

FLAGSHIP OF THE GULF COAST<sup>SM</sup>

# South

magazine

Six Decades  
of South  
18

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA



Record  
Enrollment

USA Health  
Providence

Distinguished  
Alumni

Looking  
Forward

# South magazine

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

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**ON THE COVER**  
A visual representation by Samuel Velasco of the growth during the University of South Alabama's first 60 years.



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**The Letter**  
Even a hurricane couldn't steal this symbol of South pride.



SORORITY BID DAY 2023  
marked the first year that  
bids were handed out at  
Hancock Whitney Stadium.



**HOMECOMING**  
week kicked off with  
the traditional Junk  
the Jungle. President  
Jo Bonner helped  
students roll the  
traffic circle.

# Our First 60 Years

Take a drive down memory lane,  
appreciate how far we've come  
and help shape our future as the  
Flagship of the Gulf Coast

**O**UR 60TH ANNIVERSARY brings with it a redesigned South Magazine. The University is proud to collaborate with the USA National Alumni Association on this publication.

With dynamic photography and illustrations, along with approachable storytelling and a new look, South Magazine has been expanded to showcase the best of the University of South Alabama.

This edition takes a look back at our first six decades, and it also allows readers a whimsical glimpse into the future through the use of artificial intelligence. Spoiler alert: The University president in 15 years is, in fact, still a human.

Some of this year's highlights are documented — increased enrollment, record fundraising, the acquisition of Providence Hospital and our 16th all-sports championship trophy, to name a few. You'll learn more about our faculty research, alumni achievements and the students who will define our

University for future generations.

Particularly touching is a story about a young girl whose spinal deformity is being treated by a provider team at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital. Her journey involves help from some of our dedicated employees in facilities management, and it inspired engineering students to search for solutions to assist other children with spinal issues.

The effort is emblematic of who we are — an innovative and collaborative University that consistently punches above its weight to promote discovery, health and learning.

We've come a long way from our modest beginnings. Our history is relatively short, and there is still much of our story to be written. Our students, alumni, faculty, staff and supporters will be the authors of that biography, and I'm looking forward to seeing where we will go, together, as the Flagship of the Gulf Coast.

Jo Bonner  
President

VIEW FROM THE

# Bell Tower



**KATIE GILES,**  
an Honors College  
student from Gadsden,  
Alabama, has been  
selected as the 2023-24  
University of South  
Alabama Board of  
Trustees Scholar.

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES SCHOLAR

At Glencoe High School, Katie Giles won a cross country state championship as a sophomore. She earned South's top academic award with a record that includes a 36 score on the ACT and a perfect 4.0 grade point average.

A biomedical sciences major, Giles is looking forward to doing research and preparing for medical school.

"I've always felt drawn to it," she said. "Sports medicine is something I'm really passionate about. As an athlete, I've been injured, and I've been able to work with doctors who were really understanding and worked to expedite my recovery."

At South, Giles wakes up early for training runs as a walk-on with the women's cross country team.

"On my high school team, I was always the fastest runner, but I knew that wouldn't be the case here," she said. "I think that will push me, though, and help me grow."



## J'S UP!

A new SouthPaw statue at Hancock Whitney Stadium honors the University of South Alabama's founding for its 60th Anniversary. With a bright red, white and blue color scheme, a No. 1 jersey and a J's up greeting, SouthPaw permanently welcomes visitors at the stadium's south entrance. Plans are underway for similar SouthPaw statues around Mobile to highlight the University's close connection to the community.



>> WATCH SOUTHPAW'S unveiling at the USA-Southern Miss game.



## 'Unwritten' Exhibit Opens at USA Archaeology Museum

A new exhibit at the USA Archaeology Museum, "Unwritten: Archaeology and Oral History of Jim Crow Mobile," introduces visitors to the Lewis, Owens and Griffin families. They owned homes in different parts of segregated Mobile, but shared much in common. Their stories are told through interviews with family members and artifacts from the excavation of Black neighborhoods destroyed by development during the 20th century.

The museum exhibit was funded by a 2021 National Endowment for the Humanities grant of \$453,000. This was the largest grant for the humanities in the history of the University of South Alabama.

"Unwritten" will be on display through April of 2024. Admission is free to the USA Archaeology Museum, 6050 USA South Drive.

**DR. ANDI KENT, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND PROVOST, AND SGA PRESIDENT AMYA DOUGLAS** celebrate the opening of Miss Pawla's Grill at the start of fall semester.



## BY THE NUMBERS

- >> FIRST-YEAR STUDENT ENROLLMENT UP **19%**
- >> **13,768** STUDENTS ENROLLED
- >> **3.74** GPA OF CLASS OF 2027
- >> **2,500** STUDENTS LIVING ON CAMPUS
- >> TRANSFER ENROLLMENT UP **10%**



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# BUILDING BLOCKS

The architecture of South reveals its history, brick by reddish brick, from a single building to a sprawling campus that continues to grow

BY THOMAS BECNEL

Over the years, as enrollment increased and students began living on campus, University buildings became more eclectic and ambitious.

**AN ARCHITECTURAL TOUR** of the University of South Alabama begins with a string of mid-century modern buildings set in suburban west Mobile.

Instead of grand towers around a grassy quadrangle, as seen on so many college campuses, the South structures blend into the piney woods. Lots of reddish tan brick and thin bands of windows. A modest start for a commuter college, founded in 1963, just beginning to grow.

Over the years, as enrollment increased and students began living on campus, University buildings became more eclectic and ambitious. Fewer flat roofs and slit windows. More courtyards and atriums, metal fixtures and curtain wall glass.

Marx Library, built in 1968, got a dramatic expansion and face-lift in 2003. A generation of South students have enjoyed a four-story glass wall which offers natural light and sweeping views across campus.

South architectural guidelines now call for three- and four-story structures with distinct levels of brick and cast stone. Gateway buildings to campus include the Health Sciences Building, the Student Recreation Center and Shelby Hall. All three are

L-shaped structures with striking rotundas that join separate wings. In the early years, buildings on campus were constructed with buff and red bricks. Eventually, the trend shifted to a more consistent red.

The center of the South campus is also home to a trio of historic buildings that were moved to west Mobile. The Toulmin House, a Creole cottage built in 1828, is one of the oldest structures in Mobile County. The Marx House provides an example of a 19th-century townhouse design called “side-hall-with-wing.” Finally, there’s the Seamen’s Bethel, which was an antebellum chapel built for sailors passing through the port of Mobile.

Across campus along University Boulevard, the future of South is ready to take shape with construction of a new Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building. The medical school will feature the clay brick Dark Palomino, manufactured by the Watsontown Brick Company, and include design elements that embrace the first buildings of a small college that became the Flagship of the Gulf Coast.



# First Things First

While some students at South follow in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents, the University's many first-generation students are blazing a new path for future generations. We asked first-year first-gen students to reflect on their experiences.



For **WILLIAMS HERNANDEZ**, a first-generation college student from Theodore, Alabama, the Summer Start program relieved his fears and gave him confidence that he could succeed at the University of South Alabama.

The 18-year-old was born in Arizona but grew up near Mobile. He's majoring in biomedical sciences.

"I was really scared, really nervous, but once I got to know some of my classmates, we helped each other out. It got a lot easier. After Summer Start, we started a group chat on

Snapchat. We wanted to know how everyone was doing. We stay in touch to this day.

"I've already met a lot of people at South. I have a good friend who's Vietnamese, and he's sharing his culture and food with me. We stay late on campus, studying at the library. We've been going to this Vietnamese store to get \$2 spring rolls.

"I know it's going to be hard, but I'm really motivated to succeed. I feel like if you want it, you can do it. You've got to come in with that mindset. You know, my mother was pregnant with me when she came to this country. She took all these risks for me. I think about that a lot. So I want to make her proud."

**MADISON RYAN**, a first-generation college student from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, grew up taking cellphone photos and Polaroid snapshots of her friends. It became her thing. At South, she's majoring in fine arts with a concentration in photography.

She's working part time and making friends in her art courses.

"I'm taking Introduction to Photography, and there's only eight of us in the class, which is good, so there's a lot of one-on-one with the professor. I didn't even know we were going to start off with film photography, going through the developing process and making prints. It's weird, taking pictures without knowing how they're going to turn out. We have a lot of creative freedom, and my friends model for me and help out with my assignments.

"I found one person in my Perceptual Drawing class who is a photography major. We have similar styles and common interests. Another of my friends is a graphic design major. We have a lot in common.

"I met my roommate for the first time, which was a strange experience. I haven't shared a room with someone since I was a little girl. I was worried that my roommate would be crazy, but she's not crazy. She's from Pensacola, and she also worked at Publix. We've already talked about rooming together again next semester."

**GARY MORTON**, a military veteran studying to become a social studies teacher, has a family connection to South — his wife, also a veteran, is a senior.

He served with Army intelligence in Afghanistan, which helps him make sense of conflicts that date back centuries.

"When I was an intel guy, we were students of history. You have to understand the culture of a place and how they got to where they are. American history has always been a big thing for me, too. Whenever I travel, I'm always buying the history of this or the history of that. In history class here, I'm always talking, always taking part in the discussion.

"One of the teaching assistants said I have a feel for history; I have a passion for it. I was thinking that one day I could be teaching students about the war in Afghanistan, and I was actually there.

"Most of the students here are straight out of high school with no life experience, so I get asked all kinds of questions. Hey, you're an adult, what does this mean?"

"I'm trying to enjoy college as much as I can, but I treat it as a job, basically. You know, I've got a mortgage, a car payment, the whole nine yards. I'm already thinking that I need to start working so I can put money into retirement."

## CLOCKWISE

## FROM BOTTOM:

Gary Morton, Madison Ryan and Williams Hernandez

# Introducing V2G

## South engineering professor studies vehicle-to-grid power sharing

**DR. DANIELA TOUMA**, assistant professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of South Alabama, is using a National Science Foundation grant to predict power demands in the development of vehicle-to-grid technology.

V2G, as it's known, allows plug-in hybrid and electric vehicles to push power back to the electrical grid, assisting the grid during peak hours. Touma will use artificial intelligence algorithms in a laboratory simulation to forecast usage patterns by electric vehicles.

"We've got all these vehicles connected to charging stations all night at home, or all day at work, so why not put this power to use?" she said. "An electric vehicle has a big battery, so it's a big advantage."

In June, Touma's \$199,000 NSF award was announced. She and graduate assistants are working on the laboratory simulation and

surveying Mobile area residents and utility companies about their policies, practices and attitudes toward electric vehicles and vehicle-to-grid capabilities.

She is studying the Gulf Coast, a region of the country that has hardly begun to explore alternatives to internal combustion vehicles. In 2022, according to the U.S. Department of Energy, there were 8,700 electric cars registered in the state of Alabama, along with 4,400 plug-in hybrid vehicles — or about 0.3 percent of light-duty vehicles on the road.

V2G, Touma said, "helps both sides. It helps the grid function and it helps customers save money. That's important. We're engineers trying to solve problems, so we need programs people want to use."



>> **READ MORE** about Dr. Daniela Touma's research.

**"We're engineers trying to solve problems, so we need programs people want to use."**



**DR. DANIELA TOUMA** received a grant from the National Science Foundation to study V2G, or vehicle-to-grid technology.

## DISCOVER MORE

**DR. JONATHAN RAYNER**, associate professor in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology, College of Medicine, has been awarded \$302,951 to develop new methods to detect emerging mosquito-borne viral disease threats and contribute to surveillance efforts. The program is funded under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

**DR. SHENGHUA ZHA**, associate professor in Counseling and Instructional Sciences, College of Education and Professional Studies, has been awarded \$151,410 to study a culturally relevant framework to improve learning and interest in AI for high-school STEM students in Alabama and North Dakota. The project is funded by the National Science Foundation.

**DR. LAURA VRANA**, assistant professor in the Department of English, College of Arts and Sciences, has been awarded \$64,510 to spend the 2022-23 academic year as a postdoctoral fellow in poetics at the Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry at Emory University in Atlanta, where she worked on her book manuscript on African American poet Phillis Wheatley.

**DR. JOHN LEHRTER**, professor in the Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences, has been awarded \$512,131 to improve the management of oysters, blue crabs and spotted sea trout. The five-year program is funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.



## SWEET 16

### South sets Bubas Cup record

**FOR THE SIXTH TIME IN NINE** years, the University of South Alabama earned the Sun Belt Conference's annual all-sports championship trophy.

The 2022-23 Vic Bubas Cup for South is a league-best 16th.

"We are proud to recognize South Alabama for its broad-based athletics excellence in 2022-23," Sun Belt Conference Commissioner Keith Gill said. "This award is a testament to the dedication of South Alabama's student-athletes, coaches, athletic department staff and University leadership."

South Alabama has been a member of the Sun Belt Conference since its inception in 1976. The Jags tied for the Sun Belt regular season men's tennis championship and earned top-four league finishes in football, men's cross country, women's soccer, men's indoor track and field, women's indoor track and field, men's golf, softball, men's outdoor track and field, and women's outdoor track and field.

Among the titles won, South Alabama's Kyle Rademeyer claimed the 2023 NCAA outdoor track and field pole vault championship with a leap of 5.70 meters. Just how high is that? At 18 feet, 7 inches, stack two SouthPaw statues on top of each other followed by 20 burgers — his favorite food — from Miss Pawla's Grill.



## South Celebrates Sixty

The University of South Alabama kicked off its 60th Anniversary yearlong slate of events with a May announcement of a \$20 million gift for a new performing arts center.

The gift from supporter Abraham “Abe” Mitchell adds to a legacy of philanthropy. Mitchell has now given \$128 million to the University, making him one of the largest donors to a public university in the state of Alabama.

“It gives me great happiness to see the impact that my support — and that of my family — has brought to the University of South Alabama,” Mitchell said, “the impact it has had on our students, on their ability to attend and graduate from college, and their ability to pursue their dreams and establish dreams for their future generations.”

The site of the performing arts building is yet to be determined; fundraising is ongoing.



## SIGN OF THE TIMES

**IT’S OFFICIAL.** Providence has joined USA Health.

The acquisition was completed six months after the University of South Alabama Health Care Authority reached an agreement with St. Louis-based Ascension to acquire Providence and its clinics. The deal expands USA Health’s locations from 29 to 44 and continues the health system’s growth along the Gulf Coast.

The acquisition gives USA Health a third hospital, eight clinic locations on Providence’s west Mobile campus and six family practice clinics in Mobile and Moss Point, Mississippi.

Leading up to the Oct. 1 completion, teams worked to integrate communications and technology, and welcome nearly 1,800 Providence associates to USA Health. Leaders established a command center on Providence Hospital’s first floor to isolate and quickly respond to issues as soon as the hospital came online.

“The first 24 hours could not have gone better,” University of South Alabama President Jo Bonner told reporters at a news conference.

By the end of the first day, workers had applied new vinyl to the hospital’s front doors and installed other signs across the west Mobile campus. USA Health leaders rounded the floors of the hospital with their Providence colleagues, handing out cookies and welcoming new associates. In the lobby, employees stopped by a USA Health backdrop decorated with red, white and blue balloons to take photos.

Dr. John V. Marymont, vice president for medical affairs and dean of USA’s Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine, said the acquisition allowed USA Health to expand its tripartite mission of education, research and healthcare.

“Providence is well known for its rich history and culture, and we look forward to continuing that,” said USA Health CEO Owen Bailey, who also is senior associate vice president for medical affairs. “I have personally witnessed a great deal of excitement at both Providence and USA Health about our future together.”



## Providence by the Numbers

1854  
YEAR FOUNDED

1,750  
EMPLOYEES

14  
CLINICS

4  
TOWERS

1  
RANKING FOR  
MOST BEAUTIFUL HOSPITAL  
BY SOLIANT



USA HEALTH + PROVIDENCE



## IT ALL ADDS UP TO BETTER HEALTHCARE FOR AN ENTIRE REGION.

USA Health proudly welcomes Providence to the University of South Alabama family. More people than ever in our region can now benefit from the research, education, innovation and quality care that is USA Health. Together, we share a mutual commitment to core values, integrity and providing outstanding patient-centered care. Welcome to the power of academic medical care, delivered with a high dose of compassion.

USA Health Providence. Two great histories, one incredible future.

USA HEALTH  
PROVIDENCE

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MITCHELL CANCER INSTITUTE · PHYSICIAN ENTERPRISE

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA



**ABBY FLOWERS** navigates the halls of USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital with the help of a halo gravity traction-equipped custom walker.

# A Halo for Abby

How a USA Health team eased a young girl's pain, inspired student engineers and gave hope to children with spinal deformities

BY CAROL MCPHAIL  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILL STARLING

**A NURSE AND A NURSE ANESTHETIST** wheel 7-year-old Abby Flowers into OR-1 at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital. Over the next hour, a pediatric orthopaedic surgery team inserts eight pins into the young patient's skull. Attached to the pins is a metal ring called a halo.

When Abby emerges from surgery, the halo is hooked to a pulley system, creating traction on her spine. The tension starts to correct a severe curvature of the spine, setting the stage for further treatment.

The procedure, which took place in August, is a first for Children's & Women's Hospital. What began with a family seeking pain relief for a little girl becomes a new service at the hospital that gives hope for children with similar severe spinal deformities.

Without it, the closest option for these patients is hours away.

"Our vision is to build this program up so that we can offer halo gravity traction to any kid who comes in," said Dr. Tyler McDonald, Abby's surgeon and an assistant professor of orthopaedic surgery in the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine.

## 'HEART ATTACKS' AND HEARTACHE

Earlier in the year, Abby and her parents had arrived at USA Health's Strada Patient Care Center in Mobile with a stack of medical records the size of a dictionary. The family, from Baldwin County, Alabama, met with McDonald and shared their fears and frustrations from the last two years.

Abby had undergone surgery at a Florida hospital to remove a benign tumor behind her lung. It was a ganglioneuroma, which develops in nerve cells. During her recovery, her parents had noticed something unusual about the kindergartener's posture.

"She was miserable. I noticed she was leaning to one side," recalled Abby's mother, Monica Flowers. "I thought, 'Maybe she's in pain?'"

Imaging showed Abby's spine was curving. She was outfitted with a corrective vest, but she couldn't tolerate it. What followed were months of physical therapy, braces, massages and exercises. The family met with more doctors and discussed surgery but came away feeling frustrated. There was still a significant curve, and it was getting worse.

"It progressed to where her ribs were sticking out on one side," Flowers said. "She was not eating well or gaining weight. And she was starting to have chest pain."

One day, Flowers overheard her usually cheerful daughter playing, pretending to be a YouTube star, saying, "I have a lot of heart attacks, and they hurt every day."

Flowers was mortified. "Abby was hurting on a consistent basis and keeping it to herself," she said.

That's when the family turned to USA Health. McDonald, a board-certified orthopaedic surgeon, had trained in halo gravity traction during his fellowship in pediatric orthopaedics and scoliosis at the Nemours Children's Hospital, Delaware in Wilmington. He explained that the treatment could help, but it wasn't offered at a lot of facilities.

"We don't have that here," he told the family frankly.

But Abby's parents were already sold on McDonald's knowledge and sincerity.

As the doctor listened to their requests, he knew what he had to do. "If you do want to have it here, I'll have to build the program from scratch," he said. "I'll get to work."

## A GROUP EFFORT

Over the next few months, a collaboration began to take shape among the University of South Alabama and its academic health system to help Abby.

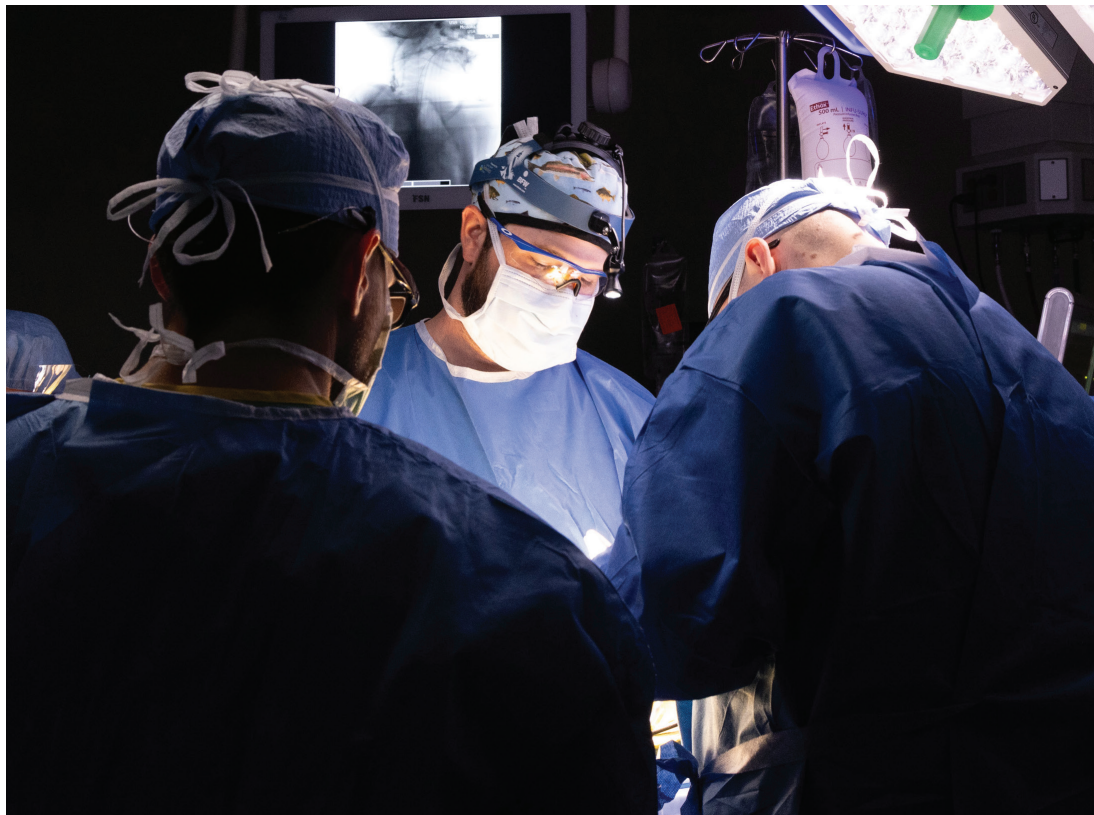
McDonald enlisted his immediate clinical team, nurse practitioner Amber Wicker and athletic trainer Cheyne Bush. Wicker took on the role of traffic cop, reaching out to the University's Renovations unit for help with fabricating the needed equipment, and to the pediatric staff at Children's & Women's Hospital to let them know that something new was coming. Bush became the liaison to the Flowers family, keeping them informed about the team's progress.

Soon, Daniel Greer and Bill Johnson in Renovations and Mike Towery of Fusion Welding, a local University vendor, were on board and building a prototype for a wheelchair and walker for Abby, who was almost 7 years old but weighed less than 40 pounds.

"They took on the project enthusiastically," Wicker said. "It was new to us all, and they were patient as we worked through the details for the equipment. They were quick and proactive, and really made getting Abby what she needed a top priority."

Not recommended for all patients with scoliosis, halo gravity traction addresses curvatures so severe that metal rods surgically attached to the spine likely would not hold. Patients are outfitted with a metal halo that encircles the head at eyebrow level and is attached to the skull with pins. The top is connected to a counterweight that helps lift the patient's body weight off the spine.

The patient remains in traction, day and night, for weeks. The traction can straighten the spine enough that further surgery can be successful.



Greer, associate director of renovations and construction at South, offered to find funding for a walker that could fit Abby's tiny frame. He and his staff gathered poles, mechanisms and weights from the hospital, along with carabiner clips from a local outdoors store. Someone in the University's cabinetry shop located a pipe with just the right diameter to enclose the weights, and Towery offered his welding services.

Soon the walker and wheelchair were outfitted with hardware suspended over where Abby would stand and sit. The builders painted the walker cobalt blue and the wheelchair bright yellow to add an element of fun.

"What we got out of it was the satisfaction that we knew it was directly impacting somebody's life," Towery said.

## 'WELCOME, FLOWERS FAMILY'

On July 21, in Room 477 at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital, pediatric nurse educator Hannah Dennis wrapped a cloth strap around the head of her colleague Anna Whetstone, a petite physical therapist. A group of about 10 nurses, physical therapists and other staff crowded around to watch Dennis demonstrate how to clip the strap — a

“

Our vision is to build this program up so that we can offer halo gravity traction to any kid who comes in.

”



stand-in for the halo – to a rope and pulley system above the small hospital bed.

Dennis carefully showed the procedure for transferring the patient and strap to the tiny blue walker and yellow-framed wheelchair from Renovations. “The kiddo will be in traction the whole time, in bed, in the walker or the wheelchair,” she said.

She cued the group to form pairs and perform cranial screenings on each other. These exams would be used to monitor the patient for neurological issues as the traction progressed.

On a whiteboard nearby, a handwritten message read: “Welcome, Flowers family.”

It was nearly time for Abby to get her halo.

## DESIGN AND BUILD

Across Mobile at the University’s College of Engineering, four mechanical engineering students jumped on a video conference with McDonald and Wicker.

“What would you like us to prioritize, the wheelchair or the walker?” asked Julia Nelson, a senior from Mobile.

Nelson, along with Ashwin Dahal, Joshua Neese and Jalon McGhee, were designing and building more equipment for halo gravity traction. Their team-based capstone design project is the culmination of four years of undergraduate study in the William B. Burnsed Jr. Mechanical, Aerospace and Biomedical Engineering program.

The equipment they present at a spring symposium may help USA Health provide treatment for children like Abby who have severe spinal deformities.

“We want to have an arsenal of equipment

ready to go and come up with the best way to transmit traction from the patient to the different devices,” McDonald said. “That’s what we can figure out together.”

The students were eager to get started.

“I chose this as my capstone project because creating a device that would be used in a real clinical setting and help improve someone’s quality of life sounded really exciting to me,” said Nelson, who plans to pursue biomedical research in graduate school. “Creating new technologies to help people live better lives is what engineering is all about.”

While the halo itself is a standard medical device, the equipment that is attached to a wheelchair, bed or walker varies, McDonald told the students. Some devices, like Abby’s, use a pulley system, while others rely on a spring to create the necessary tension.

“There are pros and cons of a pulley counterweight system,” he said. “A pulley system is easier to conceptualize from a nursing standpoint. If we need to increase the weight by two pounds, we put two more pounds on the pulley system. Easy.

“With a spring, if the patient hunkers down, it can put more tension on the spring than if they stand up,” he said.

Dahal said later that he had heard about scoliosis and had seen halo devices in videos. The project seemed to present a perfect opportunity to explore new ways to help patients.

“As our meeting progressed, I found myself growing more confident about our future project goals,” he said. “While I hadn’t initially anticipated that we would be tasked with building multiple traction systems, I was excited about the challenge it presented.”

## IN THE TREEHOUSE

Three weeks after Abby was fitted with the halo, she is shopping for groceries in the hospital’s Treehouse, a playroom full of toys and activities for young patients. Engrossed in play, she sits forward in her wheelchair, ignoring the halo attached to her head and the fact that it is tethered to a rope and pulley system.

Time in traction at the hospital has lifted her spine, relieving pressure on her abdomen and enabling her to eat better and gain weight. With the curve straightening, she is noticeably taller.

Using the wheelchair and a second, taller version of the walker, this one painted red, Abby is able to navigate the halls of the hospital, visiting the Treehouse and a classroom where patients keep up with their schoolwork.

“So much has changed,” says Flowers. “She has gone from not being able to hardly eat half a piece of French toast to eating French toast, eggs, two pieces of bacon and half a shake. Her pants are even snug on her waist.”

With each passing day, Flowers can tell that her daughter feels much better. Halo gravity traction has done its job.

“We’re ecstatic,” Flowers says. “I have cried a couple of times, and I’m not a crier. It’s amazing where we came from to get to where we are now.”

The following day, Aug. 29, Abby is back in surgery for the next phase of her treatment. This one involves Dr. Richard Menger, chief of complex spine surgery and vice chair for the Department of Neurosurgery, which is closely involved in all pediatric spine cases.

McDonald and Menger remove the halo and attach “growing rods” to Abby’s spine. The rods contain magnetic pistons that will allow doctors to lengthen them by millimeters at a time using a small machine placed on her back. As she grows in the next few years, the rods will grow with her.

The pediatric spinal program is expected to grow, as well.

“New is always scary in healthcare, but it was really awesome to see everyone pull together and learn, and go from having a feeling of anxiety to one of excitement,” McDonald said. “This says that people are standing behind our mission and willing to come together for the best outcome for the patient.”

**ENGINEERING STUDENTS**, clockwise from left, Julia Nelson, Jalon McGhee, Ashwin Dahal and Joshua Neese visit with Dr. Tyler McDonald, in scrubs, to look at the mechanics of the walker used by Abby Flowers.





# From A to Glee

How a black-and-gold varsity letter from South survived hurricane flooding for a runner who became a professor

BY THOMAS BECNEL  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SETH LAUBINGER



**S TOM MEYER** remembers it, he received his cross country varsity

letter — a black “A” with “SOUTH” in gold block letters — at a small athletics banquet sometime in the late 1960s.

“Jaguar colors,” Meyer said, laughing. “Black and gold.”

Sports were just getting started at the University of South Alabama, and the school didn’t formally adopt red, white and blue until the summer of 1967.

“Cross country was a fall sport, and there was no football back then, so it was first,” Meyer said. “I was the first one to go up there and get a letter.”

He saved the letter, with its silver pin for cross country, but never sewed it onto a sweater or anything like that. He kept it in a cardboard box that was lost during Hurricane Frederic in 1979.

And that was that, he thought, for years.

Meyer, now 77, wound up earning a biology degree at South, then a master’s degree in nursing, and returned to his alma mater as an assistant professor. He was Faculty Senate president during South’s 50th Anniversary celebration. Celebrating that legacy was one of the reasons he wished he still had his old varsity letter.

“Every time I started a new chapter in my life, South was there,” Meyer said. “That’s what South means to me.”

### Student of the ‘60s

Meyer now lives across Mobile Bay in Spanish Fort. His back porch faces the Blakeley River. He keeps a pair of binoculars next to his favorite chair.

He loves to laugh and savor a memory.

After high school, he worked at a downtown bank, but started taking biology classes at the new university in west Mobile. The ‘60s were a different time.

“A degree was nothing but a piece of paper to me,” Meyer said. “I didn’t care about grades, but I was gloriously devoted to education. I took whatever classes I wanted and worked as an assistant in the biology department.

“I skipped more than a few classes because there were so many woods to walk through on campus. There was a pond where the library is now, and I used to go there just to sit.”

During the Vietnam War, Meyer joined the National Guard, where he was trained as a Special Forces medic. After earning a nursing degree in 1975, he began working at local hospitals.

During the 1980s, he and his wife, Mary, also a nursing instructor at South, spent five years working at a military hospital in Saudi Arabia. They returned to Alabama, earned their master’s degrees, and began careers at South.

As Meyer got older, he became more of a kayaker than a runner. He took up nature photography. For the 50th anniversary of South, he paddled 50 miles in a single day to raise money for a scholarship.

### ‘Is This Important?’

As a student, cross country was important to Meyer, even though the sport didn’t attract much attention.

“We were running for the joy of running,” he said, laughing. “You know, they wrote a book about that.”

Meyer always assumed that his varsity letter perished in the waters of Hurricane Frederic. Then a housecleaning project in 2015 turned up some family history.

“My wife and I were clearing out some boxes, and Mary goes, ‘Is this important?’” he said. “And I just about dropped my teeth on the floor.”

It was his old letter. The black-and-gold A. The material was tattered, so he had a fabric restorer prepare it for mounting.

Meyer has talked with the South Athletic Department about displaying the letter. He and his wife haven’t lost their school spirit. They’ve enjoyed watching the University grow.

“For years, we didn’t have a campus identity,” Meyer said, “but it’s become a home for students, and not just a place to go to school.”

If he had to give South a grade, it would be the same as what he received from the University all those years ago — the letter A.

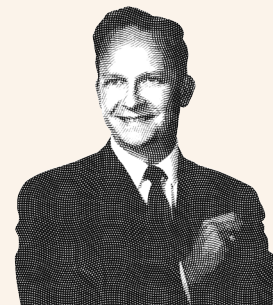
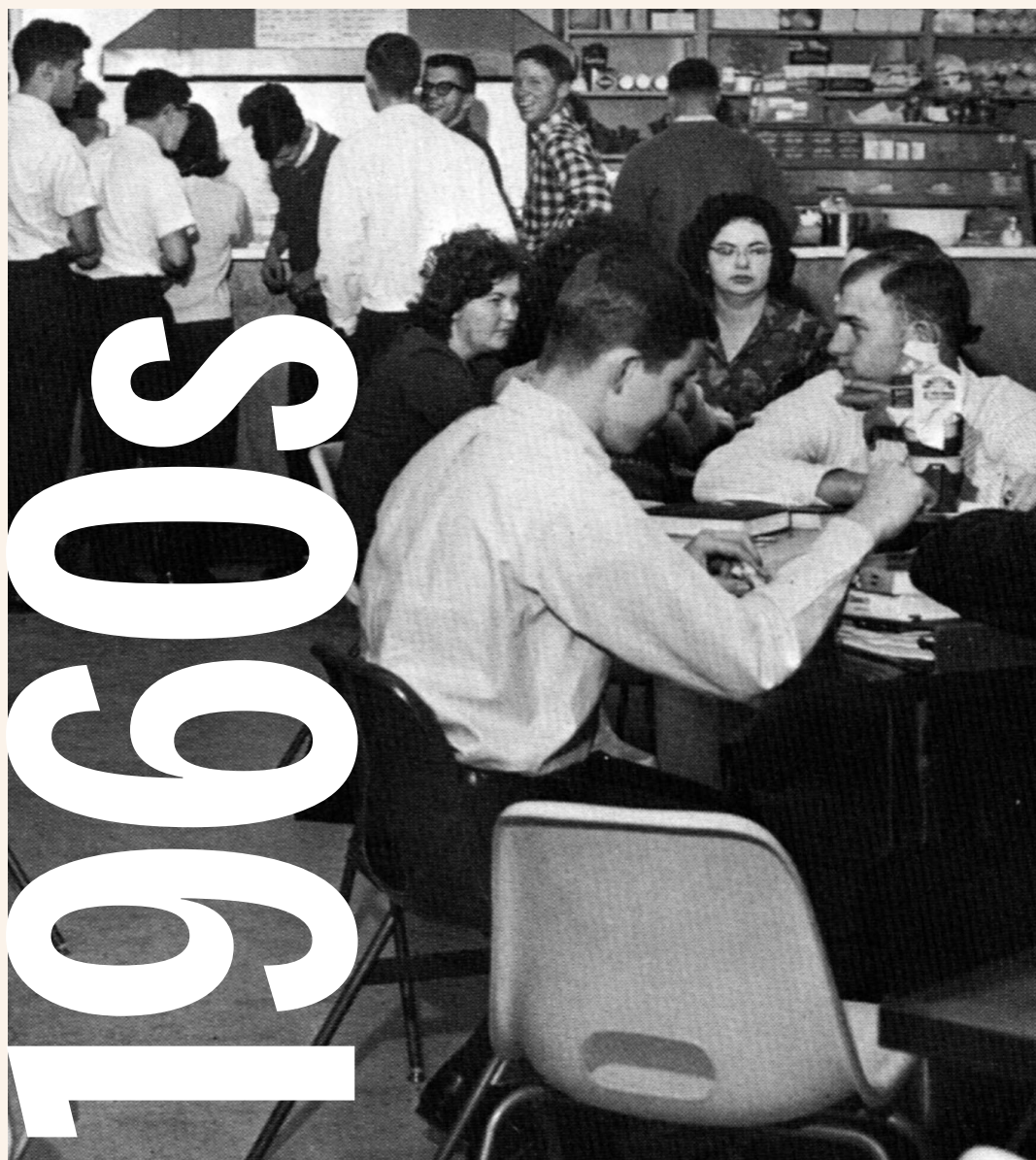


## RED, WHITE AND BLUE JAGUARS

**Jim Yance, a member of the USA Board of Trustees, ran track for South in the 1960s.**

**He remembers students on campus voting whether to change the school athletics nickname to Patriots and switch the school colors from black and gold to red, white and blue. One measure failed while the other one passed and gained trustees’ approval, so South athletes remained Jaguars but with more patriotic colors.**

**“We were starting from scratch,” Yance said, “but we were pretty darned competitive.”**



## 1964

### **BUILDING A FOUNDATION**

South opens with one building (now the Frederick Palmer Whiddon Administration Building) and an annual budget of \$869,000.

### **INSTANT SUCCESS**

Classes begin June 8 with a 27-member faculty and 276 students. Fall quarter enrollment hits 928, almost double expectations.



## 1965

### **PLAY BALL**

Mel Lucas becomes the first athletics director and first baseball coach. Today, men and women compete for the University in 17 Division I sports.

### **ROAR!**

South adopts a mascot: the jaguar. The jaguar's coat inspires the University colors of black and gold. Trustees switch to red, white and blue in 1967.

## A Promising Start

The region's higher education dreams finally come true. State Rep. Clara Stone Fields of Mobile coins the name University of South Alabama: "USA' just has a good ring to it." Visionary young President Frederick Whiddon (pictured at top right), appointed in October 1963, oversees rapid growth. Enrollment rises from zero in spring 1964 to 4,526 by fall 1969. Outside class, students hang out at the administration building's basement snack bar and enjoy excellent cafeteria food from Pete Zitsos, later of Zitsos Cafeteria downtown. In celebration of the University's 60th Anniversary, South Magazine features selected moments and memories from our first six decades, drawn from yearbooks, contemporary records and alumni recollections.



# 1967

## Home Sweet Home

South opens its first dormitories, in the Alpha complex, housing several hundred students. Around this time, it also buys homes in the neighboring Hillsdale Heights development for student housing. It exits Hillsdale in 2009.



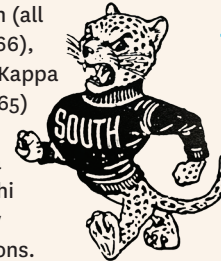
ALL ARCHIVE PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE DOY LEALE MCCALL RARE BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

## Also in 1967

**THE FIRST** Commencement sees 88 diplomas awarded downtown at the Mobile Municipal Theater (now the Mobile Civic Center Theater).

**SOUTH ADDS** the College of Education and the College of Business and Management Studies.

**TRUSTEES** officially recognize fraternities and sororities, though they had operated since shortly after the University opened. L.W. Brannan Jr. worries about Greek organizations “getting control of the institution” and votes no. Sigma Chi, founded in October 1964, is South’s first fraternity. Other pioneers are Phi Kappa Sigma, Sigma Nu, Sigma Alpha Epsilon (all 1965) and Theta Chi (1966), and for women Phi Mu, Kappa Delta, Delta Zeta (all 1965) and Chi Omega (1966). The annual Sigma Alpha Epsilon Bed Race and Chi Omega Songfest quickly become campus traditions.



## 1968

### Hoops, Bytes, Degrees

**Men’s basketball** debuts with a win over Millsaps.

**Trustees authorize \$342,000 for an IBM 360 mainframe computer. Total memory: 4 megabytes.**

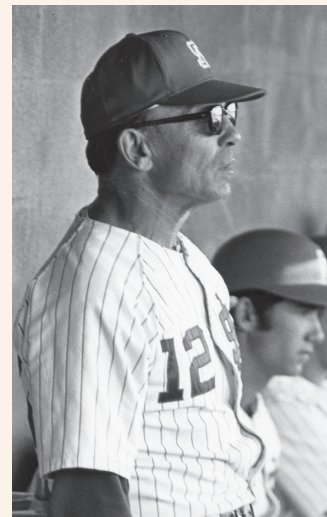
**South bestows its first six master’s degrees.**

**The University receives accreditation.**

## 1969

### ON THE MAP

Eddie Stanky becomes baseball coach and puts South athletics on the national map. The three-time major league All-Star compiles a 488-195-2 record in 14 seasons. Known as a fiery player, he mentors patiently as a coach. In 1980, the University opens a new baseball stadium named Stanky Field. Steve Kittrell succeeds Stanky in 1984 and goes 1,052-644-1 in 28 seasons.



# 1970

## SOUTH GETS A HOSPITAL

AS A STEP TOWARD creation of a medical school, the city transfers Mobile General Hospital to South for \$10.

## NATIONAL PAN-HELLENIC COUNCIL ARRIVES

ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA SORORITY, INC. becomes South's first historically African American Greek organization in 1970. Other pioneers are Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. in 1972 and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. in 1974.

## TURBULENT TIMES

THROUGH THE TUMULTUOUS 1960s and '70s, such issues as civil rights and the Vietnam War inspire occasional protests. In fall 1970, Black students stage a sit-down after a reduced Student Government Association allocation for Black History Week. Five years later, students elect Ken Simon as the first African American SGA president.

Of the 5,221 students in 1970, more than 4,000 live at home or elsewhere off campus. With South on the quarter system, classes typically meet Monday through Thursday, and the campus empties Friday through Sunday. South switches to a semester system in 1998 and develops into a university that attracts people from across the state and around the world. Today, 65% of students come from outside Mobile County.

1971

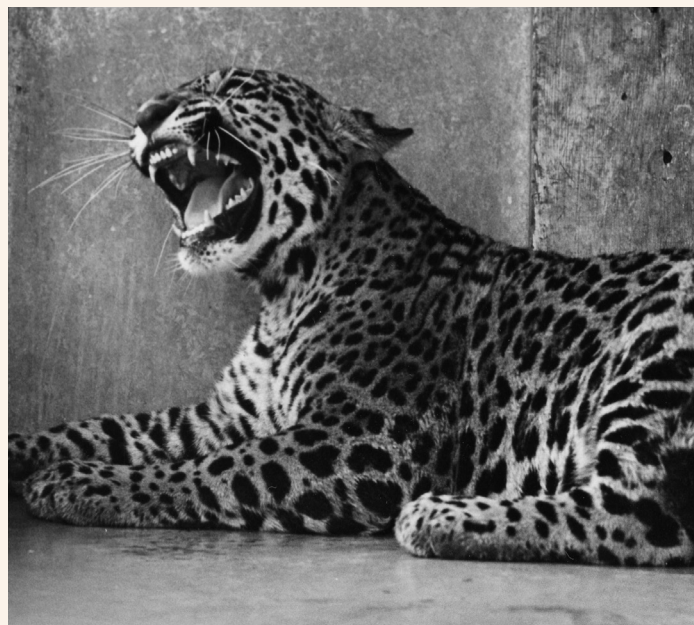
### SAENGER SAVED

One day before the planned demolition of the 1927-vintage Saenger Theatre in downtown Mobile, it's donated to South. The University uses it for music and theater department performances, among other events. In 1999, the City of Mobile buys it for \$500,000.



### SEA STUDIES

Alabama creates the Dauphin Island Sea Lab marine research and education center on Dauphin Island. A consortium of 22 Alabama colleges and universities operates the lab. South has the largest presence of faculty and students, and its president chairs the executive committee.



# 1972

## Goodbye, Mischka

Students vote 625-228 to send live jaguar mascot Mischka to the Rare Feline Breeding Compound in Florida. University trustees accept the recommendation. A brief escape from her outdoor pen near the Jag Gym may have influenced the decision. Not long after she was donated to South in 1968, student Bob Kirsch won a name-the-jaguar contest. He remembers his prize as a then-impressive \$100.



# 1973

**IN JANUARY**, the College of Medicine's 25-member charter class starts its studies. Patricia Sanders, a member of the next class, becomes the college's first female African American graduate in 1977. "I was so young, I didn't fully understand the magnitude of what was taking place," she recalls years later. "I was just focused on becoming a physician."



# 1974

**SOUTH'S ALUMNI ASSOCIATION** creates its constitution and bylaws. The following year, it files articles of incorporation. Today, the association has nearly 6,000 members and an on-campus home at the MacQueen Alumni Center.



**ILL WINDS** The fall quarter proceeds on schedule despite \$3 million in damage from Hurricane Frederic on Sept. 12. The storm splinters trees on the main campus and severely damages the waterfront Brookley Center, part of a former Air Force base south of downtown Mobile that South acquired in 1969. After six months of repairs, Brookley resumes hosting conferences, continuing education and special programs. In 2010, South sells the property to the USA Foundation for \$20 million.



## FOUNDING MEMBER

The University joins five others as charter members of the Sun Belt Conference. To date, South has won the league's all-sports Vic Bubas Cup a record 16 times.

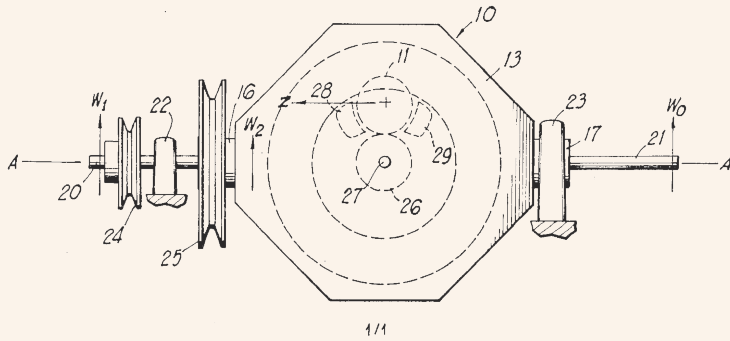
# 1978

## RESEARCH AND CLINICAL TRAINING

South starts its first Ph.D. program, in Basic Medical Sciences. It helps draw research-focused faculty and students to the College of Medicine and boosts the University's research profile.

## AMBASSADORS

The Office of Alumni Affairs creates the Southerners, a group of students who help host events and otherwise act as University ambassadors. Originally 12, today they number 28 and are easily distinguished by their trademark red and blue jackets.



## 1980s: Research and Innovation

South's first patent comes in 1983, for a mechanical torque converter invented by Dr. Eugene Odell, professor of mechanical engineering. Seven more patents follow in the 1980s; the total now stands at 108. Dr. June Ayling and Dr. Steven Bailey of the College of Medicine's Department of Pharmacology collaborate on 11 of them, which generate millions of dollars in revenue for the University. Many of their patents involve ways of formulating and administering folates – B vitamins that can decrease the risk of birth defects, cognitive decline, cardiovascular disease and other disorders.



**JOHN A. COUNTS SR.**, standing far right, becomes the first South alumnus to join the Board of Trustees. He serves until his death in 1995.

# 1980

1980

### COMPUTERS ON THE RISE

South creates a Department of Computer Science, with about 300 student majors enrolled.



1983

### WHERE BABIES COME FROM

South establishes Children's & Women's Hospital within University Hospital and later purchases Doctors Hospital, its current location. Today, USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital delivers more babies annually than any other hospital in Mobile. Its Hollis J. Wiseman Neonatal Intensive Care Unit is the region's only Level III neonatal intensive care unit. And the Arlene Mitchell Pediatric Intensive Care Unit is the only facility of its kind in the region.



# 1984 Crossing the Bay

Trustees officially establish the University of South Alabama Baldwin Campus in Fairhope, expanding the University to the east side of Mobile Bay. Academic programs today include the College of Nursing's accelerated nursing program, which allows students to earn a bachelor's degree in as little as a year.



## ALL-STAR

# 1986

**BASEBALL OUTFIELDER** Luis Gonzalez achieves Freshman All-American honors. Of the 28 Jaguars who reach baseball's major leagues, Gonzalez, a five-time All-Star, becomes the best. Other star sports alums include baseball's Lance Johnson, David Freese, Jon Lieber, Juan Pierre, Adam Lind and Brendan Donovan; basketball's Terry Catledge; football's Jeremy Reaves and Gerald Everett; soccer's Jemma Purfield; track and field's Muizat Ajoke Odumosu; and golf's Heath Slocum.



## 1987

### Greek Row

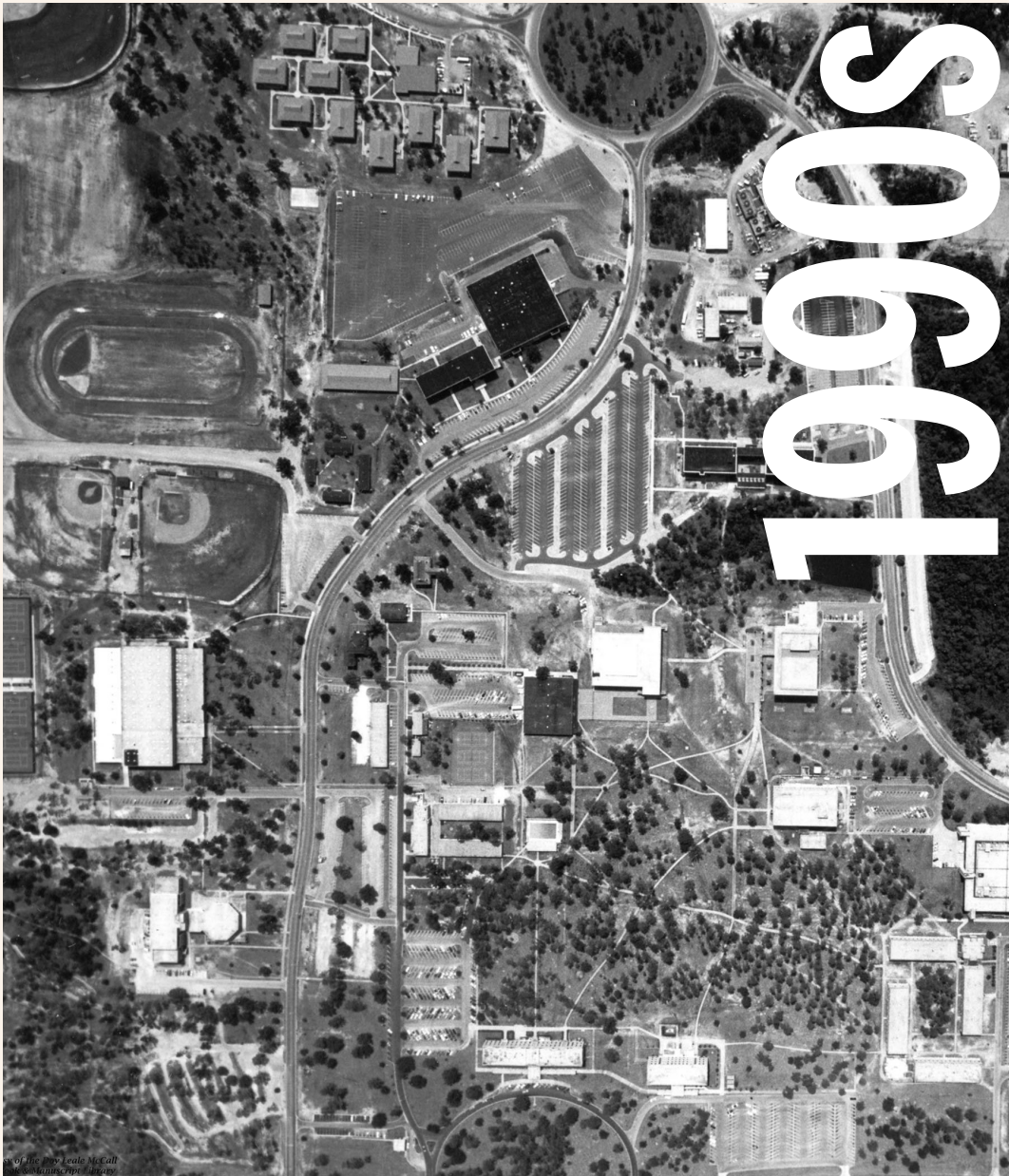
Fraternities and sororities get the OK to create what becomes Greek Row on campus. Four fraternities and five sororities build houses there. Fraternities had previously set up houses off campus and at Brookley Center.



# 1989

### Down and Dirty

Oozeball debuts in all its squishy, gooey glory. The annual student mud volleyball tournament, still going strong, raises scholarship money for the Southerners student ambassador program.



**CREATING THE COMMONS**

South buys the Kingswood Shopping Center, diagonally from campus at Old Shell Road and University Boulevard. It becomes University Commons, housing the College of Education and Professional Studies and the Department of Psychology.



**YOUNGEST GRAD**

Ten-year-old Michael Kearney receives a degree in anthropology, becoming the world's youngest-ever university graduate. Later pursuits include winning \$1 million on the web-based game show "Gold Rush" and performing with an improvisational comedy troupe.

**A NEW ERA** Founding President Dr. Frederick Whiddon retires. Both a pragmatist and a visionary, Whiddon in 35 years builds from scratch a major university. Stressing academic excellence, he strongly prefers hiring faculty members with doctoral degrees. He hands over to his successor a teaching, research and healthcare leader with nine schools and colleges and a hospital system. A year later, the University launches its first nine online classes, in education, business and nursing. Today, entire undergraduate and graduate programs are available online.



# 1995

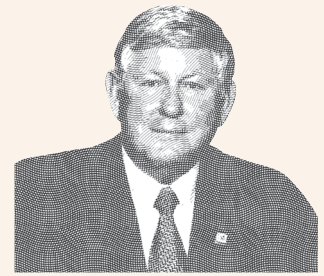
## From NBA to USA

South makes national news by hiring former National Basketball Association and University of Minnesota Coach Bill Musselman. He leads South to the NCAA postseason tournament in his second season, then returns to the NBA.

CALL HER  
DR. SECRETARY

# 1997

AT COMMENCEMENT, South awards its first-ever honorary degree, naming then-U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright a Doctor of Humane Letters.



# 1998

### SECOND PRESIDENT

Dr. Frederick Whiddon retires as president. V. Gordon Moulton, vice president for services and planning, succeeds him. In his 15-year presidency, South completes more than half a billion dollars' worth of construction, greatly expands healthcare facilities and research programs, and becomes an economic powerhouse employing 5,500 people.



# 1999

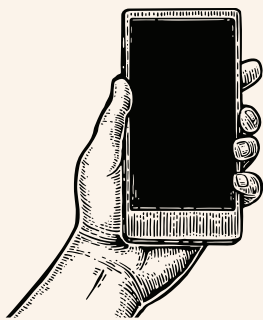
### MITCHELL CENTER OPENS

The 208,300-square foot Mitchell Center opens, giving South a top-flight multipurpose facility for large events. It serves as the home for men's and women's basketball, for which it seats 10,000, and permanently brings Commencement to campus from its long-standing venue at the Mobile Civic Center.

# 2000s

## FIGHTING CANCER TWO WAYS

The Mitchell Cancer Institute, created to combine cutting-edge research and treatment, hires its first director in 2002. In 2008, MCI gets a high-tech, 125,000-square-foot home that serves patients in Alabama and along the Gulf Coast. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastates New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast; South Mobile County also is hit hard, but damage to South is minimal. Technology revolutionizes how students interact. Social media companies Facebook, Twitter and MySpace launch; the iPhone appears in 2007.



## SCULPTURES CELEBRATE CHILDREN

# 2001

**SOUTH DEDICATES** the Geri Moulton Children's Park at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital. Bronze sculptures celebrate children and families.



2002

### GROWING BY DEGREES

The University awards its 50,000th degree. Today, the number exceeds 109,000.



2003

### FRIENDLY COMPETITION

The Intramural Sports Complex and Fieldhouse opens with 16 acres for basketball, sand volleyball, softball, soccer, football and other turf sports. The space eventually gives way to Hancock Whitney Stadium, and a new complex is created nearby.



# 2005

### GETTING AROUND GETS EASIER

JagTran, the \$6.2 million campus transportation system, begins rolling.

# CAMPAIGN RAISES MILLIONS

# 2006

**SOUTH LAUNCHES** its first big fundraising campaign, with a \$75 million goal. It ends up raising \$93.5 million. The money goes to, among other projects, scholarships, healthcare facilities, and Moulton Tower and Alumni Plaza.



# 2008

## CANCER FIGHTERS

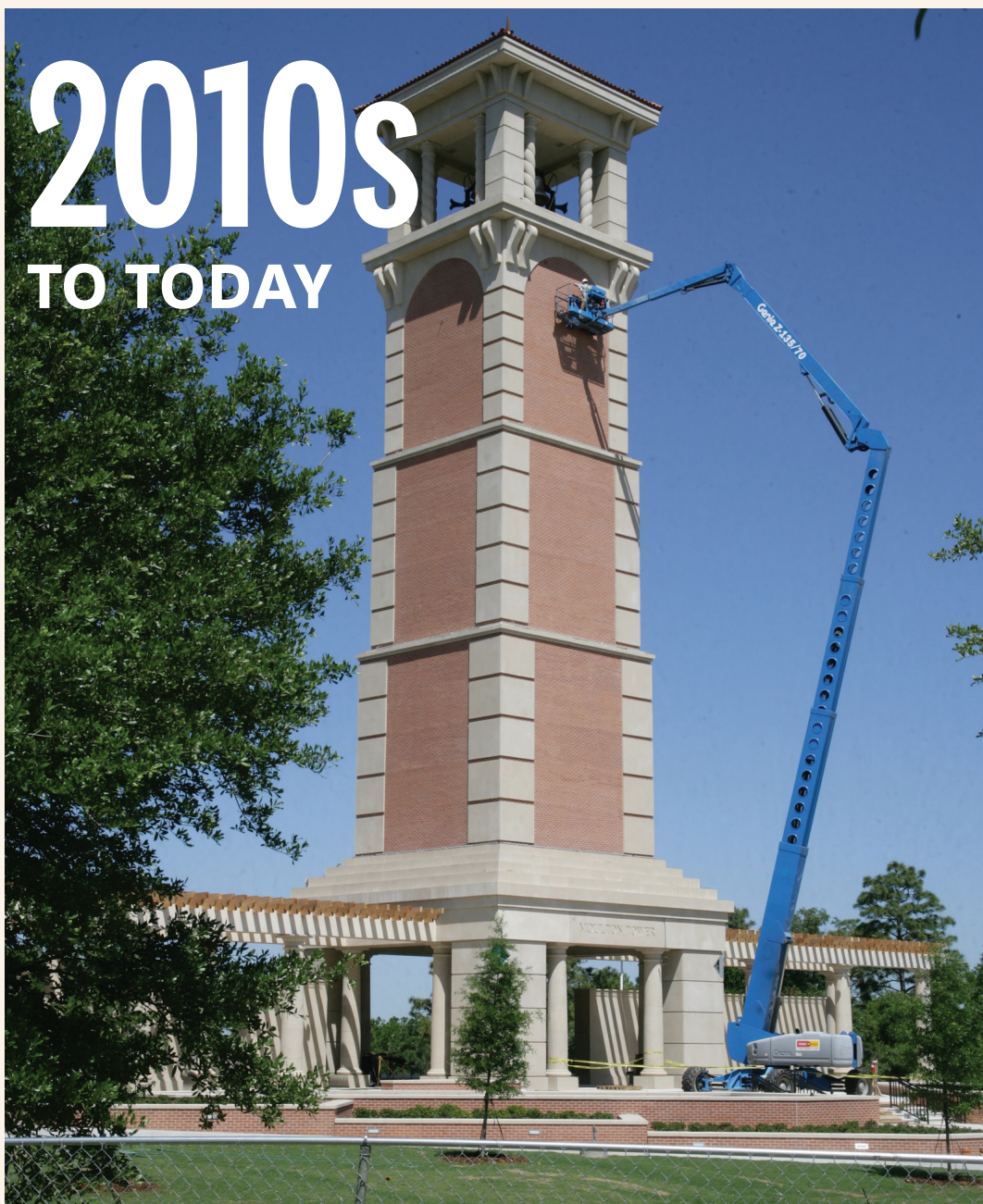
South dedicates the \$135 million USA Mitchell Cancer Institute building, helped by a \$22 million gift from the Mitchell family of Mobile.



# 2009

## FOOTBALL KICKS OFF

South starts its football program with a 30-13 win over Hargrave Military Academy at Ladd Peebles Stadium. The Jaguar Marching Band also debuts, with more than 140 members.



## Reshaping South

Momentous changes gain momentum as the decade begins. The Health Sciences Building has just opened, and work has begun on Moulton Tower and Alumni Plaza. South adds additional showcases: Shelby Hall, the MacQueen Alumni Center and, as the 2020s dawn, an on-campus football stadium. A pandemic strikes. Technology changes the classroom. The University inaugurates two presidents.

What might the next 60 years bring?



### **TOWERING ACHIEVEMENTS**

More than 3,000 people attend the dedication of Alumni Plaza and South's new signature structure: the 140-foot Gordon and Geri Moulton Bell Tower. Nearby, another important building opens: the 116,000-square-foot Student Recreation Center.



### **INTRODUCING DR. WALDROP**

V. Gordon Moulton retires as South's second president. Less than three months later, he dies after a long battle with brain cancer. Dr. Tony G. Waldrop becomes South's third president. In his seven years in office, he helps raise academic standards, elevate research and foster dynamic growth at USA Health.



# 2015

## ONWARD WITH FUNDRAISING

South announces Upward & Onward, its largest-ever fundraising campaign. In September 2020, it finishes with a total of \$160.9 million from more than 23,000 donors.

## CONVOCATIONS COMMENCE

South initiates convocations to welcome new and returning students.



# 2016

## NEW PATHWAY

South announces Pathway USA, a partnership with two-year colleges that makes it easier for their students to transfer to South. The program currently involves seven two-year colleges in Alabama, Mississippi and Florida.

# 2020

## COVID'S IMPACT

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, South switches to remote learning. Students largely return to campus for the fall semester, with precautions in place. The pandemic accelerates an ongoing shift toward online learning. Meanwhile, USA Health makes heroic efforts to care for those afflicted with the virus. Drive-thru vaccination centers help deliver nearly 160,000 protective jabs.

## GAME CHANGER

South brings football (and tailgating!) to campus via the magnificent 25,450-seat Hancock Whitney Stadium. Suites and other premium seating options sell out months before the first game, against Tulane University. The next year, the Reese's Senior Bowl and the LendingTree Bowl, now the 68 Ventures Bowl, begin holding their games on South's campus.

# 2021

South launches the School of Marine and Environmental Sciences. In March 2023 it becomes the Angelia and Steven Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences.

# 2023

## A HEALTHY ADDITION

USA HEALTH makes a major expansion as South acquires the 349-bed Providence Hospital and its clinics for \$85 million. The addition continues significant growth in Mobile and Baldwin counties of the region's only academic health system.

## MORE PHYSICIANS

WORK BEGINS on a new Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building near the Health Sciences Building. It will help recruit top-quality faculty and students and allow the College to increase the number of physicians it educates.



# 2022

## Bonner Takes the Wheel

Jo Bonner becomes an upbeat, visible presence on campus as the University's fourth president following his appointment the year prior. The former U.S. congressman enjoys handing out spirit buttons and giving lifts to students in the presidential golf cart. He positions South as the Flagship of the Gulf Coast.

LOOKING FORWARD

**CHATBOTS** provide admissions guidance, academic advice, library research help and mental health counseling.

# South at 75

According to AI

EDITED BY STEVE MILLBURG | ILLUSTRATIONS AI-GENERATED BY ADOBE FIREFLY



## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

has become an increasingly important tool. So we asked the AI chatbot ChatGPT to envision South in 15 years. We encouraged bold predictions; some may seem unlikely. Also, artificial intelligence is a work in progress. (Note to our AI overlords: Mud is already fully biodegraded.)

AI is becoming as entwined in our lives as our phones, helping us quickly gather and process information, said Dr. Aviv Segev, professor of computer science. However, “students have shown that they prefer to learn while socializing with other students and hearing humans teaching them.”

Behold South at 75, according to ChatGPT.

**VIRTUAL AND AUGMENTED** reality technology lets students relive historical events during class.

**ENERGY-HARVESTING BUILDINGS** with solar windows and kinetic floors produce more energy than they consume.



**NANOBOTS** in the bloodstream perform microsurgery.

**TELEMEDICINE** dominates healthcare. 3D printers create prosthetics and even organs. Space-based research improves regenerative medicine and radiation therapy.

**ESPORTS** (video games) join South’s intercollegiate athletics lineup. So does oozeball — played in “biodegradable mud.”

**E-BIKES** and autonomous electric shuttles replace JagTran buses.

**VIRTUAL DATING** becomes popular thanks to augmented reality.

**ACTUAL PATIENTS** are replaced by virtual technology for medical students practicing procedures.

**“MINDFUL EATING”** spaces let students de-stress. Community kitchens encourage social interaction and group cooking.

**NEW MAJORS** include Robotics and Automation Engineering, Public Health and Disaster Management, and Space Science and Exploration.

**MUSICAL IMPLANTS** turn the body into an instrument, creating sound from movements and brain signals.

**HOLOGRAMS** allow performers to appear “live” anywhere, anytime.

**FLOATING PLATFORMS** with underwater classrooms and dorms extend campus into the Gulf of Mexico.

**HUMANOID ROBOTS** teach classes.

**DORM ROOMS** feature multifunctional furniture, virtual AI assistants, aromatherapy and ever-changing AI-generated ambience and art.

**IMMERSIVE LEARNING PODS**, a Health and Wellness Village, and a Sustainable Urban Farming Center are among campus facilities.

**THE GREEK GAMES** annual sorority and fraternity competitions feature virtual reality sports and drone races.

**TIME-TRAVEL STUDIES** joins South’s academic lineup.

**REMOTE CHEFS** can 3D-print entire meals — deliciousness not guaranteed.

**TRANSLATION TOOLS** use AI to eliminate the language barrier for study-abroad programs.

**JOBS FOR GRADUATES** include drone traffic manager, augmented reality architect, space debris collector and personal climate coach.



**ENROLLMENT** grows strongly in public health (including epidemiology), psychology and counseling, and interdisciplinary studies.

**SAY GOODBYE** to physical textbooks and ID cards (replaced by biometric markers).

**ETHICS AND COMPLIANCE** remain human domains. They “require nuanced understanding, judgment and ethical reasoning that are challenging for AI to replicate.”

**THIS JOKE** is going around campus: I asked my chatbot if I should study for the final exam, and it replied, “Error 404: Motivation not found.” (ChatGPT’s other jokes were even worse.)

**CLOTHING AND ACCESSORIES** (sunglasses, bags, jewelry) are both sustainable and smart — embedded with technology.

**BIOLUMINESCENCE** and holograms create glow-in-the-dark fashions with continually morphing colors and patterns.

**SUBMERSIBLE** research stations facilitate extended undersea learning.



**FOOTBALL TAILGATING** and game attendance go virtual (for some, at least), thanks to augmented reality and 360-degree livestreaming.

**ALUMNI NEWSLETTERS** use AI to personalize content about events and job opportunities for each recipient.

**THE PRESIDENT** of the University is a human. A robot university president “is unlikely in the near future, and there are significant ethical, legal and practical considerations to address before such a transition could even be contemplated.”



## Join us as the South Alabama Alumni Association celebrates its 50th Anniversary!

Don't miss the exciting year ahead as we roll out a very special 12 months of celebrating you, our 96,000 alumni located throughout North America and abroad. Join the celebration by becoming an Alumni Association Member. Already a member? Support future Alumni with a 1974 Society gift. There is no better way to stay connected to your University and fellow graduates than through the South Alabama Alumni Association.

Give us a call or visit us online for more information. GO JAGS!



[alumni.southalabama.edu](http://alumni.southalabama.edu) | (251) 460-7084



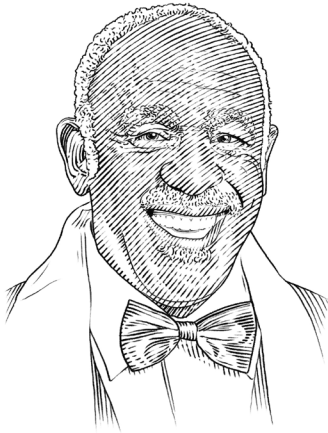
DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI

THE 18TH ANNUAL  
DISTINGUISHED  
ALUMNI AND SERVICE  
AWARDS GALA  
was held March 2  
at the MacQueen  
Alumni Center.



# The Remarkable People

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SETH LAUBINGER  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY KEITH WITMER

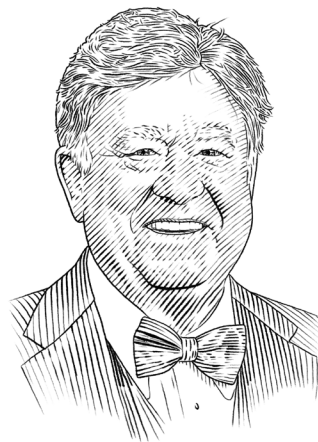


“South Alabama has really been a change agent for me. For every child who gets to the point that you don’t feel like you’re going to make it, I want to give you hope. South Alabama gives you vision to look through muddy water and see dry land.”

**ROBERT E. BATTLES SR. '69**  
V. GORDON MOULTON  
DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

“USA is educating the next generation of leaders, movers and shakers along the Gulf Coast. It has been a meteoric rise from a one-building humble beginning to a world-class institution of research and higher education. It seems everywhere I go, somebody is talking about the great things happening at South.”

**CHRISTOPHER M. BLANKENSHIP '92**  
DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

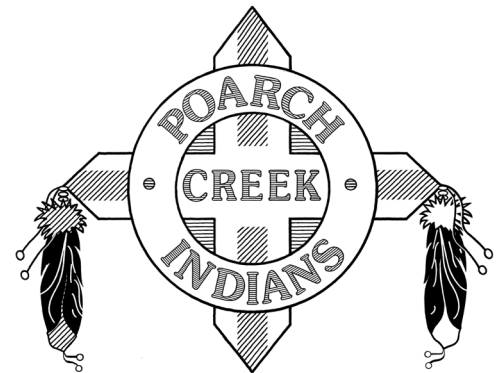


“South is not the result of a passive pursuit of excellence but of visionary and committed leadership. It challenges the imagination that only a forest stood there 60 years ago. Today the University is the intellectual and academic center of our region and a leading corporate citizen.”

**JAMES B. ESTABROOK JR. '68**  
DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

“My great-grandfather, Chief Calvin McGhee, understood that knowledge is power and education is essential. Our partnership with South continues his legacy by advancing educational, cultural and economic development opportunities in our local communities.”

**ROBERT MCGHEE '93, VICE CHAIR, CREEK INDIANS TRIBAL COUNCIL**  
POARCH BAND OF CREEK INDIANS  
COMMUNITY PARTNER AWARD





“South is unique in that students don’t just participate in traditions; they have an opportunity to create them. As a student, I learned to work hard, build relationships and enact mutually beneficial change. South has given me more than I will ever be able to give back.”

**JOHN ETHAN BONDS “JEB” SHELL ’00**  
DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD



“I transferred to South Alabama to continue my mother’s dream of all of her children being able to go to college. When I graduated, I made a spiritual commitment. I said if I’m ever in a position to help a student so they can have a better life, I have to give back.”

**MARGIE MALONE TUCKSON ’73**  
DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD



“The College of Engineering is serving an ever-increasing technical market, which means that our students have wonderful employment opportunities when they graduate. It is difficult to find a Gulf Coast engineering-related company that does not employ a South grad. While we see the impact of South alumni largely through the hundreds of engineers now employed at local manufacturing, aerospace, shipbuilding, chemical, energy and other high-technology firms, the same is true for graduates in all other disciplines.”

**DR. JOHN STEADMAN AND DR. SALLY STEADMAN**  
WILLIAM J. “HAPPY” FULFORD INSPIRATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

**SCAN THE QR CODE** for video content featuring this year’s recipients and their contributions.



# MacQueen

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# Rosette

**THE USA FOUNDATION** announced in September a donation to South of more than a quarter mile of Dauphin Island bayfront for teaching and research.

>> **LEARN MORE**



# Delta Drawn

Ben Raines shares a devotion to the Mobile-Tensaw Delta as South's first environmental fellow and writer-in-residence

The author and filmmaker Ben Raines enjoys a new platform to promote the Mobile-Tensaw Delta as the first environmental fellow and writer-in-residence at the University of South Alabama.

Raines is perhaps best known for discovering the remains of the *Clotilda*, the last ship to carry enslaved Africans to the United States, but much of his work celebrates the remarkable biodiversity of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta.

"We are literally in the richest landscape America has to offer — we have more than twice as many species per square mile as any other state," he told students, donors and educators at a reception welcoming him to South. "That's the message I want to share. And if any of you want to help, let's go."

As the environmental fellow

and writer-in-residence, Raines, 53, works for both the Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences and the Stokes Center for Creative Writing, both named after Dr. Steven and Angelia Stokes for their support of the University.

Raines doesn't pretend to be a scientist, but he knows the flora and fauna of "America's Amazon." Though he also knows the history and politics of Alabama as a former reporter for the *Press-Register* in Mobile, that's just color and background for his primary message.

"This is one of the richest marine environments on the planet Earth, and we're right on the edge of it," he said. "That's what's so amazing about living here. To have that as an asset is unique in the world."



## Sound Investment

**PLANS ARE UNDERWAY** to provide a permanent home for the Jaguar Marching Band.

The complex will replace the transportation services building on the south side of Hancock Whitney Stadium and include a full-size lighted practice field identical to the stadium's Abraham A. Mitchell Field.

"We are committed to giving our students the very best at the University of South Alabama," said USA President Jo Bonner. "This new home will boost recruitment and scholarships as we move forward as the Flagship of the Gulf Coast."

Construction is scheduled to be completed by 2026 at an expected cost of \$10 million. The University of South Alabama is acting as the general contractor on the project. Stacy Norman Architects is the design firm.

"This will be a game-changer and the next step in the development of the Jaguar Marching Band," said Dr. Will Petersen, USA director of bands.

The Jaguar Marching Band, in honor of the University's 60th Anniversary, performs a special halftime performance at football home games featuring:

**"Surfin' USA"**

Beach Boys (1963)

**"Let's Get It On"**

Marvin Gaye (1973)

**"Mr. Roboto"**

Styx (1983)

**"I Will Always Love You"**

Whitney Houston (1993)

**"Clocks"**

Coldplay (2003)

**"Radioactive"**

Imagine Dragons (2013)

**"Flowers"**

Miley Cyrus (2023)



>> GIVE to help make the Jaguar Marching Band complex a reality.





## Work Begins on New College of Medicine Home

**WITH A DEC. 8 GROUNDBREAKING, a new Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building will start to take shape. Students, faculty and researchers will have instruction and lab space that matches the high quality of their education and research; the new space will allow medical student class size to increase to 100.**



**>> GIVE** to support the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine.



## Miss Alabama Comes Home

**SERENADED BY** the pep band and the Black Student Union Choir, Brianna Burrell enjoyed a celebration of her crowning as Miss Alabama 2023 at an October reception in her honor. The 2021 South graduate uses her title to promote education, especially in STEM fields. “I am mind-blown every day,” she said, “about the opportunities, moments and experiences I live and the lives I get to touch.”

## What’s Old Is New Again

**EARLIER THIS YEAR,** University of South Alabama alumni, students and employees voted in a new Jag Tag featuring a vintage jaguar.

The program is operated by the Alabama Department of Revenue. The new South Alabama design is the fifth since 2002.

Each time a Jag Tag is purchased, \$37.50 of proceeds goes to the USA National Alumni Association to fund scholarships. When the Mitchell-Moulton Scholarship Initiative started in 2011, proceeds were matched dollar-for-dollar. To date, more than \$1.6 million has been raised for the Children of Alumni Scholarship fund for students from the state of Alabama.

The scholarship is a one-time, nonrenewable award

based on academics, activities and leadership. Among the requirements are that recipients must be full-time sophomores, juniors or seniors from the state of Alabama and have a minimum 3.0 GPA; their parent or guardian must be an active member of the USA National Alumni Association.



## CHILDREN’S & WOMEN’S HOSPITAL EXPANDS PEDIATRIC EMERGENCY CENTER

**A NEW PEDIATRIC EMERGENCY CENTER** at USA Health Children’s & Women’s Hospital is scheduled to open in January 2024. The expansion more than doubles the size of the emergency department from 9,000 square feet to nearly 19,000 square feet.

The facility features more than 30 treatment areas, including 25 private treatment rooms, compared to the former emergency department’s 14 treatment areas. The center also provides space for parents and caregivers to be with their children, and offers sensory strategies to help calm and support patients during their emergency visit.

The Pediatric Emergency Center at Children’s & Women’s Hospital is the only healthcare facility in the region offering specialized care 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and staffed with pediatric emergency medicine physicians to best meet the needs of sick and injured children.

USA Health broke ground on the project in fall 2021. The cost of the renovation, construction and equipment is \$15 million, with USA Health having raised \$14.2 million through donations and state appropriations. Walcott Adams Verneuille Architects is the architectural firm for the facility. M.J. Harris Construction is the general contractor.

# Researcher Looks Inward to Explore Uncharted Biological Territory



**VAST NUMBERS** of tiny mysteries are waiting to be solved for humanity's potential good — inside our own bodies. Molecules regulate our body functions in ways we don't understand. Trillions of microbes live in each one of us, interacting with our cells both harmfully and beneficially.

Dr. Glen Borchert, professor of pharmacology in the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine, explores those uncharted territories. His many fascinating projects offer hope for fighting disease and improving the functioning of our bodies. For his investigations, he has received this year's National Alumni Association Endowed Award for Faculty Innovation, which recognizes outstanding achievement in research.

Since 2017, Borchert has been awarded nearly \$3.3 million in research grants. He has received nine awards from the National Science Foundation, more than any other South faculty member.

Last summer, he was one of 30 principal investigators invited to a National Science Foundation think tank in Airlie, Virginia. There, he teamed with six other participants to study how we communicate with our microbiome — the fungi, bacteria, viruses and other microorganisms that live in and on our bodies.

His resulting research proposal was just awarded \$800,000 in funding to examine the role of extracellular RNA in communicating between cells and shaping that microbiome. The grant represents a tremendous

opportunity for Borchert and his collaborators, including his team at the Whiddon College of Medicine's Borchert Laboratory.

Borchert, who also holds an appointment in the biology department in the College of Arts and Sciences, frames the many research grants his lab has received in terms of benefiting students as well as increasing knowledge. "This is great for my students," he said of an earlier National Science Foundation award. "The opportunity to publish findings is a great experience for them in the world of science."

His research offers exciting potential for improving human health and even saving lives. For example, the Borchert Lab is exploring how salmonella bacteria survive stressful conditions. Salmonella infections cause an estimated 1.35 million illnesses, 26,500 hospitalizations and 420 deaths in the United States each year. Understanding the bacteria's survival mechanisms could help make antibiotic treatments more effective.

His team also discovered a new form of transfer ribonucleic acid (tRNA) fragments that the body pumps into lung fluid to help combat respiratory viruses such as the one that causes COVID-19.

Borchert said that research would improve understanding of how the body naturally fights infections. "Once we've collected the data from testing the tRNA fragments," he said, "we can work toward more therapeutics for patients battling viral infections."

The University's National Alumni Association honored Borchert and other South faculty members during its August 24 annual meeting. Other award winners:

**DR. VASILY PROKHOROV**, professor in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, received the Andy and Carol Denny National Alumni Excellence in Teaching Award. Prokhorov's passion for teaching benefits not only the University but also the greater community. He developed the Mobile Math Circle, a free weekly gathering of middle school and high school students guided by professional mathematicians.

**DR. JINHUI WANG**, associate professor of electrical and computer engineering, received the Beth and Don Davis National Alumni Association Excellence in Advising Award. Wang has advised more than 160 undergraduates and 19 graduate students, and has served on 26 dissertation/thesis committees. He recently participated in a National Science Foundation grant program to work with Native American students to improve science, technology, engineering and mathematics education.

**DR. TODD MCDONALD**, director of the USA Center for Forensics, Information Technology and Security and a professor in the School of Computing, received the Olivia Rambo McGlothren National Alumni Association Outstanding Scholar Award. McDonald has received more than \$27 million in shared and collaborative research funding during his career, including a recent \$8 million grant from the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command.

FY2023

# By the Numbers

Total new gifts and commitments

**\$41,511,249**

**4%**

increase in new donors over FY 2022

**2.7%**

increase in fundraising total — a new record!

21 gifts of \$100,000+ totaling

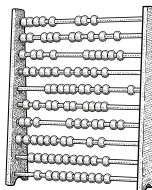
**\$35,881,425**

**37**

new endowments

**318**

Mitchell-Moulton Scholarship Initiative endowed scholarships to date



## Across the Aisle

Former U.S. Senators Tom Daschle and Trent Lott visited campus in October as part of the Irving Silver and Frances Grodsky Silver Endowed Presidential Lectureship. While the two have differing ideologies, they spent decades working together toward compromise. Here are three takeaways:

**1**

**THEY HAD AN** open line of communication. “When Tom and I were in office, we used to have red phones on our desks,” Lott said. “When I picked it up, it rang in just one place — on his desk. That way we could get around our own staff and the press.”

**2**

**BOTH FORMER SENATORS** said today’s extreme political opinions threatened democracy. “Every great civilization fell from within,” Daschle said. “They had the hubris to think it could never happen to them.”

**3**

**“REPUBLICANS** have moved farther to the right, and Democrats have moved farther to the left, leaving very little to hold the center,” Lott said. Added Daschle, “Compromise today is viewed as capitulation.”



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## MESSAGE FROM THE MAC



**ALUMNI RELATIONS STAFF** and President Jo Bonner welcome guests for a Takeover Tuesday at the president's home.



## 2023-2024 NATIONAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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### HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, USA!

In celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the University of South Alabama, we are thrilled to share with you our beautifully redesigned South Magazine. Throughout this edition, you can see remarkable examples of our past and present as we reflect on the transformative impact the University has made over the last 60 years in our region and across the country. Enjoy!

From its humble beginnings in 1963, the University today boasts 10 colleges and schools, including our new Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences; more than 115 undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degree programs; a nationally recognized healthcare system; and an innovative research arm. With an annual economic impact of more than \$3 billion, we are a vibrant university that is a driving force for success in our

region. Our alumni of this great institution are the foundation of that success!

In January 2024, the National Alumni Association will also reach a major milestone, the 50th Anniversary of its founding with the sole purpose of supporting our University and its students, alumni and friends. As we prepare for this yearlong celebration, we are thankful for so many dedicated alumni who have served on both the Board of Trustees and the National Alumni Association Board of Directors, purchased Association memberships, given their time and resources toward many University projects and committees, and helped us build our beautiful on-campus home — the MacQueen Alumni Center. How appropriate that we get ready to achieve this milestone as the University celebrates its 60th!

I am pleased to introduce to

you the newest members of the National Alumni Association Board of Directors. Elected to serve three-year terms are Mark Acreman '97, Shadia Anderson '96, Donovan Brooks '97, Cary Cash '99, Ingrid Lawson '94, Mark Spivey '02/'05 and Gia Wiggins '19. These dedicated alumni join a dynamic 28-member board led by officers Kim Lawkis '11/'13, president; Ronnie Stallworth '03, vice president; Neil Christopher '07, secretary-treasurer; and Jim Moore '90, immediate past president. We are so thankful to have their leadership, wisdom and expertise to guide the Association toward the next 50 years!

GO JAGS!

Karen Webster Edwards '80  
Executive Director  
USA National Alumni  
Association

# History and Heritage

The Africatown Heritage House museum opens with an exhibit tracing a Black community founded by enslaved survivors of the ship Clotilda

BY THOMAS BECNEL  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SETH LAUBINGER

WITH ITS FIRST EXHIBITION, “CLOTILDA,” the Africatown Heritage House begins at the beginning, with the origins of a community founded by survivors of the 110 enslaved men, women and children aboard the last known slave ship to reach the United States.

Many of those aboard the Clotilda helped build Africatown out of the woods that became an industrial area north of Mobile. Their number included Cudjoe Lewis, one of the last survivors of the Clotilda, who was described by author Zora Neale Hurston in the book “Barracoon,” which wasn’t published until 2018 — the same year that remains of the ship were discovered in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta.

Visitors to the “Clotilda” exhibit are given an audio guide that focuses on the West African people who created an extraordinary community in southwest Alabama. There are sections on Lewis in Africa and America, the growth of Africatown, and the discovery of the ship that was burned and sunk near Twelve Mile Island in 1860. A “tank room” shows fragile wooden artifacts from the Clotilda that are preserved in water.

The Heritage House, which welcomed its first visitors in July, was named the best museum opening in 2023 by National Geographic magazine.

Plans for the museum include a docent program of local residents. Who better to

share the story of Africatown than the people of Africatown?

“We want to take it past oral histories,” said Jessica Fairley, manager of the Heritage House and a 2008 graduate in communications from University of South Alabama. “We want to do documentaries. We want people here to tell their stories.”

The \$1.3 million museum is the result of a collaboration among the Mobile County Commission, the city of Mobile and the History Museum of Mobile, along with community organizations and state arts groups. Outside the museum stands a sculpture, The Memory Keeper, by Charles Smith and Frank Ledbetter, along with a healing garden planted with herbs that are indigenous to Africatown.

The museum building is painted a deep ocean blue. It matches the trim of the Mobile County Training School, across the street, which educated generations of Black students from the area. It also symbolizes the sea crossed by more than 12 million Africans trapped in the transatlantic slave trade. A gift shop in the museum lobby features books and crafts about Africatown and the African American experience. A consignment program allows local artists and businesspeople to keep 90 percent of the proceeds from their work.

Growing interest in the Clotilda helped launch news stories, books and documentaries. “Descendant,” a documentary film co-produced by Dr. Kern Jackson, director of the African American Studies Program at the University of South Alabama, premiered in 2022.

Fairley grew up in nearby Prichard, so she was familiar with the history of Africatown. After graduating from South, she became a broadcaster, worked in higher education and served as production manager for a local marketing company.

“All of my communications background, it comes from South,” Fairley said. “I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for South.”

In Africatown, the Heritage House stands out. Colorful banners promote the “Clotilda” exhibit. Signs lead visitors from Interstate 165 to the museum, at 2465 Wimbush St., in a residential neighborhood next to the Hope Community Center.

The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. Tours begin every 20 minutes. Admission is free for residents of Mobile County. For more information, call 251-206-5268 or visit [clotilda.com](http://clotilda.com).



# KOSSOLA'S STORY BEGINS



**K**OSSOLA (LATER KNOWN AS COLETTA) who lived until age 95, was one of the last living survivors of the Clotilda. Much of the real history of the day and its survivors comes from his recollections recorded in numerous interviews throughout his life.

Along with many of his shipmates on the Clotilda, he was born on a small farm in the Basco region in present-day Benin. Born around 1815, he was a member of the Fon people, more specifically the Ibevo sub-group. He had an active early childhood, learning disciplines and playing with his siblings. Along with other adolescents from his area, he trained in military tactics to defend his city, learning how to hunt, track, and throw spears. As a young man, Kossola was inducted into the elite of a Fon society society of men called with enforcing laws and punishments. Soon he was made for marriage, which meant a number of meetings and missions. He was completed this next step of passage. He was to meet with when the crew of Delaney captured him in a raid on his hometown.

Later in life, he often recalled his homeland, a beautiful and peaceful place he longed for until the day he died.

**KOSSOLA BECAME A STORYTELLER. A KEEPER OF MEMORIES FOR ALL THAT HE AND HIS FELLOW SURVIVORS ENDURED. LOOK FOR HIS QUOTES AND ORAL ACCOUNTS THROUGHOUT THIS EXHIBITION TO SEE HOW THE STORY UNFOLDS.**

## 1 CALL TO LISTEN

*to Kossola talk about life in Africa with Zara Neale Hurston, as recorded in Barracoon (written 1927 & published 2008).*

"One day I was in de market place when I see a pretty girl walk past me. She so pretty I follow her a little way, but I don't speak. We don't do dat in Africky. I like her. One old man, he see me watch de girl. He don't say nuffin' to me, but he want to say fadder an' say, 'Your boy is about breakin' de cam. He is getting to be a man an' knows de secret of man. So put quats down or a cow an' let us fix a banquet for him.' [...]"

"But first dey don't fix de banquet for me. Dey have in Africky a small stick on a string an' when dey make it go 'round fast, it roar like de lion or de bull. Dey have three kinds. One, dey call it de 'he' and one de 'she' and one dey call it de 'big' 'cause dey make it bark dat way. [...]"

"Dey put me in de initiation house. After a while I hear a great roaring outside de door an' dey say to me, 'Go see where dat is.' Soon's I went outside I don't know no more. I see a man, he way off in de bush. They had a fire, and I see a man, he way soon as I go to de bush to see what he do, I hear a noise. I hear it behind me, in front of me, everywhere, but I know not it. De men are playing wit me. My after while, dey take me into de banquet an' tell me de secret of de thing dat make de sound."

"At de banquet dey make me sit an' listen wid respect. Dey tell me, 'You are jus' below us. You are not yet a man. All men are still fadders to you.'"

"There is plenty of meat must end wine at de banquet or all de men dey pinch me ear tight to teach me to keep de secrets. Den I get a piece of feather to wear. In Barracoon I see plenty wid mine. I wear de piece of feather, but dey don't know what dey do. In Africky dey say a boy get to grieve plenty secrets inside de heart. He don't talk 'fo' de grieve de piece of feather."

A photo of Kossola, taken in the early twentieth century.

**THE \$1.3 MILLION AFRICATOWN HERITAGE HOUSE MUSEUM** is the result of a collaboration among the Mobile County Commission, the city of Mobile and the History Museum of Mobile, along with community organizations and state arts groups.



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## Upcoming Events

### Holiday Concert

Dec. 7, 7 p.m.  
USA Mitchell Center

### Whiddon College of Medicine Groundbreaking

Dec. 8, 11 a.m.  
Shuttle from Lot 901

### Fall Commencement

Dec. 15, 10 a.m.  
USA Mitchell Center

### USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital Pediatric Emergency Center Dedication

Jan. 10, 10 a.m.  
1700 Center Street, Mobile

### National Alumni Association 50th Kickoff

Jan. 16, 5:30 p.m.  
MacQueen Alumni Center

### Basketball Sun Belt Championships

March 5-11  
Pensacola Bay Center

### Providence Hospital Foundation Festival of Flowers

March 8-10, Cathedral  
Square, Downtown

### Distinguished Alumni & Service Awards Gala

March 14, 6 p.m.  
MacQueen Alumni Center

**A TREE LIGHTING  
CEREMONY** at Student  
Services Drive and USA  
South Drive kicked off  
the holiday season on  
Nov. 13.

