the National Library of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. Pettway is South's first African American scholar to receive a Fulbright.

During the 2023-24 academic year, South had three Fulbright U.S. scholars: Dr. Philip Habel, professor and department chair of political science and criminal justice; Dr. Christina Wassenaar, assistant professor of management; and Dr. Ermanno Affuso, assistant professor of economics and finance.



**RESEARCHING RESILIENCE** For more of Dr. Bret Webb's work on coastal resilience, see an April 2024 interactive Washington Post project called "The New Age of Flooding." The Post enlisted Webb to explain how the rapidly rising sea levels on the Gulf and southeast Atlantic coasts are greatly exacerbating floods in Southern states.



Traditions build community. Whether heartwarming or hilarious, an elaborate event or a simple hand gesture, they bring Jaguars together.

### Week of Welcome

Week of Welcome is really a week-plus of networking and bonding opportunities for new and returning students. Get on Board Day showcases student organizations. Convocation teaches such important skills as how to sing the fight song and how to throw a J. Faculty and staff pitch in to carry boxes during Move-In Days. It's a relatively new tradition but a strong kickoff to the fall semester.

### Junk the Jungle

You can kick off Homecoming week by rolling the trees around the USA Traffic Circle with impunity — and the Student Government Association provides the toilet paper. Homecoming also includes a bonfire and pep rally, Greek step show and, of course, a big Hancock Whitney Stadium win by the football team.



### Oozeball

It's amazing how much fun you can have playing volleyball in foot-deep water and mud. More than 30 coed teams get down and dirty — literally — at the annual Oozeball tournament to raise money for the Southerners ambassador program and the Spotting Excellence Scholarship.

### Soul Food Luncheon

This delicious Black History Month mainstay builds community among the University family. The Multicultural Leadership Center brings students, faculty and staff together for a meal to nourish both body and soul.



#### High-Fiving SouthPaw

Selfie opportunities abound at the heart of campus, especially as Commencement draws near. The SouthPaw statue and Moulton Tower and Alumni Plaza, across from each other on USA South Drive, draw lots of picture posers. A few steps away, the Jaguar Sculpture in front of the Mitchell Center and the Waterman Globe in the center's lobby have proven Instagramworthy.



#### White Coat Ceremonies

The donning of a white lab coat marks the end of classroom studies and the beginning of clinical rotations for students in medicine, nursing, physician assistant studies, occupational therapy, physical therapy and audiology.



### Bell-Ringing for Pediatric Cancer Patients

During September (Childhood Cancer Awareness Month), a bronze bell in the courtyard of USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital sings the sweetest song in the world for young cancer patients and their families, celebrating completion of treatment.

### Senior Bowl Pediatric Patient Visits

Around the time that costumed revelers parade at Mardi Gras, uniformed football players in town for the Senior Bowl visit young patients at Children's & Women's Hospital. It's hard to tell whether the kids or the players find the experience more moving.

### Wall of Honor at Alumni Plaza

An annual ceremony unveils the names of new Lifetime Members of the South Alabama National Alumni Association, along with those of other University builders and supporters. To date, the wall bears 3,931 names.

#### J Hand

The J-for-Jaguars symbol with thumb and forefinger grew as the University encouraged alternative school spirit displays to replace a "South in your mouthi" taunt that arose during basketball games. Whether you throw a J, show a J, get your J-hand up or simply say "J's up," remember to use the left hand so onlookers see a J and not an L for ... well, you know.

# Think of It as the Beta Alma Mater

**DO YOU REMEMBER** singing, "Hail to thee, our dearest Alma Mater. You'll live on o'er time's eternal sands"?

Unless you attended South in the 1970s, probably not. Those lyrics come from an Alma Mater unanimously adopted by the University of South Alabama Board of Trustees on February 27, 1970.

The trustees that day approved the University's \$5.6 million annual budget and awarded a \$7,000 contract for dismantling the Seamen's Bethel building downtown and moving the pieces to campus. Then, according to the meeting minutes:

"The board members proceeded to Room 5 of the Administration building where the Alma Mater was presented by a chorus made up of the following students: Suzanne Arnott, Mike Foerster, Vicki Porter, Jo Ann Siddon, Fred Watkins and Harold Williamson. They were accompanied on the piano by Mr. Ken Harvey, composer of the Alma Mater and a student at the University of South Alabama."

How long and how often it was used is unclear; it was featured in the Commencement program as late as four years later, in 1974.

Here are the full lyrics:

On the Golden Coast of Alabama Near the Gulf of Mexico Stands a school to which my heart is turning Ever yearning to go. All the days we will remember, All the good times and the bad. Though the years go rushing by us In our heart she'll always stand. USA we never will forsake you. Unto you we will be ever true. Hail to thee, our dearest alma mater. You'll live on o'er time's eternal sands.





SOUTH CHOSE the jaguar as its mascot in 1965. By 1971, the first costume had appeared — not nearly as debonair as today's. A late 1970s contest provided the name. South created a structured mascot program in 1986 and, in 1992, gave SouthPaw a sidekick, Miss Pawla.



GREEK ORGANIZATIONS have their own traditions, including perhaps South's oldest, the Chi Omega Songfest, which began in 1966. It raises thousands of dollars each year for the local Make-A-Wish Foundation chapter.





# Some Things Old, Some Things New

**SOUTH IS YOUNG** for a major university and still creating traditions. Football, which debuted in 2009, inspired The Prowl parade before home games and the Battle for the Belt game against Troy. USA Health traditions include the annual NICU Reunion for Neonatal Intensive Care Unit graduates as well as their families and former caregivers. Not all traditions endure. Remember the Sigma Alpha Epsilon Bed Race?



### SOUTHERNERS

# Going Strong for 46 Years

The Southerners were established as the University's official ambassadors in 1978. They are a ubiquitous presence at University functions and help out at events including for visiting dignitaries, Convocation and Board of Trustees meetings. They also sponsor service events. In all, the members worked 2,185 hours during the 2023-24 academic year.

The size of the Southerners group has increased over the years to accommodate the number of requests for them to appear. They started as a crew of 12, then increased to 20 in 2014, 24 in 2022 and 28 in 2023.

The Southerners sit on the front row of the visitor's section when the Jags travel to Troy. The tradition catches the attention of broadcast crews when the game is televised.

The Southerners presented the concept of the JagTran program to President Gordon Moulton in 2005 and assisted in fundraising. A photo of the group in front of the first JagTran was used in a holiday card to all alumni that year.











# Dressing the Part

THE ORIGINAL UNIFORMS for the Southerners included red jackets and navy pants for the men and all navy for the women.

Throughout the years they alternated from all red for both men and women to all navy to a combination of the two.

The women introduced the signature red heel as part of their uniform in 2009.

The men moved to the red jacket and navy pants permanently in 2014 and added the bow tie. The bow ties were an unexpected addition. Originally ordered as part of a new online alumni store, the ties caught the attention of the Southerners, who have been wearing them since.





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# Rites of

Each year, the Jaguar Marching Band appears in at least one Mardi Gras parade. As they step out in the 2024 Knights of Revelry parade, the band plays the Jags' fight song, "South!," "Jaguar Pride" and one of their signature tunes, Cameo's "Word Up!"

PHOTO ESSAY BY KIM LOVVORN



**ON A PICTURE-PERFECT** Mardi Gras Day in downtown Mobile, the University of South Alabama Jaguar Marching Band leads the Knights of Revelry's 150th anniversary parade. THE 254 BAND MEMBERS

perform a brief, very loud pep rally for KOR, the city's third-largest parading organization, on Fat Tuesday at the Mobile Civic Center arena. Then they catch the beginning of the morning parades.



PARADES ARE A HUGE part of the culture in Mobile, which touts itself as the birthplace of Mardi Gras, and marching bands are a huge part of every parade. After arriving on six buses, the Jaguar Marching Band spends an hour of downtime catching throws before they march behind Folly on the emblem float. Next, they'll follow along the five-mile route.







### DR. WILL PETERSEN,

South's director of bands, allows students to wear beads when they march in Mardi Gras parades, but only if the beads don't impede them from playing their instruments. Band members sport three different types of specially designed, University-themed beads — coveted throws from President Jo Bonner this year. A CROWD FAVORITE, the 15-year-old Jaguar Marching Band represents not only the University but also the city of Mobile and the Gulf Coast region as the members parade in their sharp red, white and blue uniforms. The theme for the 150th anniversary KOR parade was "150 Days of Knights."





**PLANS ARE UNDERWAY** to build an indoor and outdoor complex that will provide a permanent home for the Jaguar Marching Band.





















# South Is 'Just Right' for Coach Major Applewhite

University of South Alabama Jaguars Head Football Coach Major Applewhite and his family – wife, Julie, daughter, Lila, and son, Nash – have called Mobile home for the past three years. After serving as the team's offensive coordinator for three seasons, he became the fourth head coach in USA football history in January 2024. Veteran sports broadcaster and USA Director of Media Relations Lance Crawford recently sat down with Applewhite to discuss all things football. Here are some of his thoughts, edited for brevity.

> EDITED BY MICHELLE MATTHEWS PHOTOGRAPHY BY KYLIE SCIONEAUX



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We're going to be competitive in the classroom and be competitive on the field. We're going to be tough.

### "

### **ARRIVING IN MOBILE**

"I remember Mobile more as a child, traveling through here with my parents. We actually came to a Senior Bowl at Ladd-Peebles Stadium. But then coming through here as an adult, I liked the city more than what I remember as a child. And then once I got on campus, it kind of blew me away a little bit. It was like, wow, I like this campus. It reminds me of, you know, kind of the Gulf Coast feel, like growing up in Baton Rouge. There's a lot of similarities, and just the beauty of the campus. I really felt at home, when I hit the circle drive and kind of drove around, I was like, I really like this place. And then I got up the hill and got over to the athletic complex. I saw this brand-new stadium. We've got plenty of space. We've got meeting rooms. This is a great setup. Now we're going to take it different places. We're going to take it up. But this is a great setup to be able to recruit young men within a gas tank's distance to come to school. And then you see campus life, and you see the number of students. It's not a small campus, it's not a small population. It's not a large campus with a huge population. It's just right."

### WHAT HIS JAGUAR TEAM WILL LOOK LIKE

"They're going to be competitive. They're going to be competitive in everything they do, or they're not going to see the field. We're going to be competitive in the classroom and be competitive on the field. We're going to be tough. You know, offensively, we're trying to score every time we touch the ball. I'm not talking about every series. I'm talking about every play, we try to score. Every time we touch the ball. Defensively, we're going to attack. But I want our guys not only just to be competitive; I want us to win the right way.

"You know, I'm a little bit old school. I grew up with the coaches that you won with class, you won with humility, good sportsmanship. You know, you knocked the guy down and you get him back up, then say, I'll see you in about five or six seconds. I mean, I grew up in that frame of mind. So a little bit of the things that you see now are just added distractions. I want guys to stay focused on the task at hand, focused on our competitor. But when someone turns on the TV and there's no volume, I want them to see a team that's flying around. It's physical, competitive, that they can talk to you through the screen. You don't need volume."

### **QUALITIES OF A GREAT COACH**

"I think clearly painting a picture for your staff as to what you want to be and then putting forth a plan to give them the time to do that as a staff. But clearly painting out a picture: This is what I see our offense as, this is what I see our defense as, this is what I see us as in recruiting, this is what I see us in terms of academics, this is what I see us in the weight room in our training in our offseason, and just painting a very clear vision and then a plan, a plan to go do it. Not just, this is a vision, y'all figure it out. This is the vision, this is the plan, and then this is the quality control to go back and see are we reaching our goals and our plan. I think you also have to have some patience. We're all competitive. We want it, you know, right now instead of right, so you have to have some patience, slow things down, understand there's a human element in it. They're kids, they're 18 to 22. They're going to make mistakes. And we've got to be there to develop them and help them reach their potential."

### PERSPECTIVES ON THE TRANSFER PORTAL

"The pieces are constantly moving, but it is what it is. Those are the rules we all know beforehand. You know, there's a little part of me that's just tired of the whining. It's what the rules are. You know, we all agree on it, right? Right. Well then let's go play. It's however you want to use those rules, it's however you want to go about it, however you want to set your plan and how you want to make those rules work for yourself. And we've done a good job lately of bringing guys in from the portal that can help our football team."

### THE HOME TEAM

"My daughter's a competitive dancer. My son is 8 years old, he plays all the sports. So they're highly involved in all their activities. My wife has her crew, and that's really all you're looking for. I figured this out from my mom a long time ago. And so everywhere we've gone, every move we've had, I've been like, OK, son's good, daughter's good, wife's good, I'm good. And that's just the way it works. And I can be good about anywhere as long as those three are good."







>> WATCH THE FULL INTERVIEW ONLINE

### ABOUT MAJOR APPLEWHITE

### **Birthplace:** Baton Rouge, Louisiana

### Alma mater:

University of Texas, bachelor's degree in sports management

### **Before coaching:**

Played quarterback at Texas for four seasons. Named Big 12 Freshman of the Year and the league's co-Offensive Player of the Year in 1999. In his final appearance for the Longhorns, was named Most Valuable Player of the Holiday Bowl.

### **Coaching experience:**

Syracuse University quarterbacks coach; offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at Rice University; various roles at Texas; head coach at University of Houston; analyst on Nick Saban's staff at the University of Alabama; offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at the University of South Alabama

# Messages of Hope and Healing

The Spiritual Health and Counseling Department at USA Health provides holistic care for those in need.

> BY CASANDRA ANDREWS PHOTOGRAPHY BY SETH LAUBINGER

MANY PATIENTS AND VISITORS at USA Health hospitals hear Chaplain Kim Crawford Meeks' messages of hope and healing before they ever meet her. Most days, she makes her way to the communications office at Children's & Women's Hospital, greets the staff and then heads to a small room off the lobby.

There, she dials into the intercom system, introduces herself and invites those who can hear her to pause for a moment -a meaningful moment.

"It's OK to not be OK," she says on a recent morning, her warm voice echoing softly down hallways. "Healing is a journey, not a destination. Grant yourself permission to not have it all together. Remember, healing takes time, and progress isn't always linear. May we move forward in hope together."

For USA Health employees who aren't able to hear the messages, Crawford Meeks also sends her meaningful moments via email. At least once a month, she and her colleagues pen longer messages through the health system's newsletter, and they fan out every day across hospitals and medical practices offering scheduled and unscheduled opportunities to comfort those who need it.

"As chaplains, we meet people where they are," she says. "We step into the journey with those in our care, regardless of where on the journey they may be." The Spiritual Health and Counseling Department was formally established at USA Health in early 2022, when Crawford Meeks was hired, to offer spiritual and emotional support to patients, their caregivers and employees. Today, the department includes four board-certified chaplains and a counselor.

The group is part of a growing number of chaplains working in hospitals and academic health systems in the United States. A survey by the American Hospital Association in 2015 found that some 70% of 4,862 hospitals surveyed offered pastoral care services, which was up from 53% in 2002.

Chaplains have been caring for the spiritual needs of patients (and healthcare workers) since at least the 1920s. Research and anecdotal evidence shows that providing the services of a chaplain in a hospital setting often improves a patient's satisfaction with care, and even increases how a patient perceives their quality of life, which can lead to improved mental and physical outcomes.

Physicians, nurses and other hospital staff often call on members of the spiritual care department to help in times of crisis. On any given day, the chaplains at USA Health experience the full spectrum of life and death. In hospitals, families celebrate when a child is born, they gather to grieve those in their final hours, and they seek hope and healing for the sick and injured who are fighting to regain their health.

Outside the hospitals, Crawford Meeks speaks at dozens of events, including an annual memorial service held at Moulton Tower and Alumni Plaza to recognize members of the USA community who have passed. Another, every other year, honors the lives of donors to the USA Anatomical Gifts Program. That program plays an integral role in the education of medical students, residents and physicians.

Throughout the year, Crawford Meeks visits healthcare workers and support staff face-toface in their units to perform a blessing of the hands. With her eyes closed, she extends her own hands and says:

"Blessed be your hands that offer love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Blessed be your hands that offer hope to the hurting. Blessed be your hands that offer security to those who are afraid. Blessed be your hands that offer healing to the sick. Blessed be your hands that they may receive love in abundance of what you ask or imagine. Blessed be your loving hands."

The setting varies, but the words and support are a constant.

CHAPLAIN KIM CRAWFORD MEEKS visits healthcare workers and support staff face-to-face in their units to perform a blessing of the hands.

CHEA/



# Kids deserve their own emergency care. That's exactly what they receive here.

We understand that bringing a child or teenager to the emergency department can be an overwhelming experience. That's why we focus on offering familycentered care to make sure patients and their caregivers receive the support they need. USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital offers the only Pediatric Emergency Center on the Alabama Gulf Coast dedicated to caring for sick and injured children 24 hours a day, every day. Our specially trained healthcare staff offers the highest level of care available when every second counts.

### **USA HEALTH** CHILDREN'S & WOMEN'S HOSPITAL

### **Pediatric Emergency Center**

usahealthsystem.com

UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL · CHILDREN'S & WOMEN'S HOSPITAL · PROVIDENCE HOSPITAL MITCHELL CANCER INSTITUTE · PHYSICIAN ENTERPRISE

### UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

# It Starts with a Ride from the Airport TO MOBILE

Welcome ?

BY THOMAS BECNEL | ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH MCENEMY PHOTOGRAPHY BY SETH LAUBINGER

# **FOR MORE THAN 25 YEARS** Jim and Mary Mather have welcomed students from around the globe through the Friends of Internationals – sometimes right after their plane lands.



**IM AND MARY MATHER FIRST** read about the University of South Alabama in a Pakistani news magazine. It was 1995. They were missionaries in Pakistan, where Jim worked as a nurse in a small hospital, but had started thinking about returning to America.

The magazine story named South as one of the most popular universities for students from South Asia. The next year, the Mathers made their first visit to Mobile. They met a pair of young pastors who had started a ministry called Friends of Internationals, but were planning to leave Alabama and looking for someone to continue their work.

The Mathers took a leap of faith and made a two-year commitment to the organization. That was in 1998. Over the last quartercentury, they've welcomed thousands of international students to Mobile.

"In our first seven years, we had 10,000 kids in our home," says Jim Mather. "Not just in the house, but for a meal."

The Mathers live in a brick ranch home across University Boulevard from the South campus. The kitchen has been expanded to contain two stoves, and a den stretches across the rear of the house.

Everyone calls it the "big room." Banners with flags from more than 100 nations hang from the ceiling. Paintings and tapestries originating everywhere from Haiti to Kenya and Korea to Japan decorate the walls. A pingpong table gets pushed to the side for prayer meetings and potluck suppers.

Mary Mather, who was a physical therapist before becoming a missionary, sees foreign students battle homesickness, language barriers and culture shock. With a little help, they find their way.

The Mathers often meet students at the airport or during their first day on campus. They help make living arrangements, offer rides around town and try to solve problems. "You are not alone," Mary tells newcomers. "There are other students and other families here who can help you. There are resources on campus as well."



### CURRY, LASAGNA AND TACO SOUP

In January, at the beginning of the spring semester, Friends of Internationals hosted more than 70 students at a welcome dinner in the Terrace Room at the Student Center.

There were students from Asia, Africa and Europe, along with North and South America. The potluck menu featured everything from chicken curry and homemade biryani to red beans and taco soup, along with fried chicken and mac and cheese.

At the check-in desk, students stuck flag decals on their name tags. Oluwagbenro Adesunloro, a Ph.D. student from Nigeria, heard about Friends from advisers in the Global USA office.

"They helped with a ride from the airport," he says. "And they helped me find a place to stay until my apartment became available. Since then, I've been involved with the program."

Adesunloro teases Brusi Kola, another Ph.D. student, as he pages through a booklet of flag decals: "You're the only one from Albania!"

Kola, like so many Friends, has his own Jimand-Mary story.

"They invited me to their house for dinner just after I got here," he says. "I was a little skeptical at first — you know, who are these people? — but it was OK. I told them I liked Italian food, so Mary cooked lasagna for me."

The Friends community has always drawn plenty of foreign athletes at South. The Mathers are runners and sports fans who



### AT THEIR HOME

near campus, Mary and Jim Mather host potluck suppers that spill into their den, where banners with flags from more than 100 nations hang from the ceiling.

cheer for the Jaguar athletes they know.

Adele Magaud, a French cross country runner, struggled to speak English when she enrolled at South in 2019. It took months for her to be able to carry on a conversation.

She heard about Friends of Internationals from a Norwegian athlete and met the Mathers on her second day in Mobile. After a few years at South, she and some friends began renting a house near the Mathers.

"They were the most warm and welcoming people," says Magaud, now a graduate student at Northwestern University. "They definitely changed my experience and made it so easy to be in the U.S."



### **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING**

Dr. Tara Davis, graduate coordinator for audiology at South, is the faculty adviser for Friends of Internationals. She met the Mathers soon after moving to Mobile in 2010.

"I've learned so much from them over the years, and that's an understatement," Davis says. "I've never been around people who are so passionate about reaching international students. It's very much a priority in their lives.

"Jim often talks about the importance of building relationships with people. That drives everything they do. They don't see students as a project. They help them feel that Mobile and South are home, or a home away from home where they can feel comfortable.

"They're very giving, very hospitable people. It's not a front or something they give lip service to. They live and breathe by building and keeping relationships with others."

Richard Bennyson, an Airbus engineer in Mobile, got to know his wife, Nivi, at Friends events. When they got married a few years later, Jim Mather was the officiant at their wedding in Daphne.

"Most of the people there were people we knew through Friends of Internationals," Bennyson says, laughing. "There was a flash mob of people dancing to the song 'Jai Ho' from the movie 'Slumdog Millionaire." He remembers earning his master's degree from South in 2006 and having 60 days to find a job before his visa ran out. Finally, on day 59, he landed an engineering position.

Through it all, the Mathers were there. He was always welcome in their home.

"It was like a refuge when things were all over the place for me," he says.

The Bennysons, who have two children, remain active with Friends of Internationals. Now they're meeting young international students, offering assistance, continuing the work of the Mathers.

"They're like our parents here," Bennyson says. "We've been with them all of these years because they opened their hearts to us."

### L.A. – LOWER ALABAMA

Mary Mather grew up on Long Island, New York. Jim Mather is a Navy veteran from Philadelphia. They met at a religious retreat in Pennsylvania.

They wanted to become overseas missionaries and help people. After getting married, they spent months training and learning a new language, Urdu, then went to Pakistan for five years.

In Mobile, they've raised their own three children while developing an extended family that circles the globe.

Some foreign students at South are surprised that Mobile isn't more like Los Angeles or New York City — the America they know from pop culture. This is why Jim Mather believes it's important to reach students right away.

"The key to success for international students is they need to bond early on," he says. "Academics is a small part – a vital part – of the experience, but it's not just going to school. It's getting involved in the community. Do they feel welcome? Do they feel wanted? That's what people need."



# Celebrating the Past, Preparing for the Future

Founded in 1974, the University of South Alabama National Alumni Association is marking half a century of giving back to South and transforming students' lives.

BY STEVE MILLBURG ARCHIVE PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY OFFICE OF ALUMNI RELATIONS



# W

HEN YOU TALK TO MEMBERS OF THE University of South Alabama National Alumni Association, you hear the

same story over and over: The University transformed my life. I joined the National Alumni Association to help give others that same opportunity.

As it celebrates its 50th birthday this year, the Association provides more than \$100,000 annually in scholarships, mostly to children of members.

Alumni have given their alma mater its signature landmark (Moulton Tower and Alumni Plaza, dedicated in 2010) and its most popular event facility (the MacQueen Alumni Center, which opened in 2020).

Both stand at the heart of the main campus not far from Hancock Whitney Stadium, home of the Jaguars football team since 2020. Those structures symbolize how sports, especially football, and the MacQueen Center have strengthened the bonds between alumni and a maturing University.

Happy Fulford '73, '91 was there at the Association's beginning in 1974. A group of young graduates who hung out together in Mobile thought "it just seemed like the right thing to do," he says. "I give Ken Cunningham the credit for getting it all going because he was our first president."

Fulford, a Mobile native, became the third president in 1976. "There were eight people at the meeting," he says. He won in a landslide with five votes.

"It was a social thing," he says of the Association back then. "At 20-something years old, I certainly wasn't thinking about endowed scholarships."

And yet, "We loved the University. We appreciated the opportunity it had provided us to get an education, and we did want to see it succeed and help it grow."



Fulford was the first college graduate in his family. He worked his way through school. He planned to start at South and then transfer. "But I really just fell in love with South. After the first year, I didn't want to leave."

He more or less didn't. His decades-long career working at South included stints as director of alumni affairs and executive director of governmental relations. He retired in 2019.

The National Alumni Association now boasts more than 6,000 members. Benefits include travel, entertainment, financial services and retail discounts and several South-specific deals, including eligibility for USA Recreation Center membership.

Several societies within the Association have formed. Among the most active are groups for alumni of the various University colleges and the Jaguar Marching Band, plus societies for Black alumni, military veterans and past alumni board presidents.

Current President Kim Lawkis '11, '13 says the Association helps the University simply by bringing people to campus — and not just alumni. Groups from throughout the community rent the MacQueen Center for events.

"You've got the campus community, the alumni community and the Mobile community," Lawkis says. "You need all three of those for us to have a fully developed identity as a University."

Like Fulford, Lawkis had to scramble to get a university education. She grew up in a single-parent working-class family in Scottsboro, Alabama. From age 15, if she wanted anything besides the basics, she had to work for it.

At South, she had "such a great experience," she says. She began volunteering for service organizations on and off campus. Today, she's chief operating officer of Feeding Alabama, a nonprofit organization that assists food banks in fighting hunger.

"I want to just serve and give back to an institution that totally transformed my life," she says. "When you look at how many kids try and don't make it out of generational poverty, and then you get to the other side, you see that there are kids fighting so hard to be at South. What can I do for them?"

> BE A PART OF THE USA National Alumni Association's 50th Anniversary celebration by becoming a member. Already a member? Join the 1974 Society with your gift of \$1,974 in support of the Association's programs and services.



# Through the Years ...

#### 1974

University of South Alabama National Alumni Association is founded with a mission "to support and positively influence the goals of the University through an active relationship with the University, its alumni, students and friends."

### 1974

The Association's first president of the Board of Directors, Kenneth W. Cunningham '68, is appointed.

### 1975

The Association receives its certificate of incorporation as a not-for-profit organization.

### 1978

The Association creates the University's first student ambassador program, the Southerners.

#### 1979

The Association establishes its first student scholarship programs, the Alumni Leadership Scholarship and the South Alabama Scholars Award.

#### 1989

The Association establishes the Children of Alumni Scholarships program, which provides scholarships for students from Alabama through the sale of customized collegiate license plates. Today, the Association awards more than \$100,000 annually in overall student scholarships.

### 2000

The Association creates endowments to recognize outstanding achievement through its Employee Recognition Awards and its Faculty Excellence Awards.

### 2010

The Association dedicates Moulton Tower and Alumni Plaza, now the most recognized landmark on campus.

#### 2020

The Association dedicates and opens the MacQueen Alumni Center, the on-campus home for South Alabama alumni.


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### It's Our Birthday YEAR!

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## $\bigoplus$

## 19th Annual Distinguished Alumni and Service Awards

MARCH 14, 2024

### **DAN OLLIS '80**

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

Dan Ollis has spread beauty around the globe through the Los Angeles-based design firm Swanson-Ollis Interiors. He's an avid South football fan who hosted an alumni dinner party in his own exquisite house when the Jaguars played at UCLA.

We love that kind of home team.





### **DR. PETER** LINDQUIST '06, M.S. '11 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

Dr. Peter Lindquist was passionate about taking care of customers as a teenager working at his family's auto salvage business in Mobile. He now oversees nursing for HCA Healthcare's North Florida Division and helps bring healthcare to impoverished children in Haiti.

He won't toot his own horn, but we will.

### **ALEXIS ATKINS '97**

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Alexis Atkins enrolled at South while working full time at her family's business, Budweiser-Busch Distributing Co. She is vice chair of South's Board of Trustees, a former president of the USA National Alumni Association and a tireless volunteer in the Mobile community.

Now that's a story worth a toast.



### **CHANDRA BROWN** STEWART '99

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Chandra Brown Stewart speaks out on behalf of those who have been overlooked or marginalized — as executive director of Lifelines Counseling Services in Mobile and as a community leader and devoted volunteer. Her donation of a friendship bench at the Africatown Heritage House encourages visitors to sit together in conversation.

Let us all listen.





### SUSAN AND TRAVIS BEDSOLE JR.

V. GORDON MOULTON DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Travis and Susan Bedsole deeply value education. They have championed literacy programs and facilitated numerous scholarships at South. One of those scholarships reflects two of their passions: learning and Jaguar athletics. It goes to an education major who plays an NCAA sport.

As the Bedsoles say: Go Jags!

### **DR. JACK DIPALMA**

WILLIAM J. "HAPPY" FULFORD INSPIRATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Dr. Jack DiPalma has brought worldwide respect to the University and USA Health through his leadership in the field of gastroenterology. Revered by his students, he has also built community ties by serving in local organizations. And he coaches South's bass fishing team.

He's a big fish in many ponds.





### UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA FOUNDATION

COMMUNITY PARTNER AWARD

The University of South Alabama Foundation, led by board President John McMillan and Managing Director Maxey Roberts, stands as a strong partner with South. Its support includes funding for scholarships, healthcare and academic programs, relying on timber and other investments.

We'll shout our gratitude from the treetops.



**WATCH** videos spotlighting this year's recipients and their contributions.

# JOINUS FOR THE JOURNEY of a LIFETIME

For more information visit SouthAlabama.edu/JaguarJourneys



Shades of Ireland March 15 — March 24, 2025



1.th

A MURAL CREATED BY University of South Alabama alumnus Riley Brenes '10 and teens at Strickland Youth Center was a focal point at the spring Festival of Flowers, an annual fundraiser for the Providence Hospital Foundation.

S. 18

## The Power of Painting

WHEN RILEY BRENES '10, who majored in fine arts at the University of South Alabama, worked at Strickland Youth Center, a juvenile detention facility in Mobile, he enlisted the help of teenagers there to create a mural for the annual Festival of Flowers fundraiser held at Cathedral Square.

Brenes, who was a transitional program coordinator, and the teens started by studying Sam Lackland, credited as the founder of Mobile's Azalea Trail, a beautification campaign for the city in the 1920s. Then they painted a colorful 16-by-8-foot mural that celebrated Lackland's life and legend.

Brenes believes painting and gardening projects help give purpose to Strickland youth. "When they're in painting classes, they're just kids," he says. "Their minds are busy. They're doing something good. Painting is like that."

Strickland murals have become a centerpiece of the annual festival, which benefits USA Health Providence Hospital, thanks to the support of Circuit and Juvenile Court Judge Edmond Naman, another South alumnus. Brenes also painted two smaller murals for the entrance to the event.

"He was a true friend to the children that needed him most," Naman wrote when Brenes left Strickland. "He has a magical touch with children who are lost and hurting and always seems able to bring out the best in them."





## When Every Second Counts

The newly expanded Pediatric Emergency Center at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital opened its doors to patients and their families this spring. Specially trained healthcare staff offer the highest level of care available when every second counts. Here are three takeaways:

> **THE PEDIATRIC EMERGENCY** Center is the only pediatric emergency department on the Alabama Gulf Coast dedicated to caring for sick and injured children 24 hours a day, every day. It has achieved 100% compliance through the Emergency Medical Services for Children Program's National Pediatric Readiness Project.

2

WITH NEARLY 19,000 square feet, the facility features 25 private treatment rooms, two behavioral health rooms, areas for major medical treatment and resuscitation, an isolation area for patients with infectious diseases and a private space dedicated to the care of pediatric sexual assault patients.

A SENSORY ROOM is designed to support neurodivergent patients while providing the opportunity for children to develop and enhance effective coping skills. The space offers a variety of modalities that promote sensory stimulation, relaxation, calming and developmentally appropriate play.





MEDICAL STUDENTS joined Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey and other supporters during the December groundbreaking of the new Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building.



### 'AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE OF HEALTHCARE'



#### CONSTRUCTION IS UNDERWAY

on a new, 250,000-square-foot Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building that will allow the University of South Alabama to graduate more physicians and enhance research and innovation. Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey and other supporters attended a December groundbreaking on South's campus.

The \$200 million facility, set to be completed in 2026, will round out a medical education hub on campus that includes the College of Nursing, the Pat Capps Covey College of Allied Health Professions, the Health Simulation Building and the Charles M. Baugh Biomedical Library. When the new building opens, more than 500,000 square feet of campus facilities will be dedicated to healthcare education and research.

"This facility will offer our future students the most advanced learning and research opportunities anywhere in the country," says USA President Jo Bonner. "It will transform medicine to the unique needs of our community while educating and training the next generation of providers." The new Whiddon College of Medicine building will provide state-of-the-art laboratory spaces that will create flexibility and efficiency for research today and in the future. It will also allow for expanding the class size of first-year medical students from 80 to 100, with the capability of increasing to 120 in the future, at the same time the nation faces a projected shortage of healthcare providers.

"This is an investment in the future of healthcare to meet the needs of Alabamians," says Dr. John Marymont, dean of the Whiddon College of Medicine and vice president for medical affairs. "By national metrics, this medical school produces highquality physicians that stay in the state, helping meet the needs in primary care as well as in rural and underserved areas at an affordable cost."

The Whiddon College of Medicine is one of 158 accredited M.D.-granting institutions in the United States, and one of only two in the state. More than 1,139 of its graduates are practicing medicine in Alabama.



### Good Eggs

THE USA NATIONAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION'S annual Easter Egg Hunt helped celebrate six decades of South. With more than 6,000 eggs, the March 30 event at the Jaguar Training Center included something special this year: 250 commemorative 60th Anniversary wooden eggs in purple, green, blue and gold. The University turned 60 on May 3, 2023; events were held throughout the year.





### USA BY THE BAY DRAWS CROWDS

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA'S new speaker series, USA by the Bay, has brought hundreds of people to lectures and performances by artists, scholars and industry experts at the USA Baldwin County Campus in Fairhope. A July event features Major Applewhite, South's new head football coach. Healthcarefocused topics complement USA Health's significant expansion in the county. All events are free and open to the public and reflect South's commitment to building relationships along the Gulf Coast.

>> LEARN MORE



### For Hannah Maddux, Life Is All Kills and Thrills

HANNAH MADDUX, a superstar from the University of South Alabama Jaguars volleyball team, has spent the past few months thrilling crowds as an outside hitter for Vegas Thrill, one of seven teams in the new Pro Volleyball Federation.

Maddux was drafted to the Thrill in the inaugural season of the women's professional indoor volleyball league.

She earned a bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism from South and continued her education with a master's degree in strategic communications. With two games left to play in the season, Maddux missed attending spring Commencement — so her teammates stepped in and celebrated her at practice,

and celebrated her at practice, surprising her with champagne, a pink cap and gown and a video montage of her friends and family congratulating her. Originally from Texas, Maddux

Originally from Texas, Maddux was recruited by South as a high school player. "I wanted to go somewhere I'd make an impact," she says. "I loved the campus when I came and toured. It was forest-like, yet near the beach. I loved being at South."

Maddux was one of the most prolific players in program history, finishing top 10 in career block assists and kills per set and top five in total kills and total attempts. She was a 2023 First-Team All-Sun Belt selection and contributed to the program's two NCAA Tournament appearances, both under Coach Jesse Ortiz.

Following her playing career, Maddux plans to go into sports broadcasting.



#### **GREETINGS, JAG NATION!**

The 50th anniversary celebration of the University of South Alabama National Alumni Association is in full swing. It's been so much fun seeing so many of you at festivities the past several months, including our birthday kickoff party, the Distinguished Alumni and Service Awards gala, the Alumni Easter Egg Hunt and our Member Appreciation Block Party. Stay tuned for upcoming events as we continue to celebrate our 50th anniversary year.

In this edition, we reflect on the history of the National Alumni Association, from our humble beginnings in 1974 to the dynamic organization we are today, and the impact we've made on our beloved University, our alumni, students and friends. Alumni continue to play an important role in the growth and success of our University by becoming more integrated in its life, leadership and governance. We serve on boards and committees, assist in student recruitment, provide expertise on University initiatives, advocate

on behalf of the University and contribute time and financial resources. In the past 20 years, we've also contributed significantly to enhancing the landscape of our beautiful campus with the addition of Moulton Tower and Alumni Plaza (2010) and the MacQueen Alumni Center (2020). Both facilities were designed and funded by alumni and have become symbols of our spirit and commitment to the University of South Alabama for generations to come.

I am honored to present to you the recipients of the 2024 Distinguished Alumni and Service Awards. Receiving Distinguished Alumni Awards were Dr. Peter Lindquist '06, M.S. '11, and Dan Ollis '80. Distinguished Service Award recipients were Alexis Atkins '97. Chandra Brown Stewart '99. and Travis and Susan Bedsole. The Inspirational Achievement Award was presented to Dr. Jack DiPalma, and the University of South Alabama Foundation received the Community Partner Award. This stellar group of

healthcare heroes, educators, entrepreneurs, corporate trailblazers and public servants, along with 119 previous award recipients, continue to make a positive impact in our world. We are so proud of each of them.

Mark your calendars for Oct. 24-26, 2024, for Homecoming and Alumni Reunion Weekend. One of the highlights of this special weekend is the unveiling of the names of the Association's newest Lifetime members on the Walls of Honor at Moulton Tower and Alumni Plaza. This year, we will add 198 names, bringing the total number of Lifetime members recognized to more than 4,000. Also, a highlight of the weekend is the Golden Jaguar Luncheon, featuring the members of the Class of 1974 in honor of the 50th anniversary of their graduation. We can't wait to see vou here! GO JAGS!

Karen Webster Edwards '80

Executive Director USA National Alumni Association



### 2023-2024 NATIONAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

#### National Alumni Association

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EACH MAY, some 40,000 people flock to Gulf Shores for the three-day Hangout Fest, one of the largest single draws to Alabama's beaches with 60-plus acts. The event kicks off the start of summer and the tourist season.

The timeless lure of Alabama's Gulf Coast supercharges tourism.

BY STEVE MILLBURG

"This is my beach. This is where I bring my family every year. This is where my parents brought me when

I was a kid. And now I'm bringing my kids." N TOURISM, AS IN MOST THINGS, trends come and go. The Alabama Gulf Coast doesn't play that game. Its appeal rests on a glittering treasure with timeless allure.

"Our main attraction obviously is 32 miles of sugar white sand beaches," says Kay Maghan, public relations manager for Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism.

"We hear from people all the time, 'This is my beach. This is where I bring my family every year. This is where my parents brought me when I was a kid. And now I'm bringing my kids."

Lots and lots of visitors feel that way. In 2023, travel-related spending in Mobile and Baldwin counties totaled \$9.7 billion, according to the Alabama Tourism Department.

That's a whopping 41 percent of the state total. The two-county region also accounted for more than a third of the state's travelrelated employment.

"People know that we have tourism here," says Amanda Donaldson, senior instructor in the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management at the University of South Alabama, "but I don't think that they understand what it generates for our economy."

Decades ago, tourists came primarily from the Southeast, mostly in spring and summer. Many restaurants and shops closed in winter.

Over the years, the popularity of Alabama's beaches grew. Snowbirds started to fill winter vacancies. Lodging and attractions extended north into Foley. And the 2010 BP Gulf of Mexico oil spill, although an environmental disaster that threatened a long-term economic crisis, proved to be no match for the area's appeal.

Exhaustive news coverage made the adjoining beach cities of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach nationally known. Promotional campaigns followed. In 2016, for example, the Alabama Tourism Department set up a beach chair on a New York City street and invited all comers to plop down, relax and dig their toes into powdery-soft Baldwin County sand — to get just a little taste of a brand known to generations of Alabamians.

Recovery money helped fund a renovation of Gulf State Park, the crown jewel of the state park system, including the construction of a full-service resort and conference center, The Lodge.

Chandra Wright, director of environmental and educational initiatives for the park, calls it "an international benchmark for environmental and economic sustainability." Construction and design professionals come from around the world to check out its stylishly contemporary design.

Another of Baldwin County's premier accommodations, the Grand Hotel Golf Resort & Spa in Point Clear, is the traditional queen of Alabama Gulf Coast resorts. With a historic lodge overlooking Mobile Bay, the Grand has welcomed guests since 1847.

Across the bay, Mobile County tourist draws include Dauphin Island, Bellingrath Gardens, USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park and the street parades of Carnival. Visitors can explore the local history and contributions of African Americans, including at the Africatown Heritage House.

Having so many tourism businesses next door helps recruit students to South's Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Donaldson says.

One of them, Trinity Walker '23, worked after graduation as a concierge at Walt Disney World. She's now partnership coordinator for Visit Mobile, the city's tourism agency.

In tourism, Walker says, "The first interaction and the last are going to be the ones they remember most vividly. You have to greet them with a smile. And then tell them that you hope to see them back soon."

Sure enough, again and again, they return for the things they can't find anywhere else, like those familiar sugar-white sands.

TOURIST DESTINATIONS,

clockwise from top left: Battleship USS Alabama; The Lodge at Gulf State Park; the beach at Gulf State Park; Africatown Heritage House; Mardi Gras in downtown Mobile; Grand Hotel Golf Resort & Spa; Bellingrath Gardens; Alabama Point East in Orange Beach; center, the boardwalk and jetty at the Grand Hotel.





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### Upcoming Events

USA by the Bay with Coach Major Applewhite July 11, 5:30 p.m. 111 St. James St., Fairhope National Alumni Association

50th Anniversary Block Party Aug. 16, 5:30-7 p.m. Braided River Brewing, Mobile GO Run Benefiting USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute Sept. 21, 8 a.m. Hancock Whitney Stadium

Homecoming/Reunion Weekend Oct. 24-26 USA hosts ULM on Oct. 26 Hancock Whitney Stadium A Night Honoring Healers Nov. 7, 5:30 p.m. Mobile Convention Center

National Alumni Association 50th Anniversary Wrap-up Party Dec. 10, 5:30-7 p.m. MacQueen Alumni Center

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**THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA** recognized the Class of 2024 during two May 4 Commencement ceremonies at the USA Mitchell Center. Friends and family gathered outside after each one to congratulate South's newest alumni.