

THE MAGAZINE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT PEMBROKE

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SPRING  
2021

# UNCP TODAY

REMEMBERING  
CHANCELLOR

**JOE  
OXENDINE**



*A LIFE  
WELL LIVED*

*Strength, Resilience & Perseverance* ———

————— HOW UNCP PUSHED THROUGH THE PANDEMIC



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# UNCP TODAY

THE MAGAZINE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT PEMBROKE | SPRING 2021 |


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**A**s the 2020-2021 academic year comes to a close, it has certainly proven to be unlike any other we've experienced before. COVID-19 forced us to dig deep, to respond to the challenge, and to do things a little different than planned.

Over the last year, we've all lived within restrictions. We've found new ways to get things done and perhaps even how to do some better. As you flip through these pages, you'll see only a glimpse of what the last year held for UNCP. Even at six feet apart, UNCP has experienced a remarkable year.

Those restrictions forced many virtual commencements across the country, but at UNCP, not offering an opportunity for our graduates to cross their stage wasn't an option. We became innovative, planning a drive-thru ceremony (**pages 8-9**) to celebrate the milestone accomplishments of our newest alumni. And with a record enrollment for the third year in a row (**pages 10-11**), Braves are joining the ranks of our more than 30,000 loyal alumni at an exciting rate.

UNCP has long been committed to providing access to education while taking the challenges of our region head-on. Former Trustee Mary Ann Elliott's monumental \$6 million gift to establish the McKenzie-Elliott School of Nursing (**pages 42-43**) allows UNCP to continue to further our impact and improve the health outcomes in southeastern North Carolina.

But UNCP isn't just making an impact here in North Carolina—not when faculty members like Drs. Steven Singletary, Veronica Hardy and Ben Bahr are part of your university. Dr. Singletary's innovative parachute design (**pages 30-31**) was used to deliver food to countries in need, contributing to the United Nation's awarding of the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize.

UNCP's Renaissance Woman, aka Dr. Hardy (**page 34**), life's work is devoted toward empowering others to overcome their challenges. And, research to uncover treatment methods for Alzheimer's in Dr. Bahr's lab earned UNCP its first U.S. patent (**page 18**).

It's clear we have much to celebrate as a university. But in my six years as Chancellor, there's a recurring statement I've heard in speaking with alumni, faculty, staff and students that perhaps is our most significant accomplishment: "UNCP is like a family."

It requires a unique group of people to transform a place—a campus—into a home. People like the late Chancellor Joe Oxendine (**pages 4-6**), newly retired Dr. Lisa Schaeffer (**pages 24-26**) and six-decade professor Dr. Richard Vela (**pages 14-16**). Indeed, UNCP feels like a family because it's comprised of incredibly special people.

I don't want to spoil too much more of what fills the pages that follow, but like me, I know you'll feel immense pride for your university.

Go Braves!

Robin Gary Cummings, M.D.  
Chancellor



# JOE OXENDINE

## A LIFE WELL LIVED

Former Chancellor Joe Oxendine and wife, Adrienne McNaughton Oxendine

When the time of year was right, Beth Carmical knew there would be a treat waiting for her and the other staff members in the UNC Pembroke chancellor's office. Her boss, Dr. Joe Oxendine, had been daffodil hunting once again.

"He would go by his mother and dad's old home place, and even though the daffodils hadn't been tended over time, they were still so pretty," says Carmical, who served as Oxendine's executive assistant throughout his tenure as chancellor from 1989 to 1999. "We'd come in

one day and find these beautiful daffodils on our desks. It was such a simple thing to do, but so thoughtful."

Kind gestures like that were a staple of Oxendine's life. His death at age 90 on April 14, 2020, culminated a rich life of leadership, whether in

the athletic arena, in academia or in the communities where he lived. But Oxendine never forgot the values he learned on his family's Robeson County farm—those of kindness, humility, hard work and building relationships to make a way forward. They served him well throughout his life, and especially during the 10 years he led UNC Pembroke.

### DEVELOPMENT OF A LEADER

Born in 1930, Oxendine was one of eight children born to Thomas and Georgia Rae Oxendine, who were raised with an enduring sense of family, Carmical recalls.

"I have to give their parents credit," Carmical says. "Their children have all remained close throughout their lives. You don't see that kind of family togetherness anymore, and Dr. Oxendine marveled at families who weren't close. He was very devoted to his entire family."

A young Joe Oxendine carried that family love and support with him as he left the farm to make his own way. He may have been a son of the South, but a significant chunk of Oxendine's life would be spent north of Robeson County. He headed to Detroit after high school, working in the auto industry for a time while saving for his education. When he had enough in the bank, Oxendine enrolled at Catawba College in Salisbury, where he excelled in football, baseball and basketball. Later inducted into Catawba's sports Hall of Fame, Oxendine played for three seasons in the Pittsburgh Pirates' minor league baseball organization.

But his calling was education, and after his baseball career, Oxendine taught and coached in the high school ranks in Lynchburg, Virginia, before a stint in the Army. He served in Korea and Hawaii before returning to Boston University, where he had earlier earned a master's degree, to become a teaching fellow while finishing work on his doctorate in education.

In 1959, Oxendine began a 30-year run at Temple University in

Philadelphia, serving on the faculty. He was elected president of the Faculty Senate and later chosen as the founding dean of Temple's College of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

His time in Philadelphia was significant to his personal life, too; it's where he met and married his wife, Adrienne, in 1961. Beth Carmical remembers a devoted couple who complemented each other's strengths while raising two children, James and Jean.

"It was such a treat to be with them. They were both fun to be with and were great at entertaining," Carmical says. "They were good storytellers, comfortable to be with and so generous with their attention."

Oxendine's years at Temple burnished his skills as a teacher, faculty leader and scholar. He led several study abroad trips for Temple students when those excursions weren't common, including a trip to the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich. He published a variety of textbooks in motor learning and sports psychology, and Oxendine's book "American Indian Sports Heritage" highlighted the accomplishments of the country's top American Indian athletes, such as Jim Thorpe, and the role sports has played in everyday life for American Indians.

His impact at Temple had been significant, his credentials impeccable. As then-Pembroke State University searched for the successor to retiring Chancellor Paul Givens in 1989, Oxendine was well prepared to come home and lead the institution through some of its most transformative years.

### MAKING FRIENDS, BUILDING SUPPORT

Oxendine's historical knowledge of Pembroke State, combined with his years of experience as a faculty member and administrator, informed his agenda for the university as he settled into the chancellor's seat. PSU had been a difference-maker for countless local students throughout its history, but Oxendine believed the

university's potential to touch lives could reach far beyond southeastern North Carolina. To do that, Oxendine relied on allies like David Weinstein, who served as mayor of Lumberton when Oxendine became chancellor.

"When Joe was named chancellor, I invited him and Adrienne to my house to meet other people in the community," says Weinstein, who would eventually become chair of the university's Board of Trustees and serve in the North Carolina Senate. "Joe never forgot that, that a Native American was invited to the mayor's house to meet important leaders in the community."

The men forged a friendship over the years that helped garner support for the vision of growth Oxendine had for PSU.

"Sometimes, folks can be resistant to change, but Joe and I were for change," says Weinstein. "He always put the university first and laid the groundwork for what the university is today."

Dan Kenney, who served as men's basketball coach and later as athletics director under Oxendine's leadership, points to the relationships Oxendine built with people like Weinstein as a crucial factor in his ability to drive change.

"He was able to make some inroads into bridging the gap between Pembroke and the surrounding community," says Kenney, "and he was able to build support for the things he felt were important for the university's future."

### PSU BECOMES UNCP

Before Oxendine's arrival, the idea of changing the Pembroke State name to give the university more recognition beyond the region had been floated from time to time. But it's often true that big changes don't get off the ground until they have a catalyst or a champion, and that's what Joe Oxendine was for the name change at PSU. In 1996, PSU officially changed its name to The University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

"We take that name change for granted now," says Kenney. "Even though a growing number of people in the '90s felt tying into the UNC System was a positive, it was Chancellor Oxendine who had the capital to convince the community that the name change was a good thing. I think that moment brought Pembroke into a special place."

"PSU' just did not have the same clout as 'The University of North Carolina at Pembroke' did," Weinstein says. "Once the name changed, the university really exploded."

Oxendine was also behind the transformation of the university's costumed Indian mascot that appeared at athletics contests, another change that was important in the growth of a brand.

"Dr. Oxendine believed that mascot reinforced a lot of negative stereotypes, and he was right," Kenney says. "He helped lead the change of our athletics identity to the red-tailed hawk and really developed our first athletics logo. Over time, I think those two things—changing the name of the university and our athletics identity—really helped UNCP develop its brand."

Oxendine's influence also brought new resources to the university's academic mission, deepening the substance that stood behind the name. Dr. Charles Jenkins, who served as provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs under Oxendine, saw him advocate for faculty and students on a regular basis.

"Joe was very much a university person," says Jenkins. "He had a great appreciation for universities and knew how they should operate. He believed the focus should be on teaching, research and public service, and he was a good steward of the public's money."

Jenkins appreciated how Oxendine pushed for programs like the North Carolina Teaching Fellows to come to UNCP.

"The state wasn't wanting to add more institutions to that program, but Joe took the position that UNCP really needed this, and we got it. Having been a teacher himself years earlier, he had a passion for public schools, and he used that passion to bring the Teaching Fellows to campus."



**A CALM DEMEANOR AND A LOYAL FRIEND**

Oxendine's abilities as an administrator and a visionary leader may have been surpassed only by his people skills. And it's easy to argue that his success was due in large measure to the way he was wired as a human being.

"If he had a bad day, I never witnessed it," says Carmical. "I think, most of all, he was an optimist. He made it fun to come to work each day. Sylvia Edwards and I worked together in his office, and we had both worked for some great people over the years, but we agreed that working for Chancellor Oxendine were the happiest years of our careers."

Negativity wasn't part of Oxendine's personality, Jenkins says.

"He had a very positive attitude. Even when things were bad, even when things went wrong, he kept a positive attitude. That was one of the things I admired about him most."

Always an athlete, Oxendine's approach to life was undoubtedly bolstered by his commitment to exercise and fitness. Carmical says he was always checking on her to make sure she was exercising, and Kenney remembers Oxendine giving students 40 years his junior a run for their money when it came to staying in shape.

"He had great pride in his degrees in physical education," Kenney says. "He was the first college president I had ever seen who would exercise with the students. Here was a man in his sixties, and you would see him out for runs on campus. I know he kayaked and ran until late in his life."

Kenney also experienced the Oxendine touch in a personal way. In 1992, Kenney left Pembroke to become head men's basketball coach at Winthrop University, a school that competed at the NCAA Division I level. After six seasons at Winthrop, Kenney was invited to consider the athletic director role at UNCP.

Kenney got the job and went on to serve as UNCP's athletics director until 2012. He then worked as chief of staff for Chancellors Kyle Carter and Robin Cummings until his retirement in 2018.

"When I think about the second half of my professional career, it wouldn't have happened if not for Joe Oxendine giving me a chance to come back to Pembroke and prove I could do it." ■

By David Hibbard

# NEW TEACHERS GET SUPPORT THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

For even the most veteran of educators, the COVID pandemic has been a challenging experience, but imagine being a new teacher, excited to be in the classroom, ready to shape and mold the next generation, when the pandemic hit. Sure, new teachers may adjust to Zoom, SeeSaw and Google Classroom with ease, but teaching during the COVID era is a far cry from what they expected and prepared for.

Over the last year, programs like UNC Pembroke's North Carolina New Teacher Support Program became instrumental. In March 2020, program directors regrouped, knowing they and the coaches would need to provide more support than ever before. Dr. Denise Hunt, instructional coach for Scotland County, notes that while coaching certainly looks different, the impact remains the same. Weekly meetings, observing, co-teaching: it all happens—just virtually.

Hunt has been a coach in Scotland County for five years and knows all too well the difference support can make for beginning teachers. Hunt has two very different "first-time" classroom experiences. Her first was not a positive one—there was no support, formally or informally. "I felt like I was on an island left to figure it all out on my own. While I loved working with my students, it was a miserable experience and I quit after the first year."

Thankfully, several years later, a move pushed Hunt back into the classroom, and it would turn out to be a life-changing experience.

"The support I received from the veteran teachers at the school was unparalleled. They truly wanted me to succeed as a teacher."

When her school first began working with instructional coaches, it was a lightbulb moment for Hunt—"this was it, this was what I wanted to do." She immediately applied and initially started out as a pre-service instructional coach, acting as a liaison between the clinical teacher, student teacher and university supervisor.

"My role was to enhance the knowledge and skills that the clinical teacher and university supervisor provided the student. Collectively, we were answering the question, 'How can we best grow this teacher?'"



Dr. Denise Hunt

Eventually, another move brought Hunt's family back to Robeson County, where she serendipitously ran into a former colleague who was in town to help launch the coaching program locally. Immediately, Hunt got involved, and she hasn't looked back.

For Hunt, one of the essential parts of coaching is establishing a strong relationship with the teacher. Right now, that includes consistently reaching out, being available and

ensuring the teacher knows Hunt's on their team. "Together, we are working towards one goal, student success."

Jessica Figueroa has only been teaching for a year and working with Hunt for much of that time. Whether Figueroa needs resources, ideas, or emotional support, she knows that Hunt is always there to help. This past spring, Figueroa was not only teaching full time but also completing a graduate school course—it was a mentally exhausting few months, but she knew Hunt had her back.

"Her guidance and emotional support helped me succeed. I made an A in my class, and all my students passed their end-of-course exams."

The COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging, but the resilience of our region's teachers has not faltered. Nor has it hindered the work being done to support beginning teachers in Southeastern North Carolina.

*The NC New Teacher Support Program was developed in 2011 as a comprehensive, university-based induction program offering a research-based curriculum and multiple services designed to increase teacher effectiveness, enhance skills and reduce attrition among beginning teachers. UNCP Pembroke is one of 10 state university partner institutions that extends mentoring and induction support to 1,200 beginning teachers across North Carolina in over 250 traditional public and charter schools. ■*

By Eleanor Johnson

# DISCOVERING CELEBRATE

# NEW WAYS TO COMMENCEMENT

**R**estrictions limiting large gatherings may have forced many recent commencement exercises onto virtual platforms, but graduates of the class of 2020 and their families refused to allow the pandemic to rob them of the traditions that make graduation so rewarding.

In fact, family and friends got a chance to behave a bit more exuberantly than usual during last spring and fall commencement as graduates were met with loud cheers, whistling and honking car horns. Some even sounded air horns and rang cowbells as their loved one's name was called. A team of university staff and faculty were successful in recreating the traditional experience in the form of a drive-thru ceremony, ensuring that this milestone for our students was safe and memorable.

On graduation day, decorated cars, open Jeeps, stretch limousines and several luxury and limo buses stretched for miles along Prospect Road. Graduates exited their vehicles at the new gateway entrance, crossed an oversized stage and were greeted by university leadership before returning to the parade route.

While several neighboring universities and others across the country postponed or canceled graduation ceremonies altogether, UNCP was the first and only university in North Carolina to honor graduates with a modified in-person commencement. While gathering restrictions moved uplifting speeches online, university leaders understand that the commencement tradition is an important part of the UNCP experience, so offering graduates the chance to cross the stage and accept their diploma in front of loved ones remained a priority.

During both fall and spring commencement, UNCP incorporated a hybrid event, maintaining the unique processional with a Native American flute and Lumbee ambassadors, speeches, traditional greetings and conferral of degrees delivered in a virtual format combined with the livestreamed drive-thru portion of the ceremony. The recording was made available for graduates and families to view following the in-person portion.

Graduating college is regarded as one of the most significant milestones in a student's life; to that end, UNCP continued to offer new ways to celebrate in this new era in the spirit of perseverance and resilience.

"You've experienced, as a student, what few experience in a lifetime," Chancellor Robin Gary Cummings told the graduates in his virtual remarks. "But you stuck with it, you stayed focused, you completed your degree and you accomplished what you came to UNCP to do. Through all this, you've become resilient." ■

By Mark Locklear



# NO SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN

**T**here are no signs of slowing down as UNC Pembroke continues to see upward trends in student enrollment. This past August, the university welcomed a record 8,262 students for fall 2020, breaking the enrollment record for the third consecutive year.

The total enrollment increased by 2,932 students—a 7.3% spike from fall 2019. Enrollment in 2019, which was also a record, stood at 7,698. Since the implementation of the NC Promise Tuition Program at UNCP, the university has seen an impressive 32% increase in overall enrollment.

This growth is astounding considering total enrollment was capped at 3,400 just 20 years ago in 2000.

“In the unprecedented times we’re experiencing, we’re pleased that more students than ever are choosing UNCP. Education will become even more critical in the future as our world continues to change. Our university will remain centered around the success of our students,” said Chancellor Robin Gary Cummings.

“Breaking our enrollment record for the third year in a row is a testament to the high-quality, affordable education offered at UNCP at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Our faculty and staff are working hard to keep students engaged and connected to their educational goals as we adjust to new demands in course delivery and budget constraints,” Cummings said.

In addition to NC Promise, which lowers the cost of undergraduate tuition at UNCP each semester to just \$500 in state and \$2,500 out of state, in recent years, UNCP has aggressively launched new and strengthened existing programs in high demand throughout the state and region.

Innovative partnership programs with other universities like N.C. State, Tuskegee, ECU and Methodist in engineering, medicine, veterinary medicine, physical therapy and physician’s assistant offer critical access for students with aspirations in those career fields.

The establishment of a new College of Health Sciences and subsequent program growth is meeting the demands for qualified health care professionals in the region, while the AACSB-accredited School of Business is producing graduates with the skills needed to succeed in a global marketplace.

Even in the face of an unprecedented pandemic and economic uncertainty, more individuals are opting for continuing their education, specifically graduate degrees—as is the case at UNCP.

UNCP saw increases across several categories, including the number of transfers and online students.

Contributing to overall undergraduate enrollment is the number of transfer students, which increased 70% since fall 2017. University officials also pointed to the tremendous growth in The Graduate School, which saw an increase from 1,345 students in 2019 to 1,826 last fall. Since fall 2017, The Graduate School has seen a whopping 137% increase.

The MBA program, consistently ranked among the best online MBA programs in the country, saw a 60% spike, adding 370 new students last fall.

Michael Napierala explored every online MBA program in the state and weighed all options carefully before choosing UNCP. For Napierala, UNCP checked all the boxes—affordability, value and accessibility. The Pittsboro resident represents a number of students choosing the MBA route.

“I work full time, so the online format was important. As far as time management, cost per credit hour for in-state students and how long it will take to complete the program, UNCP was the better choice,” he said.

University enrollment officials are thrilled to see record-breaking trends in both new students and retention for the third year in a row, noting the ability for the university to meet

each student where they are with the individualized support needed as a key component of success.

“Small classes and personalized attention are a hallmark of the UNCP experience,” said Lois Williams, associate vice chancellor for Enrollment Management. “We know this makes a critical difference in the success of students and are proud more students are recognizing and choosing to become a Brave. With NC Promise, there isn’t a better value to help students reach their goals.”

Interim Provost Dr. Zoe Locklear agreed, saying university leaders are pleased with the growth they’ve seen in the graduate programs and, in addition to business, are experiencing a high demand for programs in elementary education, counseling, social work and public administration.

“These programs are particularly designed to meet the needs of students throughout the region and state, with many courses being offered in an online delivery format tailored for the working adult. Our faculty are committed to providing high-quality instruction at every level, both undergraduate and graduate.” ■

By Mark Locklear



UNCP students in class

UNCP students take part in the annual Brave Walk

# Online LEARNING ON THE FLY

It was early March 2020. Talk of moving college courses online was spreading as quickly as the novel coronavirus. A month after joining the UNCP staff, Dr. Miguel Nino—better known across campus as Miko—was called into a meeting with cabinet-level administrators and deans. He began preparing himself for what lay ahead. Or at least he tried.

In truth, there was no practical way to prepare for the task at hand—shifting more than 1,800 courses online.

And there was a catch.

Nino and his four-person team who make up the Office of Online Learning (OOL) were given 10 days to train UNCP faculty—many of whom have taught in person their entire careers—to convert their courses online.

Nino left the meeting confident his team, with the support of his colleagues in the Division of Information Technology and the Teaching and Learning Center, among others, was up to the task.

“We had a commitment to the university and to the students,” Nino reflected. “I did not want to let the university down. We understood it was on us to make it happen. We had to make the challenges of the pandemic easier on everyone.”

Nino, the OOL director, immediately drafted a strategy to ensure all content would be ready when students returned from an extended spring break. Virtual training sessions were held for upward of 50 faculty at a time. Faculty were offered “Just-in-Time” training on how to use emergency remote teaching and instructional tools, such as Canvas and Webex, to go online as soon as possible. In addition, Nino and his team offered consultations in any advanced topics related to online teaching and instructional design.

Faculty were provided overall instructional design support using methods such as project-based learning, video-based learning, digital game-learning and contextual learning.

“Many of the faculty had never used Webex or Canvas. Some were very nervous in the beginning. However, we assured them we would be there every step of the way. We created templates that were ready to be imported into courses. Training sessions were recorded, and we created a YouTube channel to allow faculty to access more information. We made sure the faculty would not be alone in this process.”

Close bonds were forged among faculty during this two-week window and have remained since. They leaned on one another along with support from the university’s IT experts, the Teaching and Learning Center and its director, Scott Hicks.

“There was some doubt and fear initially, but the faculty was very supportive of one another, sharing tools and tricks. Personally, it has made my teaching better,” said Hicks, a professor of English. “It’s been energizing to try to rethink my teaching methods, navigate through the challenges and find out what I can do differently.”

The weekend before classes resumed, Nino and his team held what were essentially virtual open house consultations with faculty. The OOL team made itself available for eight hours, addressing last-minute questions and concerns.

Aside from a few expected hiccups and adjustments, the migration to online was a smooth transition. And though the pandemic created health scares, disrupted social life on campus and forced educators to rethink how courses are delivered, Nino was able to find silver linings in the process.



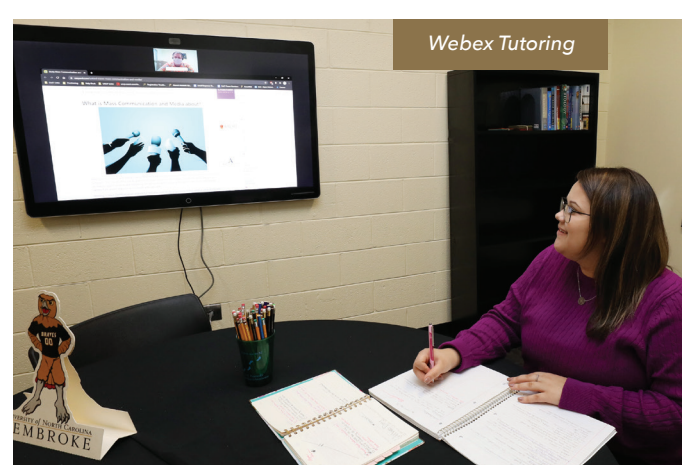
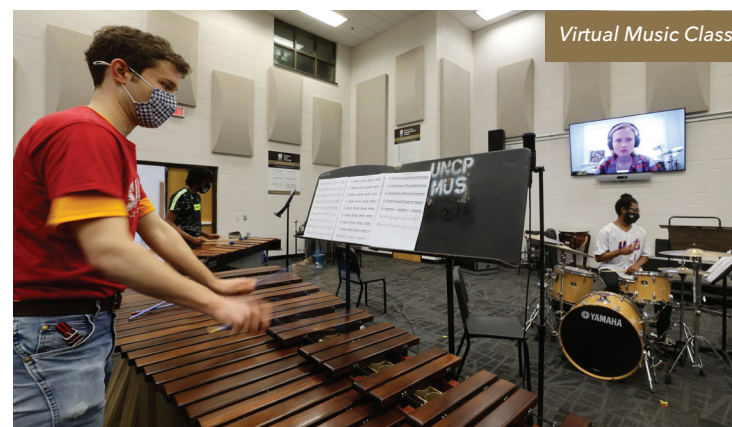
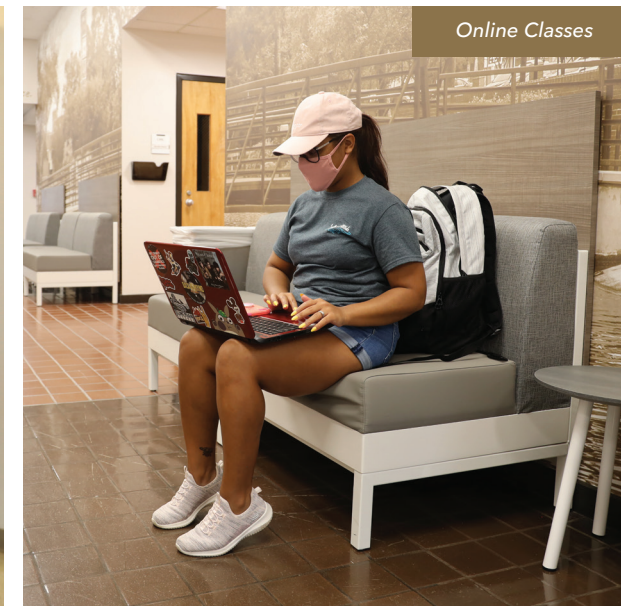
“The pandemic opened the eyes of many people who probably would have never taught online. More faculty now have a better familiarity with online technology. It has increased their creative process with regard to their teaching style.”

Another positive outcome resulted when nearly 100 faculty earned a Certificate in Online Teaching Excellence after completing a six-week training hosted by OOL and the Teaching and Learning Center. Many more faculty were trained by experts as part of OOL’s inaugural Vanguard Institute. Faculty got a chance to redesign their online courses using a variety of instructional methods.

“These shared experiences created a sense of community among the faculty,” Nino said. “It also gave faculty the opportunity to offer peer mentoring. Before the pandemic, there were some who may have never met faculty from other departments across campus.”

Though most classes have returned to being held in person, these collaborations and trainings continue in the form of weekly seminars offered by Hicks, Nino and his superstar team of experts. The seminars are designed to keep faculty engaged with the latest hands-on tools, software and strategies that will allow them to be successful, whether in the classroom or in the virtual world. ■

..... By Mark Locklear







Dr. Vela (center) during a visit to the famed Globe Theatre in London

# DR. RICHARD VELA

## CONTRIBUTING TO THE GREATER GOOD

**R**eflection might seem a daunting task when asking Richard Vela to survey his remarkable teaching career. After all, this year marks the 50th anniversary of his arrival at UNC Pembroke, known in 1971 as Pembroke State University, and the memories are undoubtedly too numerous to count.

But the longtime professor in UNCP's English, Theatre, and Foreign Languages department doesn't tick off awards or personal accomplishments when he thinks back on what's meant the most to him.

"I've been remarkably lucky to have the students I've had," says Vela, now in his sixth decade on the university faculty. "Many of them went on to do great things, so I am grateful for having been a part of their lives."

His students are quick to say they are the lucky ones; more on that to come. And while luck wasn't involved, there certainly was a bit of fate that helped bring this California-born, Texas-raised scholar to Robeson County.

### FROM WEST TO EAST

The end of World War II was just around the corner when Vela was born in Los Angeles in 1944. L.A. left quite an impression on a young Vela.

"It was a great location in a lot of ways," says Vela. "We were a block away from the Los Angeles Coliseum, which had hosted the Summer Olympics in 1932, and we were near the museums. Pretty much every weekend, my dad would take me to the museums." He remembers streetcar rides to his paternal grandmother's house in a different part of the city and the general

sense that L.A. was teeming with activity and energy.

Vela's parents were both of Mexican descent. In fact, his mother's ancestors included one of the earliest settlers of the territory that would become Texas, so in 1950, he and his parents left Los Angeles for Del Rio, located on the Mexican border about three hours west of San Antonio. There was plenty of family—Vela's maternal grandparents and a number of aunts and uncles were nearby—and a supportive environment for Vela as he grew up, graduated high school and headed off to the University of Dallas on a scholarship. His career as an educator was inspired by the academic rigor and faculty he encountered there.

"It was a very intense kind of place, and they put a premium on philosophy and international studies," says Vela. "There were

great teachers who made me look at things a lot differently." His work as an undergraduate earned Vela a scholarship to the university's master's program in English, where he began to blossom as a scholar.

"There was an emphasis on ideas and how things are connected," Vela recalls. "What was the culture, what was the thinking, what were the ethics involved, why were things done the way they were? It was a wonderful place to learn."

While finishing his master's degree, Vela worked at a Dallas prep school and interviewed for several jobs, eventually landing a teaching position at a community college in Fort Smith, Arkansas. He had been there for 18 months when one of those previous interviews paid off, though not in the way he might have envisioned.

"I had interviewed at a school in Abilene, Texas, and the chair of that program liked my work but couldn't hire me at that point," says Vela. "Eventually, he became a curriculum consultant at Pembroke State. He recommended me, and that's how I got the job in January of 1971."

Although he had never been to North Carolina or the East Coast, Vela says he immediately felt comfortable in Pembroke.

"There seemed to be a lot of opportunity here, and a lot of the people around here looked and acted like the people I had grown up around. I remember commenting on that to someone in the registrar's office, and they took that as a really good sign that I would stay for a while."

### A CONNECTION WITH STUDENTS

Those early years at Pembroke allowed Vela to develop his teaching style—"the Socratic method of asking questions greatly influences what I do in the classroom," he says—and grow as a scholar. Encouraged by his department chair to pursue a doctorate, Vela attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on fellowships from the Danforth Foundation and Ford Foundation. "I really committed myself to getting my doctorate, and I met world-class scholars in Chapel Hill," Vela says.

But he also looked forward to coming back. "I was invested and committed to this place," says Vela.

**"Pembroke was a place to come back to. I knew the people already, and there was always a sense that you are who you are, and who you are makes a difference here."**

The difference Vela made on campus and in the community was growing in various ways, but it was most acutely felt by the students he mentored in the classroom.

"Richard is one of the main reasons I decided to be a college professor," says Barry O'Brien '75, dean and associate professor in the School of Business. "My wife and I met in Richard's composition class 50 years ago, and that class was taught in the classroom that's next door to my office today. One of the things I liked the most about him was that he found a way to meet every student where they were in their ability to write and then worked with them from there."

James Bass '94, '03, saw Vela's ability to connect with students during a Film Literacy graduate course.

"If Dr. Vela saw you had a particular interest in something, he would help expand that," says Bass, who serves as director of UNCP's Givens Performing Arts Center. "I was always a big film fan, and he would come to class with VHS tapes of movies I had never heard of and tell me to take them home and watch them," Bass says. "He completely changed me. He opened my eyes to watching movies in a whole different way."

Vela was memorable for more than the small green convertible he drove, says Wendy Lowery '99, '07.

"He was always prompt and always polite," says Lowery, who serves as vice president for Advancement and University Relations at Radford University. "He didn't baby us, he treated us like adults, and he was so passionate about the subject he was teaching."

Like Bass and O'Brien, Lowery also interacted with Vela as a professional during her time as UNCP's vice chancellor for Advancement. "It was interesting to me

to have been a student at UNCP and then also have worked there," Lowery says. "Dr. Vela was always so respectful to me as a professional and always, always made me feel accepted there."

Vela said it has always been important to him to know his students on a personal level.

"I made it a point to get to know something about my students and have a conference with each one at the beginning of the year," Vela says. "I felt like things went better if I did that. What do you want to do? Why is it important? How do you get there from here? Working with students from that standpoint has been helpful to me, and hopefully to them."

His accomplishments as a teacher haven't gone unnoticed. Vela earned UNCP's Outstanding Teaching Award in 1998, the UNC System Board of Governors Award for Teaching Excellence in 2000 and UNCP's Adolph L. Dial Faculty Award for Scholarship and Creativity in 2007.

"In my job, I have to evaluate professors, and they will ask me, 'What are you looking for?'" says O'Brien. "And I'll be honest and tell them I don't know exactly, but I often use the way Richard approaches teaching as an example of one of the beautiful ways it can be done."

### SUBSTANCE AS A SCHOLAR

Vela's success as a teacher is grounded in his own love of learning, something that is easy to see in his scholarship when it comes to the works of William Shakespeare. Over the years, Vela has become an internationally recognized expert on Shakespeare and the various adaptations of his works, earning praise from colleagues and scholars around the world. In 2004, he was named Shakespeare on Film and Television chair of the Southwest branch of the Popular Culture Association and has served as national chair since 2010. He has chaired or served on countless panels examining Shakespeare.

"As a scholar, Richard has an absolutely phenomenal knowledge of adaptation studies," says Peter Babiak, a Canadian scholar who has studied Shakespeare and served on several panels with Vela. "It's virtually encyclopedic. He has

**"I've been remarkably lucky to have the students I've had. Many of them went on to do great things, so I am grateful for having been a part of their lives."**



a very broad but focused knowledge of all the literature that's available in the field as well."

Vela has participated in a National Endowment for the Humanities Shakespeare program that takes scholars to the Blackfriars Theatre replica in Staunton, Virginia, and the famed Globe Theatre in London. He even had the chance to play an acting role on those stages. It's knowledge he gladly shares with his students; Vela has



taken graduate students to London for the full Shakespeare experience, even securing a special tour of the Globe for them because of his past experience there.

"I'm particularly proud of the work I've done with Shakespeare," says Vela. "It's not only teaching, it's being involved with the whole study. Teaching isn't just a matter of reading, preparing, walking in and telling them what you know. You have to be engaged with the subject matter as well as the students."

Vela is also quick to help his colleagues in the field. In 2011, when Babiak was defending his dissertation on Shakespeare at Toronto's York University, Vela served as a member of the evaluating committee. It was a gesture that Babiak has never forgotten.

"He did that a week or two before a big conference in San Antonio, so it was an enormous investment of his time on my behalf," Babiak says. "Generosity is the first word that comes to mind when I think of Richard. He is quick to support the research others are doing."

Holden Hansen, a former professor of theatre at UNCP and now a half-time

lecturer at the university, has also been a recipient of Vela's generosity.

"My earliest recollection of Richard is from 1999, when he came to a show I directed and really expressed an interest in the choices I made in that production," Hansen says. "Acting and directing has been my form of scholarship, and Richard has always taken an interest in me as a director. I think he came to every single show I directed from 1999 until last year."

Hansen was honored when Vela successfully nominated him for the Dial Award in 2012, the same award Vela had won five years earlier.

"Richard has always been keen on my growth as a scholar," Hansen says. "To have him take me under his wing like that has really helped to form me as a fully functioning scholar."

### CONTRIBUTING TO THE GREATER GOOD

Vela's instinct to give back and help others has manifested in countless ways during his years at UNCP. He was the first to teach Latino Literature courses at the university. In the 1980s, he helped establish the Advisement and Retention Office that helped students address and overcome challenges in their studies. But an encounter with one student led to something much more profound.

"Teachers would contact me if they had students who were missing or absent from class a lot," Vela says. "I kept trying to find one student, and when she finally came to the office, I could tell something was seriously wrong. But we talked for three hours before she began talking about having been sexually abused. I was able to get help for her, and eventually I got training and certification in rape crisis counseling."

It was an experience that spurred Vela to do even more for survivors of sexual assault, eventually joining forces with others in the community to establish the Rape Crisis Center in Robeson County.

Vela's reliability and steady leadership have landed him on several university committees, and he served as chair of the provost search committee during the 2016-

17 academic year. It was no accident Vela was chosen for such a critical leadership role, says Lowery. "One of the things that makes Dr. Vela a superstar faculty member is his reliability," according to Lowery. "You can always count on him to do the job well and with integrity."

Vela is grateful for the opportunities he's had thanks to his job, including the chance to travel extensively.

"It's been one of the amazing things about this job," Vela says. "I have presented papers in Ireland, England, Mexico and Canada, as well as several states. I've also spent time in France, and in 2017, I took a class to Cuba." One of his more interesting personal hobbies was scuba diving, which took him to Florida, Honduras and other spots. "There were summers where I was able to take dive trips almost every weekend," Vela says. "I reached Master Diver rank and did about 200 dives over the years."

But regardless of his travels, Richard Vela always came back home to UNCP, where his main devotion for almost 50 years has been his students. It's no surprise that his two commencement addresses carried them as a common thread.

"Both times, I reflected on how lucky I have been to have the students I have had here. So many of them have gone on to do so much." ■

..... By David Hibbard

Dr. Vela enjoying one of his favorite hobbies



# VIRTUAL PLAY COVERING NEW GROUND

Students in professor Jonathan Ricks' play therapy class seeking to delve deeper into the theories discussed in their textbooks have a direct line to the source—the books' authors.

This year, Dr. Ricks has discovered innovative ways to bring experts in the field of play therapy and child counseling into his classroom. Students have had the unique opportunity to draw on the experience of several play therapy experts, including the likes of Drs. Eliana Gil, Athena Drewes and Don Nims. With assistance from a grant and Zoom, Ricks is able to provide his students with a perspective he says will enhance their knowledge and way of thinking.

"This adds so much more meaning to what they are learning," Ricks said. "I still do the teaching, but the experts take it to a whole new level!"

Soon after the pandemic forced the transition to remote instruction, Ricks began brainstorming ways to incorporate a hybrid approach to his teaching methods in his virtual classroom. He was awarded a grant through the UNCP Teaching and Learning Center to recruit 10 guest speakers from across the country with expertise in play therapy.

Several of the experts authored chapters about their theories in the textbooks he is using this year.

"The class focuses on the theories of play therapy, so I used the grant to have the people who created the theories to join us via Zoom. We've had one expert per week. The students get a chance to interview the experts, and they discuss their theories. My students say they feel like they've had a master class in play therapy every week. I can't explain how excited they are."

Despite myriad of interruptions in higher education, Ricks and his colleagues across campus have found creative ways to deliver course material and ensure student engagement. Faculty continue to focus on the positive aspects that have resulted from an online environment.

"COVID has made me think differently about teaching. I could have lectured on these theories, but everybody can obtain access to a computer, so I felt these experts add so much more meaning to the material. I've been able to present to the faculty about the grant and what we've been able to accomplish and give other professors ideas on how to do innovative teaching in their courses." ■

..... By Mark Locklear

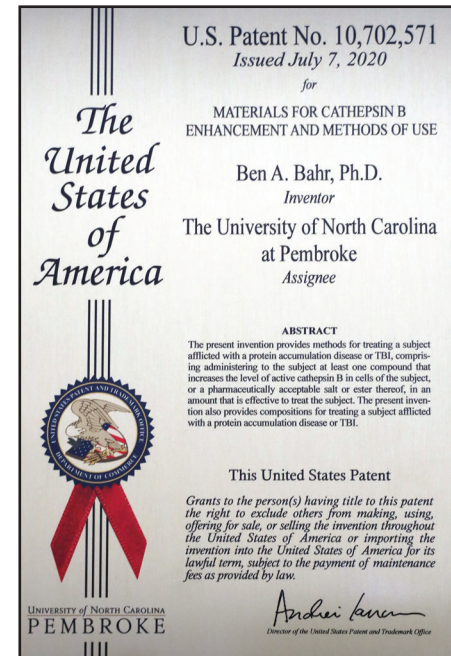


Dr. Eliana Gil gives a presentation as part of Dr. Ricks' play therapy class

# Dr. Ben Bahr: ON THE HORIZON

Since arriving on campus in 2009, Molecular Biology and Biochemistry Professor Ben Bahr and his team at UNCP's Biotechnology Research and Training Center have been working to uncover new treatment methods for Alzheimer's disease and traumatic brain injuries (TBI).

As a result of their studies, UNCP was recently awarded a U.S. Patent for compounds and compound combinations that hopefully will be used one day to alleviate Alzheimer's and TBI. It is the first patent in the university's history.



"This patent is yet another milestone that recognizes the cutting-edge research Dr. Bahr is conducting in his laboratory on these diseases that rob us of our very essence of who we are as people," said Chancellor Robin Gary Cummings.

"This is transformative research with far-reaching implications for the future relief of human suffering."

Dr. Bahr previously discovered a compound that was shown to clear accumulations of protein material in the brain that cause memory loss and contribute to Alzheimer's disease.

"The patent covers previous compounds, new derivatives and unique combinations that tap into the rapidly growing field of natural products for brain health. We are probably the first to show how you can combine them to be able to treat diseases such as Alzheimer's, Huntington's disease and ALS," Bahr said.

"And very importantly, the U.S. Patent Office allowed us to include the treatment of mild cognitive impairment. The MCI disorder, which we tested in animal models, is often considered pre-Alzheimer's disease and where you really want to start treating early dementia symptoms before Alzheimer's disease slowly becomes established in the brain."

Much is known about Alzheimer's disease, but the underlying cause of the disease that affects nearly 6 million Americans remains obscure. This makes it more difficult to find therapies capable of slowing and reversing the progression of Alzheimer's.

Bahr hopes the new patent will open the doors for UNCP to work with some of the state's major pharmaceutical companies. It's going to take investments to get the treatment method to the clinical trial phase.

Awarded last August, the new patent covers traumatic brain injuries because these types of injuries accumulate similar toxic protein deposits as Alzheimer's. Bahr's research has led him to identify a unique class of cathepsin B-enhancing compounds, cathepsin B being an enzyme that can degrade and clear the nerve-damaging deposits found in both Alzheimer's and TBI.

"As it turns out, both football players and military individuals too often develop chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), and that has the telltale images of the kind of protein deposits that occur in Alzheimer's disease."

The patent also includes compounds from patents awarded to Bahr and



another medicinal chemistry professor, Dr. Dennis Wright, while Bahr was on the faculty at the University of Connecticut, prior to coming to UNCP.

Dr. Todd Cohen, associate professor at the Neuroscience Center at UNC Chapel Hill, has interacted extensively with Bahr, exchanging reagents and brainstorming ideas.

"By improving the health of neurons, we may be able to improve synaptic function and restore cognition to those in the military that suffer from blast injuries, as well as other people that undergo single or multiple brain traumas, since both conditions affect the tau protein that forms deposits in the brain.

"His team's work should provide major new insight into these conditions and help guide therapeutic development in the coming years to treat these patients with effective new drugs," Cohen said. ■

..... By Mark Locklear



# KATINA BLUE: A NEW TECH FRONTIER

The pandemic has reshaped the landscape of higher education, forcing institutions nationwide to confront new challenges and solve problems with outside-the-box ideas. This new era has brought the role of technology to the forefront.

From an information technology perspective, the pandemic not only introduced challenges but also benefits in disguise, according to Dr. Katina Blue, UNCP's associate vice chancellor of Information Resources and chief information officer.

We sat down with Blue to examine how her department has responded to technological challenges and how the pandemic has impacted and changed society.

"We have stepped up, especially during the first wave, in support of our staff and students at a greater capacity, to address staffing concerns, hire consultants and increase cybersecurity," Blue said. "The pandemic increased our demand for software and placed a greater demand on our IT workforce. It has shown us the importance of the internet and the value of network technologies."

She reflected back on spring of 2020 when UNCP shifted more than 1,800 courses online—a feat the university, according to Blue, executed with few hiccups. The IT department continues to provide campuswide support in this new era of interdepartmental communication among faculty and staff.

She's quick to give the university's response a superior rating, which she credits to an "out-of-box thinking" approach.

"There were no real major interruptions. We were able to mitigate cyberattacks, provide students and faculty with laptops. At the same time, classes were delivered remotely, and we offered internet access through free Wi-Fi hotspots for students and the local community."

The pandemic, Blue says, has forced leaders in higher education to consider a hybrid learning model to deliver course content.

"As UNCP is striving to achieve 10,000 in total student enrollment, we can't help but move more toward new approaches offering flexibility to meet students' needs no matter where they are."

Though new to UNCP—hired just months before the pandemic hit—Blue had been practicing emergency scenarios for more than 16 years as director of IT Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity at N.C. State University. In spring 2020, the time came for her to put these theories into practice.



"I was able to bring all my previous experience to my team and bring a different perspective of ideas, which added great value in our ability to transition as quickly as possible. The organization was running well before I got here. Still, because of my experience, my background, the number of years in leadership roles and all the planning in previous roles, we were able to roll out a pretty seamless transition."

UNCP's ability to adapt and meet the technological needs campuswide wouldn't have been possible without collaboration from leaders and colleagues across campus to supply resources and funding.

As the virtual world continues to dominate the way we communicate, Blue stressed the importance of taking care of your physical and mental health using self-care techniques.

"The pandemic has certainly changed the way we conduct meetings, interviews and presentations. Last March, my staff and I were working more than 12 hours a day and on weekends. It's tough to turn things off when most of our communication is virtual. As leaders, we must know when to be purposeful with our employees' time. We must be very supportive of each other's needs during this time." ■

..... By Mark Locklear

# RESEARCH TO SERVE THE REGION

It's one thing for nursing students to learn about a global pandemic in a textbook. It's another for them to research one in real time. That was the opportunity made available last year for UNC Pembroke students thanks to a \$1 million grant from the North Carolina Policy Collaboratory.

"I've participated in mock events for nursing students, where you try to pretend that something is happening. But this is reality," said Dr. Todd Telemeco, dean of the UNCP College of Health Sciences.

"You're dealing with real emotions, real situations, real fear. And I think the students really enjoyed the opportunity to see their faculty in action and then partner with them to do good work."

Telemeco was describing a multipronged research project that was designed to measure the amount of herd immunity for COVID-19 based on the percentage of community members who had antibodies for the coronavirus. More than 900 people in Robeson County were tested as part of

the research, which was concluded in early December 2020.

Many people in the community had already had COVID-19 but didn't realize it because they didn't show any signs, Telemeco explained. Others who participated in the study suspected they'd had the coronavirus months earlier when they experienced symptoms. The research would help public health officials understand the transmission of COVID-19.

## PARTNERSHIPS

Telemeco credits Dr. William Puentes, Brenda B. Brooks Endowed Professor of Nursing, for leading the project, from planning and implementation to data analysis, which was still being finalized at press time. The college plans to publish the results in a major research journal.

The project was a massive undertaking that wouldn't have been possible without strong community partnerships, Telemeco said. He explained that the College of Health Sciences worked with the Public Schools of Robeson County to test educators and parents. The Robeson County Health Department was on hand to conduct PCR COVID-19 tests by swabbing the checks of participants who showed up at testing sites with symptoms of the coronavirus. The other participants, those without symptoms, had their blood drawn by UNCP nursing students under faculty supervision. The blood samples were used for antibody testing.

Dr. Cherry Beasley, Nursing Chair and Anne R. Belk Endowed Professor, explained that drawing the blood was a small fraction of the learning experience for students.

"The junior students got excited about drawing the blood," she said. "The senior students were able to understand, because of where they were in the curriculum, the values of the other pieces."

Those other pieces included important aspects of nursing that don't relate to a medical procedure but involve education and advocacy.

"A lot of what they learned was the different approaches that had to be used for the different people in the community," Beasley said. For instance, while they were in line to get their blood drawn or were waiting afterward for the required 15 minutes, study participants peppered nursing students with a host of questions about how antibody testing works and how the data would be used. Sometimes the person asking the question had a degree in biology, and sometimes they had less than a high school education. The nursing students had to be able to communicate with them all.

The students also had to think through ethical questions: How was the \$10 fee that participants received different than paying them for their blood? How can a participant who doesn't speak English provide informed consent? The study followed the highest research standards, but understanding those questions was a beneficial exercise for the students, Beasley explained. Additionally, students had to create a medical chart for each participant, providing faculty with an opportunity to reiterate the importance of accurate recordkeeping.

"It was a holistic approach to nursing education," she said, explaining that nursing education is focused on knowledge, skill, ethical comportment and attitude. The sometimes trying conditions of the fieldwork allowed students to practice having a positive attitude "even when you're hot and tired and you haven't had lunch," said Beasley.

The research involved all three types of UNCP nursing students: those who are already licensed nurses but working on their bachelor's degree in nursing, unlicensed students working on their bachelor's degree in nursing and graduate students seeking a Master of Science in Nursing, Beasley said.

Some experienced students were paid for their work on the project after demonstrating their skills. The opportunity to make money was critical for many students, who had lost their jobs when restaurants closed.

Telemeco said the research offered "a novel way of getting students clinical time amid a pandemic," when many clinical settings were not accepting students due to increased safety protocols.

"I think the students really appreciated the opportunity to ask questions and understand public health on a bigger scale," Telemeco said. "I think that is a part of nursing that is critical but often difficult to teach."



Nursing staff and students engage in serology testing

## HEALTH BEHAVIORS

The project extended well beyond antibody testing, and additional research is planned, Telemeco explained. One goal is to learn more about human behaviors that affect health. Participants who had their blood drawn were asked to come back for a second test six weeks after their first. "If they were negative the first time and they were positive the second time, we wanted to learn what were the behaviors that converted them," such as getting a new job or stopping wearing a mask, Telemeco said.

Some participants were randomly selected for a survey about their perceptions of COVID-19 and preventative measures such as mask wearing and social distancing. And

because "underserved minorities typically have a low vaccination rate," Telemeco explained that some participants were also asked about the perceptions of the vaccine since it was quickly brought to market.



## 'TIP OF THE ICEBERG'

Beasley, who was the first nursing faculty member hired at UNCP in 1992, said the project illustrates the growth of the university's health programs and their impact in the region.

"This is a university that was founded by the community for the benefit of the community," Beasley said. She explained that the project exemplifies how UNCP's role is "to not only educate fine practitioners of nursing, it's also to be a service to the community."

Beasley said, "It would have been a lot easier to do [the fieldwork] in Pembroke and Lumberton," but that it meant a lot to smaller communities like Fairmont and Red Springs to know that UNCP is interested in them. "It said to them, 'We appreciate who you are,'" she said.

Each participant was given \$10 as well as a UNCP ink pen and a mask. "We had people who were so interested in having things with UNC Pembroke's name on them; they wanted us to keep the money and give them more masks because they wanted something that said UNCP on it," Beasley said.

She said the endeavor represents "just the tip of the iceberg" in terms of the potential for UNCP to have an impact on the region's health, economy and education. Telemeco agreed, saying the project provided an opportunity for the newly formed college to demonstrate its commitment to the area.

"UNCP has always had a strong relationship with the community. But this was really the first time the College of Health Sciences was in the forefront," Telemeco said. "I think this really demonstrated UNCP's capabilities when given the proper opportunity." ■

By Justin Smith



# Q & A

## UNCP FIRST LADY REBECCA CUMMINGS



### ALWAYS SPORTING HER SIGNATURE WARM SMILE, UNCP'S FIRST LADY REBECCA CUMMINGS RELISHES HER TIME GETTING TO KNOW STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF.

She's engaged on and off campus, frequently spotted at academic functions, athletic events and GPAC shows, and you may even spot her speaking at events such as the Women's Empowerment Summit or at the Museum of the Southeast American Indian.

Her love and devotion to the Black and Gold family are unmistakable. And her presence at UNCP is undeniable. We caught up with her to talk about her experience as first lady over the past six years. Here's what she had to say.

#### *What is your favorite aspect of your role as First Lady?*

I grew up just five miles down the road from the university, so coming back home in this role has been so fulfilling. The university is so important to my community and the region. To serve as first lady is a very high and humbling honor.

But, by far, the absolute best part is getting to know our students. I enjoy the opportunity to sit down and talk with

them at different events throughout the year and to experience with them as they grow and mature. They share their struggles and ambitions, and then to see them on commencement day in their black and gold gowns is such a proud moment. At each commencement, I get to see the whole picture, and it brings it all together. I'm so happy we were still able to host a COVID-appropriate version of commencement this year for our graduates.

#### *Speaking of COVID, which UNCP event did you miss the most over the past year?*

Of course, I missed hosting various student groups at the Residence and our alumni events like the Star-Spangled Celebration. Robin and I really value the

opportunities we have to spend with Braves, both current and former, and normally, the Residence is pretty active on many evenings during the week. I missed Christmas and all the celebrations and great traditions. But the most prominent event I missed was the Scholarship Dinner.

Each year, students are invited to meet the donor who provided their scholarship. On this night, you hear from students and about the impact these scholarships have had on their academic journey and futures. And you hear from the donors themselves, their story, on why they give. It's one of the more heartwarming events we have. It's a true reminder of the great people that make up the BraveNation family who so generously invest in our students. It truly is a powerful event and so rewarding to hear each story and see our university at its very best.

#### *You and the chancellor are such a strong partnership by which so many are inspired. What's the secret?*

It's always been a team effort with Robin and me. We have always been supportive of each other in everything we do. We have an understanding friendship,

and our journey together has been so rewarding and blessed. We both feel a strong connection to our hometown, and it's exciting to see all the positive changes taking place in the community and here on campus. I see the potential that has always been here and the potential for even greater things to happen, and I am excited. What more could you want in life than to be a part of history, in this case, 134-year old history and vision?

#### *Tell me about the first time you met Chancellor Cummings and growing up together in Pembroke.*

Robin tells this story so much better than I, though I really think he adds to it each time he tells it. But the first time he says he saw me, and I saw him, I was at Pembroke Middle School, walking to the cafeteria with friends. The exact location is a sidewalk outside a brick building near the Residence where we now live. I could throw a rock to the location. He was in ninth grade, and I was in eighth. We eventually attended the same high school, and that's when we began dating.

UNC Pembroke was a center point of our childhood growing up. In fact, throughout high school, we would sometimes "study" at the Mary Livermore Library. We figured

out early on, parents would never say no if they thought you were going to study, and so many of our friends and we took advantage of this opportunity quite often, and the library became a meeting spot. Robin and I dated throughout high school and college. He took a year off between his undergrad and starting medical school, and we married that year on July 15, 1978. We celebrated our 37th wedding anniversary in 2015 as Robin officially began as the sixth chancellor of UNCP.

#### *What legacy do you and Chancellor Cummings hope to build and leave with UNCP?*

I think what we both want, as Robin says, is simply to make a difference that lasts. We see ourselves in these positions as chancellor and first lady to serve our students and this university, and it is sometimes an overwhelming honor, to look back at the great history but to also look forward to the great future inspires us. Changing Lives Through Education is real. We hope others will see and believe we did a good job, and the next generations of Braves will be stronger, and those past will be proud of their university because of something we contribute while here. ■

By Tabitha Cain



First Lady Rebecca Cummings throws out first pitch at women's softball



Chancellor Robin Gary Cummings and First Lady Rebecca

# ON THE QUAD

## STUDENTS WERE THE CENTER

Schaeffer, who retired in January, played a lead role in developing facilities that no one had imagined yet when she started her career—buildings such as the Brave Health Center, the University Center Annex and the Courtyard Apartments. Beyond the buildings she helped plan, the true measure of her legacy is the number of lives that she touched. And as the university has changed, so have the needs of its students.

“I don’t think that most people understand what college students are going through today,” she said. “Our students need so much more now.”

And it was Schaeffer’s job to ensure those needs were met. She oversaw 13 offices that provided fundamental services such as housing, police and student health, and she grew other programs designed to develop students into leaders and engage them on campus and in the community.

Part of Student Affairs is seemingly a blast—homecoming celebrations, hypnotist shows, lip sync battles—but it isn’t all fun and games, not by a long shot. The division also helps students who face serious issues like homelessness and hunger.

“Students have so many challenges, personal challenges, in their lives now,” Schaeffer said. To meet those challenges, Schaeffer created the CARE (Consultation, Advocacy, Resources and Education) Team that harnesses the resources of the university to support students on a case-by-case basis.

The team includes experts from across campus in fields such as counseling and psychological services, financial aid and campus safety who can help “any time a student has any kind of problem, big or small,” Schaeffer said.



Dr. Lisa Schaeffer

## ‘I HOPE AND I PRAY THAT I DID MAKE A DIFFERENCE’

When Lisa Lewis Schaeffer was hired as an admissions counselor in 1984, UNC Pembroke was a different place in many ways.

“The farthest that the campus went was the Dial Building, and I thought that was on the other end of the Earth,” she said.

But over time, the Dial Building would become the geographic center of campus, and Schaeffer would find herself in the center of Student Affairs, rising to the rank of vice chancellor.



Lisa Schaeffer (second from left) is pictured with her parents Thomas and Shirley Lewis, her brother, Rice, and Karen

### CAREER PATH

An effective vice chancellor must have attention to detail but also a big-picture view of how their department contributes to the university and its mission. The early years of Schaeffer’s career at UNCP helped her form that perspective, providing a unique insight into the lives of individual students as well as the university’s impact in the region.

After graduating from Peace College with an associate degree in liberal arts and from Campbell University with a bachelor’s degree in sociology, a teacher’s certification and a master’s degree in guidance and counseling, Schaeffer joined UNCP as an admissions counselor. In that role, she had to understand the inner workings of the university so she could effectively recruit students and help them navigate the admissions process.

“I had to know a little bit about everything, and that got me interested in everything on campus. I certainly wasn’t ever in a bubble,” Schaeffer said.

Even though she had to know how the university ticked, a lot of her time was spent off campus. Her recruitment territory included most of North Carolina and all of South Carolina, Florida, Virginia and some of Maryland.

But after five years in admissions and two promotions within the department, Schaeffer was ready to spread her wings elsewhere on campus. Plus, university leaders encouraged her to pursue a doctorate, which would have been impossible given all the time she spent on the road.

Schaeffer moved to a new role, director of career services, which provided her with a new vantage point from which to see the university. Part of the role entailed collaborating with area employers looking to hire UNCP students.

“Working with employers developed in me a better understanding of the world of work, but it also helped me develop my professional skills,” Schaeffer said.

In addition to gaining a better understanding of business, Schaeffer’s new job gave her the opportunity to work one on one with thousands of students.

“Back in those days, we didn’t have large staffs,” she said. “It was me and my assistant.” Schaeffer understood that she couldn’t focus just on helping students write resumes and prepare for job interviews. She needed to work with them as soon as they set foot on campus to make sure they were on the right path.

Schaeffer hand-scored each freshman’s career assessment and met with them individually to discuss the results. “That really developed my understanding of what our students were facing when they came in as freshmen,” she said.

She also counseled seniors, many of whom were raised in the region and hesitant about moving away to pursue career opportunities.

“I was kind of a product of that myself,” said Schaeffer, a native of Fairmont, where she still lives. “I made the decision to stay in

Robeson County even though I had been educated other places and had lived other places.”

Over the course of 12 years as director of career services, Schaeffer became known as an organized, highly competent leader who could get the job done. In 1993, she earned her doctorate in education from Campbell University, and UNCP leaders increasingly began calling on her to contribute to campuswide initiatives that were well beyond the scope of her office.

“I was open to that. I was hungry for that and took pride in that,” Schaeffer said.

In 2002, her reputation and track record of success led to her promotion to associate vice chancellor of Student Affairs. She would later serve two stints as interim vice chancellor before being named to the permanent position in January 2017.

### MENTORSHIP

While Schaeffer dedicated her career to developing students, she was also focused on helping staff members reach their full potential. After all, she’d had strong mentors at UNCP, and she saw it as her obligation to continue the cycle.

“I love being a mentor,” she said. “I want people to think of me as a mentor to them and that I’ve helped them in some way be better at their jobs.”

In addition to Chancellor Robin Cummings, Schaeffer credits Dr. Dianne Jones as one of her strongest mentors. The two women followed similar career paths, rising through the Student Affairs ranks at UNCP to the position of vice chancellor.

Schaeffer has been on the other side of countless relationships. One of her mentees was Cynthia Oxendine, who started as Schaeffer’s secretary in the career center and retired in 2019 as assistant vice chancellor.

Schaeffer saw Oxendine’s potential early on. “Cynthia is quiet, but very smart. She is very level-headed and has a lot of common sense. I’m drawn to those that have a lot of common sense,” Schaeffer said.

“She always encouraged me and pushed me to explore my career aspirations,” Oxendine said, explaining that Schaeffer spurred her to pursue her master’s degree, which expanded her professional opportunities. “Having her in my life as a mentor and a friend was no less than a gift from God.”

A more recent mentee is Christie Poteet, director of the Office for Community and Civic Engagement, who is pursuing her doctorate in part because of Schaeffer’s encouragement.

“Her mentorship empowered me to have the confidence to make important decisions without fear of failure and always knowing that I would be supported,” Poteet said.

# ON THE QUAD

## SCHAEFFER CONTINUED

### CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

A point that Schaeffer emphasized to her staff was the need to assess and continually improve their programs. Even though she spent her entire career at UNCP, Schaeffer wasn't stuck in her ways, and she wanted to make sure her team wasn't, either.

"Our [student] population changes every two to three years. If we're not changing what we're doing to be hip, if you will, with the new students, we're really wasting our time," she said. "What we were doing five years ago might be obsolete compared to how we're doing things next year."

And while Schaeffer saw tremendous change during nearly four decades at the university, the most dramatic shift occurred in her final year.

"We were trying to add online components to our services anyway, but COVID-19 brought it home and forced us to make it work," she said, explaining that Student Affairs now offers a host of virtual services, including counseling, campus recreation and a distinguished speakers series.

The online offerings make programs more accessible for UNCP's online and commuter students, and those who balance school and work.

"In a lot of situations, it's enhanced what we do, and I really see us continuing the online offerings even after the pandemic," Schaeffer said.



Dr. Schaeffer, left, and Sara Oswald

### 'LOVED MY TIME'

When Schaeffer announced her retirement to Chancellor Cummings in January 2020, giving him 12 months' notice, she had no idea that her final year would be so different than the previous ones.

In retirement, she plans to spend more time with her family, including her husband, Mike, a retired UNCP men's soccer coach, and their son, Ethan. She also intends to get more involved with the family's 200-acre farm and rental properties.

"I'm not going to sit home and knit," Schaeffer said. But she would like to take painting and drawing classes, activities that never made it to the top of her priority list during her career.

"When I worked, I worked. And when I came home, there wasn't an awful lot left," she said.

Schaeffer plans to return to UNCP for shows at GPAC and to volunteer, if needed. "I'm going to miss the people terribly," she said. "I have loved my time at UNC Pembroke. I've learned so much. I've grown so much. I'm a better person because of it. My whole goal was to have a career where I made a difference in lives. And I hope and pray that I did make a difference." ■

By Justin Smith



Dr. Schaeffer and her son Ethan

# DOWN MEMORY LANE...

## A SHORT HISTORY OF TOMMY ROCK



Submitted by Dan Kenney, former athletic director & chief of staff

In 1998, I was hired by Chancellor Joe Oxendine to become the director of Athletics. We talked about the university's brand and the 1991 decision to do away with the hideous brave mascot and replace it with a red-tailed hawk. The new logo designed by Gloria Lowery and the hawk as the university mascot had not gained traction yet. We brainstormed on how to jump-start affinity for both. I convinced Chancellor Oxendine that a statue of a red-tailed hawk would be a great addition to campus. He told me I could pursue it but we didn't have any funds for its creation. Thanks to philanthropy, UNCP spirit, and community goodwill, the Tommy Statue in front of the Chavis University Center became a reality.

During the fall semester 1998, several serendipitous events occurred. The 1999 UNCP senior class decided their gift to UNCP would be the statue, and UNCP art professor and sculpture extraordinaire

Paul Van Zandt agreed to create a bronze replica of a red-tailed hawk. Finally, I had a friend named Greg Price from Lumberton who worked for NCDOT. He introduced me to a business that would have a suitable boulder on which to mount the Tommy Statue.

Greg took me to a quarry—Hanson Aggregates—in Harnett County that agreed to give UNCP a boulder for free. I drove down into the bottom of the quarry and picked out the boulder. The deal was it belonged to UNCP as long as we would get it transported back to campus. I often joked it was the largest gift in school history, some 20 tons.

Thanks to Trent Locklear and his late dad Lonnie of Lonnie Locklear Jr. & Sons Construction Company Inc., we got it delivered and used a crane to get it put in place. They brought the boulder to UNCP on a flatbed truck that they owned. The

day the boulder arrived, it created quite a buzz on campus as it pulled up on the road that used to run between the UC and Jones Center.

Thanks to the creativity of Larry Freeman and Eleanor Fields, the front of the statue got brought to life with flowers and blue granite pavers. Those pavers that sit in front of the statue came from the lobby of the original Sampson Hall.

It is hard to believe that the statue has been in place for 22 years. It has become one of the iconic places where graduating seniors snap commencement day photos.

Would you like to take a trip down memory lane for the next issue? Send your best memories to [mark.locklear@uncp.edu](mailto:mark.locklear@uncp.edu). ■

# ON THE QUAD

## TWO FORCES OF NATURE AWARDED ORDER OF THE LONG LEAF PINE

**R**etired UNCP professor Dr. Robert O. Schneider was awarded the state's highest honor—The Order of the Long Leaf Pine—for the significant impact he has made in higher education over the last four decades.

Schneider retired in November 2020 after serving 38 years as a professor of Political Science and Public Administration and as an administrator at UNCP. He served 17 years as chair of the Department of Political Science, two years as associate vice chancellor for International Programs and director of the MPA program.

A recognized expert in the field of emergency management and disaster mitigation, Schneider's scholarly research includes numerous journal publications in his field. He is the author of three books in addition to numerous peer-reviewed articles and has taught courses in South Africa and China as an exchange scholar. He has researched and written on leading policy issues where science and politics intersect.

Schneider holds a Ph.D. in political science from Miami University. He completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

Conferred by the governor of North Carolina, The Order of the Long Leaf Pine is awarded to persons for exemplary service to the state and their communities that is above and beyond the call of duty and that has made a significant impact to strengthen the state. ■

### DR. ROBERT SCHNEIDER



### DR. WILEY BARRETT



**U**NCP Trustee and alumnus Dr. Wiley Barrett has been honored with The Order of the Long Leaf Pine following a 50-year career as an educator, high school official and civic leader. Barrett is a 1969 UNCP graduate and former member and chair of the Moore County School Board. He served the last nine years as a member of the UNC Board of Trustees, including a term as chair.

Barrett was honored with the award in December with a presentation from state Rep. Jamie Boles at his home in Southern Pines.

Since 1963, North Carolina's governors have reserved their highest honor, The Order of the Long Leaf Pine award, for individuals who have dedicated their lives to creating impact in their communities and the state of North Carolina. Barrett's exemplary career and advocacy for education has earned him this top honor.

Barrett played basketball for four years at UNCP. After earning his degree, he went on to earn advanced degrees from UNC Charlotte and Campbell University. For the next 30 years, he served as a teacher, coach and principal in Moore County before retiring in 2001.

Wiley also spent 50 years officiating high school basketball, earning the coveted Golden Whistle Merit Award in 2015. He has the distinction of having played in an NCHSAA state basketball championship game, coaching a team to a state basketball championship and then officiating in several state championship basketball games. ■

By Mark Locklear

## IN SERVICE OF OTHERS: **RAHMAN** IN ACTION

**O**ne of the many ways Dr. Mohammad Rahman gives back to the community is by helping others hold on to more of their own money. On the surface, that doesn't sound too altruistic, but look a little closer and you'll see it makes perfect sense for Rahman, an associate professor of Accounting and Finance in the School of Business.

Rahman and Dr. Rebecca Gonzalez, chair of the Accounting and Finance Department, are taking financial literacy to high school students as well as adults in Robeson County to help them avoid pitfalls Rahman says are all too common.

"A lot of people make bad financial decisions because they did not know better," says Rahman.

Each semester, Rahman and Gonzalez host several events to talk about things like the use of credit cards, how to manage debt, budgeting, saving and a variety of other money matters. "We try to do at least three events every semester in the Lumberton and Pembroke area and on campus as well," Rahman says. "We may teach finance in the classroom, but we feel like we owe a lot to the community as well."

Early in the program, Rahman and Gonzalez realized limiting the audience to adults wasn't sufficient.

"One of the biggest challenges we had was that a lot of times when we talked to folks, they had already made some big mistakes in their life with finances. They were already in financial trouble. We realized that people need to be financially responsible as soon as high school, because if they make a mistake early on, it is hard to get out of that and then move ahead," Rahman says.

The sessions are interactive, with Rahman and Gonzalez inviting speakers from the North Carolina Attorney General's office and other agencies to talk about money scams, identity theft and protection of personal data.

"People need to understand that data breaches can put them at tremendous financial risk," Rahman says. "Somebody can use information from a data breach to open a credit card or even buy a house in your name, so we're trying to educate our community about these scams so they can maintain their credit rating."

Helping others to be smart with money is just one example of Rahman's belief in supporting the local and global community in all the ways he can.

A native of Bangladesh, Rahman has been involved with MUNA (Muslim Ummah of North America) since he came to the United States for college in 2001. The nonprofit organization works with immigrant communities, especially people from Bangladesh, in New York, Los Angeles, Detroit and Houston.

"Those cities have large Bangladeshi communities, and most of them do odd jobs, like driving cabs, so when COVID hit, a lot of them were without a job," Rahman says. "English is not their first language, so it becomes a challenge to apply for things like unemployment benefits. We set up a 24-hour hotline where volunteers help with a variety of services like nonemergency medical help or applying for COVID-related services. We've also developed a state-by-state webinar on how to apply for benefits." MUNA also operates food banks in larger communities and has distributed more than a million pounds of food.

Rahman serves as treasurer at his mosque in Raeford, North Carolina, which operates a local food bank on the first Saturday of each month. "We provide eight- or 10-pound food boxes to anybody who comes and needs it, and we have seen the turnout increase during



COVID," Rahman says. His mosque also sponsors several children in Yemen who have been orphaned by the civil war there.

At UNCP, Rahman is the advisor of the Muslim Student Association, an outgrowth of his membership in Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity during his college years. "I encourage our students to get involved in different service projects, because they will see the positive impact they can have right here in the local community."

Rahman credits his faith and family for his dedication to helping others. "Our core belief is that we cannot do well just taking care of ourselves. If your community fails to grow with you, then you won't grow yourself. Our religious belief is that you are not only responsible for your family, you are also responsible for your community. Every second I have, other than working to provide food for my family, my community deserves everything I have in the service of others." ■

By David Hibbard



# ON THE QUAD

## UNITED NATIONS' SECRET WEAPON

### PROFESSOR STEVEN SINGLETARY



Food airdrops in South Sudan



Singletary has 20 years experience parachuting and as a skydiving instructor



Professor Steven Singletary

It might come as a surprise to some students in the Department of Chemistry and Physics that one of their professors had a hand in the United Nation's World Food Program winning the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize.

Sounds a bit far-fetched, but it's true. Food airdrops were innovative ways UN pilots utilized to combat hunger in dangerous places like South Sudan and Syria during the pandemic. Parachutes used to deliver oversized bags of cereal, wheat, grains and flour were designed, developed and tested by none other than UNCP's very own Steve Singletary.

He didn't expect his name to be mentioned during the announcement in October and chuckled at the thought of seeing any prize money. His thoughts were much broader.

"Over a million people didn't go hungry because of my work. That's more than enough," Singletary said. "It's rewarding to know that something I designed is helping feed hungry people around the world. It's hard to quantify in words what it means."

Somewhat of a Renaissance man, the MIT-educated professor, former Marine and geology expert has always had a fascination with all forms of air travel. He fell in love with skydiving after a stint in the military and pilot school. Today, he has 20 years of experience as a skydiver, instructor and parachute rigger, that latter of which taught him the ins and outs of maintaining and repairing parachutes and the physics behind them.

Several years ago, the World Food Program began testing parachutes at Rampart Aviation in Louisburg, North Carolina, where Singletary worked as a production control manager.

After much trial and error, WFP officials sought Singletary's expertise. For three months, he worked to redesign a prototype nylon parachute sturdy enough to safely drop a 55-pound bag of food from a plane traveling 200 mph. The final product was reached after 100 test runs.

"I've been an active skydiver since 1997, and I've been a parachute rigger for that same amount of time. So, with my technical experience with materials and theory, combined with my academic knowledge, I was able to completely design these parachutes."

Never the type to toot his own horn, Singletary plans to use any exposure to recruit students to the chemistry and physics program and STEM disciplines. More specifically, he hopes his newfound notoriety attracts more students to the 3-plus-2 dual engineering program that UNCP shares with N.C. State University.

"That's the big thing for me. I don't care about notoriety. I wanted to grow our programs and help our students be successful."

A UNCP grad himself who grew up in the small town of Tar Heel, North Carolina, Singletary can relate to his students. He hopes his life experiences and contributions to fighting world hunger will encourage his students the way his professors encouraged him.

"When I first came to college, I didn't want to be here. But, my professors believed in me and kept having faith. If it had not been for those instructors pushing me, I doubt I would have gone anywhere." ■

By Mark Locklear



Aerial view of food airdrops

# ON THE QUAD

## TEXTBOOK PIONEER FRANK SCHMALLEGER



Pembroke in 1976, teaching courses in the emerging academic field of criminal justice. Two years later, Schmallegger was named chair of the Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Criminal Justice, a post he held until he left the university in 1994. Today, he is one of the world's leading criminal justice textbook authors, having written more than 30 books. Schmallegger's "Criminal Justice Today" continues to be the foremost introductory textbook in the field, more than 30 years after its first edition.

Authoring textbooks was the last thing on Schmallegger's mind after graduating from Notre Dame and heading to The Ohio State University for graduate school in the fall of 1969.

Schmallegger earned master's and doctorate degrees in sociology from Ohio State and taught for a couple of years at a small Catholic college in Ohio afterward. It was during this time that a contact he had made in Columbus paved the way for his next professional stop.

"I had gone to school at Ohio State with Clem Bartollas, who was by then teaching at Pembroke State," Schmallegger says. Spurred by a recommendation from Bartollas, sociology professor John Rimberg called Schmallegger to discuss a teaching position at Pembroke, and in 1976, Schmallegger headed south. "There was some interest in forming a criminal justice program at the university, so since I had some experience in that area, they put me in charge of developing the program," Schmallegger says.

While his writing career was taking off, Schmallegger was also enjoying his work as a teacher at Pembroke State.

Simultaneously, "Criminal Justice Today" was growing in prominence as faculty around the world began to adopt it as the standard for introductory-level classes in the field. It was a development that took Schmallegger completely by surprise.

His commitment to getting it right extends to his approach to writing, a painstaking task that Schmallegger has yet to lose his zest for. ■

..... By David Hibbard

Growing up in the zinc manufacturing town of Palmerton, Pennsylvania, in the late '50s and early '60s, Frank Schmallegger remembers, his parents stressing education as an essential part of his formative years. Despite that, the significance of his college choice didn't register with Schmallegger as he was thinking about the next step in his education.

"My father was a Notre Dame fan, but I didn't really know much about the school," Schmallegger says. "But my dad helped me apply there, and somehow I got accepted."

Going to South Bend opened all sorts of doors for Schmallegger, who eventually joined the faculty at UNC

## NEW AMERICAN ACADEMY OF NURSING FELLOW IS:

### CLOSING THE GAPS IN HEALTH CARE



disseminates nursing knowledge to contribute to health policy and practice for the benefit of the public and the nursing profession. Through a rigorous nomination and application process, a committee of elected fellows reviews hundreds of applications and selects new fellows based on their contributions to advancing the public's health. Beasley was nominated by Dr. William Puentes, Brenda B. Brooks Distinguished Professor of Nursing at UNCP, and Dr. Phyliss Horns, East Carolina University nursing professor.

**D**r. Cherry Maynor Beasley has devoted her nursing career to rural, underserved populations. Since 1975, she's been steadfast in her commitment to achieve health care equity and improve health in rural, disenfranchised areas, particularly in the American Indian community.

Last fall, Dr. Beasley joined an elite group of health professionals as the longtime UNCP nursing professor was inducted into the American Academy of Nursing. The fellowship is one of the highest honors in the nursing profession, and only 2,700 distinguished nursing leaders worldwide have been given the honor. Dr. Beasley is just one of six inductees from this recent class from North Carolina.

"Not only is this an honor for me, but I consider that a major honor for our community," Beasley said. "Many of the people who are selected focus their efforts in urban communities and large research universities. This selection clearly demonstrates that nurses who work in a variety of settings are leaders in the profession."

The American Academy of Nursing is a professional organization that

"Dr. Beasley's commitment to health care equity and her drive to respond to the health care needs of disenfranchised, rural populations is reflected in her tireless involvement in initiatives to address these pressing issues," Puentes said.

"Her advocacy for rural populations has made her the go-to person throughout North Carolina, as well as nationally among American Indian and rural health care professionals, for implementing data-driven, culturally appropriate solutions. As a colleague, I have found her tireless pursuit of equitable health care for all an inspiration."

Horns added, "Dr. Beasley is a nationally recognized expert on American Indian culture, beliefs and health issues. Building on her own cultural heritage as a Lumbee Indian and through her exemplary nursing career, she has an impressive history of advancing Indigenous people's health issues and influencing related health care policies to better serve this population, particularly in rural settings."

A native of Pembroke, Beasley currently serves in several nursing and public health leadership roles, including the North Carolina Future of Nursing

Taskforce, the North Carolina Action Committee of the Health Care Quality Commission, the UNC Southeastern Health Board of Trustees and the GlenFlora Board of Directors. She frequently consults with the Lumbee Tribe on health concerns. Her numerous teaching awards include the coveted UNC Board of Governor's Award for Teaching Excellence.

Among her many accolades, she was awarded the North Carolina Legislative Nurse of the Year in 2009. She is co-editor of "American Indian Women of Proud Nations: Essays on History, Language and Education", selected for the Critical Indigenous and American Indian Studies series. She served as keynote speaker during spring 2018 commencement at UNCP.

As part of the virtual induction ceremony, Beasley shared her thoughts on the future of nursing during a video vignette.

"Just as UNCP has changed with the societal demands and yet has maintained a strong foundation in our history, I know that the current and future nursing workforce can and must do the same by developing new models of care that allow for differences for the goal of a brighter future for all." ■

..... By Mark Locklear



# ON THE QUAD

## VERONICA HARDY: RENAISSANCE WOMAN

College professor doesn't begin to encapsulate Veronica Hardy's lifework. They don't make business cards to match her versatility.

Author. Public speaker. Mentor. Professional consultant. Podcast host. Licensed clinical social worker. And it's no surprise her areas of expertise and interests are just as diversified, from racial equity in K-12 school settings to child sex trafficking to trauma-informed practices and the integration of spirituality and mental health.

A more accurate business card descriptor would be "Accomplished."

Through her writing and public speaking, she uses the power of story to reveal and confront challenges experienced by her audience. Hardy's passion for helping others cope with life's challenges can be traced to her years growing up in Pennsylvania. As a teenager, she counseled friends who were impacted by drugs in the community or even had significant family losses. At that time, her goals were to start a home for teenage girls and a shelter for people experiencing homelessness.

"I wanted to understand their experiences," she said. "At an early age, I knew I wanted to be able to understand human behavior and how people dealt with hurt and grief."

She would go on to earn advanced degrees in the field, open a private counseling practice in her home state and later publish a book providing ways to process grief. Hardy eventually transitioned into higher education, teaching at Colorado State University Pueblo and Colorado Christian University before joining the social work faculty at UNCP in 2009.

Her former students and colleagues will tell you she's more than an educator. She practices what she teaches, taking

a stand on social justice issues like human trafficking. She's a professional consultant for Doing It For The Kingdom, an anti-human-trafficking organization, and serves as a human trafficking services team member for the North Carolina Youth Violence Prevention Center.

Her third book, "Becoming Un-Tangled" was released earlier this year and focuses on issues including trauma and was influenced by the many challenges of 2020, which Hardy describes as a year of loss: loss of hopes, dreams and loss of life. It speaks about entering a new season and creating a new sense of hope. After the book launched, she began hosting a video series inviting guests to share inspiring stories of personal growth and overcoming challenges.

Hardy is also the organizer of empowerment events and podcasts including Conversations: A Women's Empowerment Symposium, a forum to identify and confront barriers to living a beautiful life; Woman to Woman: There Is Power in Our Stories, a platform for women to share their spiritual journeys of resilience; 60 Seconds, a domestic violence awareness event; and Creative Strategies, a seminar series designed to highlight the leadership strengths of social work professionals.

Of her many hats, woman of faith is how most folks describe Hardy. And she does not shy away from sharing this aspect of her identity with students in her class.

Outside the classroom, Hardy recently began researching ways to help others through a focus on fitness, healthy eating and exercise. She believes individuals must make lifestyle changes that affect not only their mental and spiritual well-being, but also their physical health.

So, what's next for UNCP's renaissance woman?

"I keep evolving. The sky is the limit. But one thing is for sure, whatever is next it will involve helping others in some way. I am here to support and help people. I believe it's what I was called to do." ■

..... By Mark Locklear



Dr. Veronica Hardy

Athletics department officials at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke announced that its seventh annual Cash Bash fundraising event raised more than \$70,000 for the department's general scholarship fund. The total of

The 2020 Cash Bash, which was provided in a virtual format for the first time in department history, retained its "Night With the Stars" format and featured interviews with Jennifer King, an assistant coach with the Washington Football Team, as well

# VIRTUAL CASH BASH

\$71,257 was spearheaded by the Fund-A-Cause portion of the five-day virtual event which raised more than \$25,000 alone—the second-highest total raised by that portion of the program in the seven-year history of the department's premier fundraising event. The silent auction, which featured more than 80 unique items and vacation experiences, raked in more than \$12,000 toward the total.

To date, the annual event has generated nearly \$700,000 in eight years for student-athlete scholarships.

"I appreciate our donors and community so much for rallying behind this event," said Athletics Director Dick Christy. "There are definitely takeaways from this event that can even improve our face-to-face Cash Bash events in the future."

..... By Todd Anderson

as a conversation with UNCP alum and current University of Houston men's basketball coach Kelvin Sampson. Former NC State basketball standout Dereck Whittenburg, who helped lead the Wolfpack to the 1982-83 national championship, and Brian Bersticker, who played a pivotal role on two NCAA Final Four squads at UNC-Chapel Hill, were also prominently featured.

Donated items for the live auction event included a round of golf and dinner with renowned basketball coaches Kelvin Sampson and Tubby Smith, a round-trip flight to Ocean Isle Beach and dinner for two at the famous Oyster Rock Restaurant in Calabash, dinners with Christy and Chancellor Robin Cummings at the chancellor's residence and an offshore fishing adventure with Salt Fever Guide Service. ■

# ATHLETICS HALL OF FAME

Individual student-athletes representing four different sports, as well as the legendary 2004 men's soccer team, comprise the 41st UNC Pembroke Athletics Hall of Fame class that was unveiled in June 2020. Plans were to officially induct the group into the esteemed listing of former student-athletes, coaches and administrators during Homecoming Week in October 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic led to a postponement of the annual ceremony.

Larry Rodgers, who served the track and field program as a student-athlete and later as its head coach, will join a host of his former teammates in the fraternity. Former diamond standout Johnny Dial will become the 31st baseball player to be inducted into the Hall, and he will be joined by wrestling's Greg Shealy and women's basketball's Teresa Carl.

The 2004 men's soccer team, which rattled off a 16-3-0 record on the way to an appearance in the NCAA Final Four, will be the second team in four years to be added to the Athletics Hall of Fame display in the English E. Jones Center.

Rodgers, who also served as the coach of the men's and women's cross-country and track and field programs across three decades, was a 1972 all-American and four-time NAIA all-district selection for the track and field program from 1969 to 1973, while also serving a key role on four cross-country squads that were skippered by legendary head

coach Ed Crain. Rodgers helped the cross-country squad to four NAIA district titles, as well as an Area 7 championship in 1972. He was a part of eight indoor and outdoor NAIA district championship squads as well. He set a school record that still stands today after running a leg on a 4x110-meter hurdles squad that registered a mark of 1:02.35.

Dial raked in 1st Team NAIA All-America accolades in 1984 after posting a .492 batting average with 13 home runs and 37 RBI while leading the Braves to 20 victories under the direction of storied head coach Harold Ellen. Dial earned NAIA All-District and All-Carolinas Conference laurels following each of his last two seasons in the Black and Gold and paced the squad in both home runs and RBI in 1983 and 1984 as well.

Shealy compiled 122 victories as a member of the wrestling team from 1976-80 and earned all-America laurels as a senior after finishing sixth in the 190-pound tournament at the 1980 NCAA Wrestling Championships. A four-time NAIA All-District and three-time All-Carolinas Conference selection as well, he collected 35 victories on the mat in 1978 and then outdid himself the following season with 37 wins. He currently ranks seventh all-time on the program's all-time wins list.

Carl scored 1,365 points as a member of the women's basketball team from 1985-89 and earned all-America

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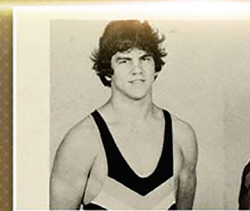
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**2004 MEN'S SOCCER TEAM**

## CLASS OF 2020

honors as a senior after averaging 13.0 points, 4.7 rebounds and 2.5 assists in leading the Braves to a 23-5 record. She was a part of a graduating class that racked up 86 victories on the hardwood under the direction of Lalon Jones and wrapped up her collegiate career with All-Carolinas Conference and NAIA All-District accolades following the 1988-89 campaign. Her career point total ranks eighth among the program's distinguished list of 1,000-point scorers.

Blessed with a lineup that featured five eventual all-region award winners, as well as an all-America honoree and future professional standout, the 2004 men's soccer team posted a 12-2 mark during the regular season before putting together a storied postseason run that eventually landed them at the NCAA Final Four in Wichita Falls, Texas. The Black and Gold tacked up a perfect run through the Peach Belt Conference Tournament, including a 3-1 win over USC Upstate in the championship game, and then blanked both Clayton State and Central Arkansas, respectively, in the opening rounds of the NCAA Tournament to punch their ticket to the NCAA semifinal round, where they eventually succumbed to SIU-Edwardsville.

Members of the 2020 Athletics Hall of Fame committee include Hall of Famers Tom Gardner (basketball) and Melanie (Cobb) Hughes (soccer), Braves Club members Crystal Moore and Jordan Sampson, and Dr. Calvina Ellerbe, an associate professor in the Sociology and Criminal Justice Department. ■

..... By Todd Anderson

**JOIN OUR TEAM**

**UNCP BRAVES CLUB**

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# JAMES DE LA RIVA

## KEEPS MOVING FORWARD



James De La Riva with his wife Hannah and their three daughters, Maylyn Gail, Stella Marie and Myla James



De La Riva on the mat during his wrestling days at UNCP

*"Graduating with my degree could have very easily not happened, but it turned out, and I walked away a success."*

*-De La Riva*



Firefighter with the U.S. National Forest

James De La Riva will readily admit that his path to graduation at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke was not always filled with sunshine and rainbows. There were a few fires along the way that he needed to put out and push through, but he still credits his time in Pembroke as a standout wrestler for the Braves for the life that he enjoys today.

A multisport student-athlete at Alexander Central High School in Taylorsville, De La Riva always knew he wanted to be a collegiate athlete, but wrestling was not his first choice.

"Throughout most of my life, soccer was my number one sport," he said. "As I moved further along through high school, wrestling sort of took over. I still wasn't 100% sure what I wanted to do until my senior year. I started to have a lot of success in wrestling, and I won a state championship, and that kind of sold it for me."

De La Riva had some immediate success as a student-athlete for the Braves, registering a fourth-place finish at the Pembroke Classic in his first month on the collegiate stage, but a season-ending injury cut his sophomore season short after just four appearances on the mat. He posted 15 wins as a redshirt sophomore in 2010-11 and thrived as a starter for the Black and Gold over his last two seasons, including a junior campaign that watched him register a career-best 22 victories and two trips to the podium.

Despite the injury, his collegiate experience would spark envy in some, but life threw De La Riva some pretty nasty curveballs along the way. He failed a course in his first semester on campus—the first time he had ever failed a class—and eventually was deemed academically ineligible to compete for the Braves during the second half of his sophomore year. A fatal car accident involving a high school girlfriend proved to be the tipping point, but it was an event that would eventually right the ship of his life.

"Going to school and the time you dedicate to the sport consumes you. There's more to it than just going to class and enjoying your social life," he said. "After I failed that class, it should have been a wake-up call for me, but I continued to do the things that I was doing. And then, after the car accident, I just went through a stage for a couple of weeks where I just didn't care about anything. That is when (former head coach Jamie) Gibbs pulled me into his office and engrained it into me that 'Life happens. You have to just keep moving forward.'

"Graduating with my degree could have very easily not happened, but it turned out, and I walked away a success."

At one point in that life-changing span at UNCP, De La Riva also made another choice that guides his life today. Following a career year on the mat in 2011-12, a high school teammate guided him to a summer internship with the Pisgah Ranger District in the Pisgah National Forest. He initially worked as a fee collector and a lifeguard at Sliding Rock and, after he received his degree in recreational management in 2013, was encouraged

to pursue his "Red Card," which is earned through special training and allows federal workers to fight fires and respond to emergency incidents.

Since that move, he has fought nearly 100 fires over the last eight years, including "million-acre fires" as far away as Idaho. He is regularly sent to states like Montana, Wyoming and Nevada for details that last anywhere from 14 to 30 days. As one of four primary firefighters on the Pisgah District, he was also involved in fighting the historic blazes in western North Carolina in 2016 that scorched more than 70,000 acres.

"The job is strenuous, and it requires you to be physically fit, and it is very disciplined," De La Riva said. "You're on the fire line and have to have situational awareness. You always have to be on your toes, and you always have that gut feeling, regularly, that something can go wrong. That worry is always there. There are times that I recall specifically where I had an 'Oh, crap. This is real' moment. We always expect that."

De La Riva married his college sweetheart, Hannah Keegan, in October 2014, and credits most of the success he enjoys to her and their three daughters—Maylyn Gail, Stella Marie and Myla James. Hannah, a 2011 graduate of UNCP, where she was also a member of Zeta Tau Alpha sorority, expresses extreme pride in the work that De La Riva does on a daily basis but admits there are many times she has her phone close to her side.

"It's hard to articulate how proud I am of James," she said. "I know he loves going out there and traveling the world, but he has to leave us behind, and he has to leave me knowing that I am back here doing this by myself. He does a really good job of making me feel secure, though, and he always says things to make me feel comforted when he has to leave. Because I know the safety measures he goes through to do his job, I don't really worry about him until I see the fire on the national news; then I know it's bigger than I thought."

De La Riva, who has been promoted on a handful of occasions with the U.S. National Forest - Pisgah Ranger District over the last nine years, and currently serves as engine captain for the district. He always has a pack ready to go, with a sleeping bag and pad, fire clothes, hard hat, work boots, headlamp, snacks to last a few days and a fire shelter—a tin foil-like tent used in extreme moments of last resort. He gives credit to the life lessons he learned as a student-athlete at UNCP for both his success and his work ethic, and encourages any former wrestlers to follow in his footsteps if given the opportunity.

"We all seek job opportunities in order to provide for our families, so I am thankful to have a job that allows me to do that," he said. "With that, I also get to do something that I also enjoy. I have met wrestlers all across the country who fight fires. The tough mentality that we have, and the drive that we have to get something done and not being scared of a certain situation, are desirable traits. I have never lost that." ■

By Todd Anderson



# GILBERT “MAC” RAY: A SOLDIER'S PROMISE

By Mark Locklear

## ADVANCEMENT NEWS

Like many Vietnam veterans, Gilbert “Mac” Ray’s mind often flashes back to not so pleasant times in the jungles of Southeast Asia. It was during an intense firefight that a then 19-year-old Ray made a promise that if he made it home, he would go back to college.

“During that moment, I thought if I didn’t get an education, I was going to be cannon fodder for the rest of my life. I realized if I didn’t get an education, I was going to always be on the receiving end, and I would never be somebody who was in charge.”

In February 1970, not long after returning home to Rockfish, North Carolina, Ray took charge of his life. He had begun his journey at UNCP in the fall of 1966 when the university was known as Pembroke State College but left after one semester. In the fall of 1970, he returned to UNCP—by then known as Pembroke State University—eventually earning a political science degree and graduating with the class of 1973.

“Pembroke didn’t exactly escape the turmoil that the nation was experiencing in those days, but compared to most places, it was a warm, welcoming and peaceful place to be. That may sound boring, and I suppose to many young people it was, but to me it was heaven. I met my wife, Barbara, when she visited her family in Fayetteville. We married in September 1971 and just celebrated our 49th anniversary.”

After his Army service and college, Ray went to work for the finance department with the city of Fayetteville, then on to First Presbyterian Church before embarking on a 17-year career in the U.S. Navy. After retiring from the Navy, he worked for and retired from the North Carolina Employment Security Commission.

Fifty years after Vietnam, Ray continues to experience mental and physical service-related ailments. In spite of those everyday battles, he credits his UNCP education with providing him with a strong foundation upon which to build a successful career.

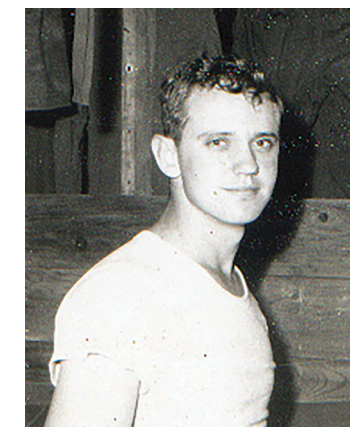
Over the Christmas holidays last year, with his UNCP experience on his mind, Ray sent a donation and personal note to his alma mater that read in part, “I do believe in helping out when I can but with so many hands out it’s hard to know who to give to. I wish we could give more but we do the best we can.”

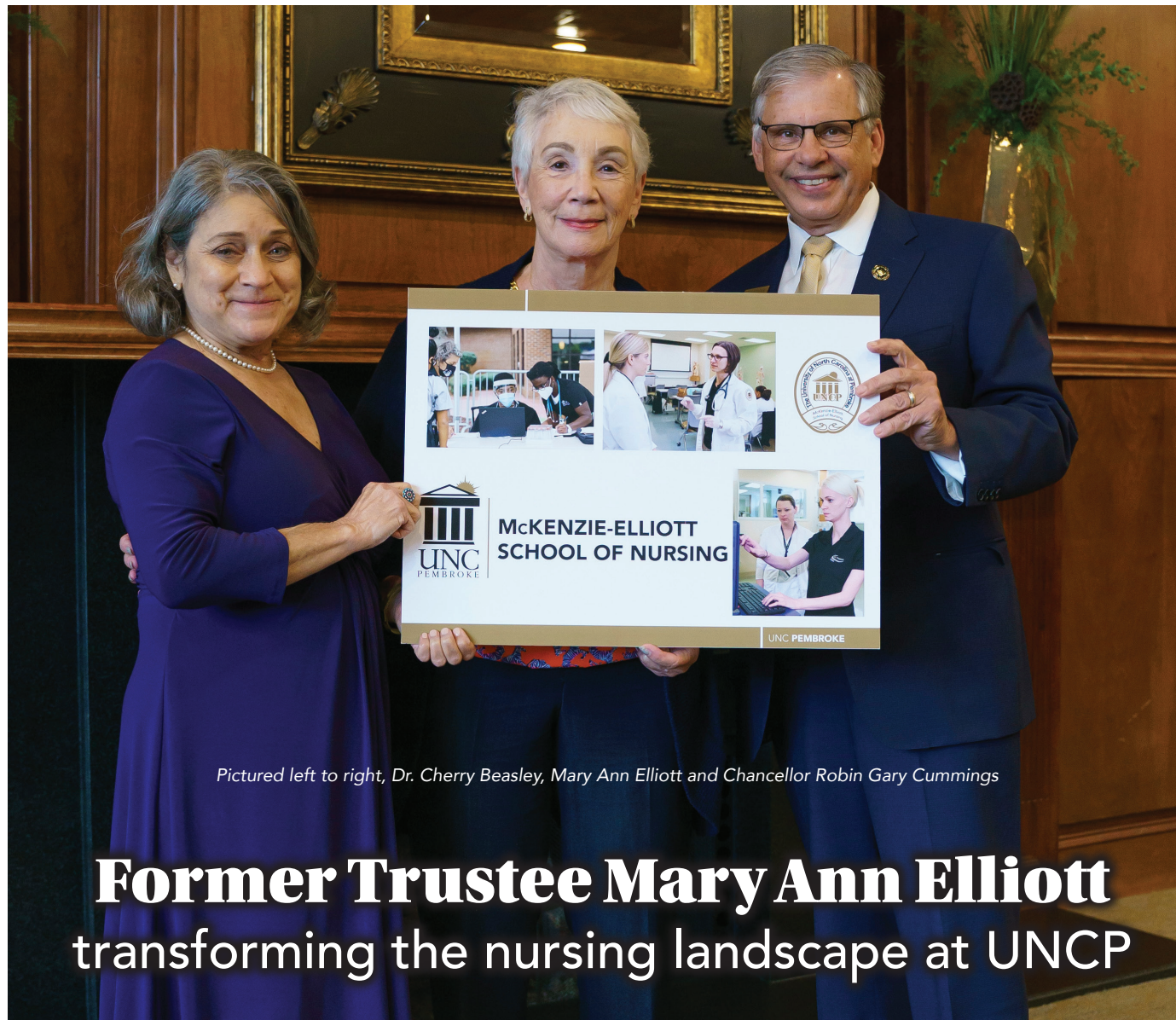
He asked that the funds go toward student aid in memory of his father Maj. Gilbert Ray Sr., who believed in higher education and encouraged his son to pursue a college degree. Two of Mac’s siblings and his daughter are also UNCP graduates.

“I’ve always been proud of (UNC) Pembroke and praise the university to everyone who will listen.” ■



Above: Mac, second from left, is pictured with his wife Barbara and their children Shelley and Brian





*Pictured left to right, Dr. Cherry Beasley, Mary Ann Elliott and Chancellor Robin Gary Cummings*

## Former Trustee Mary Ann Elliott transforming the nursing landscape at UNCP

A new school is on the horizon at UNC Pembroke to honor Mary McKenzie Edwards, a strong mother and role model who overcame obstacles in the 1930s to become a registered nurse.

UNC Pembroke announced in April that it has received a \$6 million planned gift—the second largest in the university's history—from former trustee Mary Ann Elliott to name the McKenzie-Elliott School of Nursing. The future new school will be established by transitioning the existing Department of Nursing into a School of Nursing within the College of Health Sciences.

Elliott, a native of our area and retired CEO of a global aerospace company, is making this estate gift to elevate the prominence of nursing education,

attract further interest from prospective students and bolster faculty recruitment efforts.

The university's Board of Trustees voted unanimously to approve the proposed establishment of the new school and naming.

"Mary Ann has long supported UNCP both philanthropically and through dedicated service," said UNCP Chancellor Robin Gary Cummings.

"Evidence of her generous contributions can be found across our campus, from the Mary Ann Elliott Business Career Center in the new School of Business building to the Entrepreneurship Hub and the College of Health Sciences. Her latest gift is yet another way she's changing the lives of our students,

changing our communities, our region, for generations to come.

"We're fortunate to have someone like Mary Ann believe so strongly in the impact UNCP can have in southeastern North Carolina. On behalf of everyone at UNCP, I express our heartfelt appreciation for her leadership, generosity and unwavering support."

Elliott, who resides in Virginia, has followed the rise of the university's nursing program since it first began offering an RN-BSN program in 1992. Years later, a prelicensure BSN option was introduced. Then, in 2013, UNCP approved a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) program.

"I've witnessed the growth of the university in terms of its impact on the

community. The quality of standards has improved from when I first became involved with the university in the mid-1990s. There has been a steady progression in the administrative level, professors, the quality of students and overall physical growth of the university. When you witness improvements and milestones attained, one feels donated funds will encourage UNCP to keep moving forward," Elliott said.

Elliott hopes her gift will also ultimately pave the way for offering a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree. The DNP program was noted in the 2017 legislatively directed Health Study precipitating the 2018 establishment of the College of Health Sciences. The study indicated that establishing a DNP program would offer the region's only source of primary care providers, creating an essential pipeline that will also bolster UNCP's pool of potential faculty recruits who are doctorally prepared.

**"My dream for the McKenzie-Elliott School of Nursing is it will not only improve health care outcomes in the surrounding area, but it will instill a desire for further education throughout the lives of students and those they serve."**

"To see the nursing program expand its focus beyond the medical care provided to include educational programs and the importance of reading to children is important to the growth in the county. It is only through education and health care that the county will prosper."

The McKenzie-Elliott School of Nursing will honor Elliott's mother, Mary McKenzie Edwards, who dedicated her life to the nursing profession after struggling financially to earn her degree during the Great Depression in Robeson County in the 1930s.

"My mother was a selfless individual who gave of herself to others. She conveyed many life lessons to me and was truly

called to be a nurse. She overcame many obstacles to attend nursing school and become a registered nurse in the thirties. Her never-give-up attitude was instilled in me so thoroughly that it became a foundation for my later success," Elliott said.

After her mother's passing in 1996, Elliott established a nursing scholarship at UNCP in her memory. Since then, she has expanded her philanthropic efforts, becoming one of the university's top donors. She was among the private donors who helped establish UNCP's Entrepreneurship Incubator, and in 2017, she donated \$500,000 to the Thomas School of Business to create the Mary Ann Elliott Business Career Center.

In 1991, Elliott founded Arrowhead Global Solutions, a satellite communications firm, which, over the next 17 years, grew to a multimillion-dollar operation that played a critical role in supporting American troops deployed overseas. Through her work with Arrowhead and other firms, Elliott spent more than 30 years supporting America's military, security and intelligence communities.

During her career, she was recognized as one of the nation's top female satellite communications experts. In 2007, she became only the second woman inducted into the Space and Satellite Professionals International Hall of Fame, among many other awards. Two years later, she received an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from UNCP. Most recently, she served on the Board of Trustees at UNCP from 2017 to 2019.

Interim Provost Zoe Locklear believes transitioning to a School of Nursing will be instrumental in advancing the College of Health Sciences and the nursing program's mission of improving regional health outcomes, workforce capacity and diversity challenges. Dr. Locklear added that this gift will enable the continued growth of nursing education at UNCP.

"This incredible news affirms the importance of our goal to producing tomorrow's workforce," said Locklear. "It will enable the McKenzie-Elliott School of Nursing and College of Health Sciences to advance their ability to provide accessible, seamless, high-quality undergraduate and graduate nursing education to diverse student populations. The future impact will be transformative."

Department Chair and Anne R. Belk Endowed Professor Dr. Cherry Maynor Beasley said Elliott's planned gift reflects a "vote of confidence" in the program's success and provides an opportunity to increase innovation and the footprint in the nursing workforce.

"Since our beginning, the UNCP Department of Nursing has had two major commitments—to provide a highly competitive nursing workforce and to improve the quality of health care outcomes and nursing care in the region," Dr. Beasley said.

"This gift will allow us to be more responsive to the ever-increasing need for nurses and be more innovative in scholarship, service and community engagement."

Service and community engagement are the core of the mission of nursing education at UNCP, evidenced by the department's frontline response to COVID-19. Throughout the global pandemic, nursing students and faculty have volunteered their time with innovative solutions, research and service in the community. From mobile clinics to distribute vaccines to serology antibody studies, nursing students and faculty have had firsthand experience addressing public health needs.

Kellie Blue, a UNCP alumna and UNC Board of Governors member, said Elliott's generous donation affirms their recent work and will support the continuing growth of the College of Health Sciences programs that directly impact the health outcomes of our region.

"As we continue our fight against COVID, there has never been a better time to invest in and support health care education programs that have a proven impact on the communities they serve. The pandemic will only exacerbate existing health disparities in southeastern North Carolina for the next generation," said Blue, who serves as Robeson County Manager.

"I am proud of the work of UNCP's Department of Nursing and College of Health Sciences and look forward to the future impact this gift has the potential to create on our health and economy." ■

..... By Mark Locklear



# HONORING RAYMOND CUMMINGS: A LIFE OF SERVICE

director of Student Activities. He left in 1999 to go work for the county school system as director of Transportation.

Education was his passion, but he also had a heart for his community. For 24 years, he served his community as a Robeson County commissioner—the longest-serving commissioner at the time of his death. He worked to improve the county's economy and was well known for his years-long efforts to remove litter from the county's highways through the Robeson County Clean and Green Committee. He served on the Board of Trustees at Robeson Community College and Lumber River Workforce Development Board and was one of the original crafters of the Lumbee Constitution.

Sheila said she couldn't think of a better way to honor her brother, who always maintained an affinity for UNCP.

"Raymond was a student of the university and later an employee, so these experiences gave him a strong commitment to education, because he saw firsthand how the university cared for the students and helped them become successful and prepared them to become productive citizens. He was committed to UNCP."

Shelia also began her educational career at UNCP before earning an aerospace engineering degree at the University of Maryland-College Park. In 2009, she formed her own company—Cummings Aerospace—with locations in Huntsville, Alabama, and Niceville, Florida. In December 2020, Cummings Aerospace opened a new facility in Tucson, Arizona.

She hopes future recipients will carry on her brother's love for community, family, education and public service.

"It is my hope that recipients of this scholarship will take the opportunity to learn more about Raymond and his public service career and use that as a model for a future career."

To learn more about the Commissioner Raymond Cummings Memorial Scholarship or to make a contribution to the fund, contact the Office of Advancement at UNC Pembroke at 910.521.6252 or [advancement@uncp.edu](mailto:advancement@uncp.edu). ■



Sheila Cummings

..... By Mark Locklear

# JAMES AYARS: PAYING IT FORWARD

Years ago, while teaching in public schools in Cumberland and Moore counties, James Ayars would often imagine the day he would have the financial means to give back to the university that provided him with the tools he needed to be successful.

After graduating from UNCP in 1986, Ayars enjoyed 27 years in the classroom while doubling as a gymnastics instructor at Sandhills Gymnastics in Aberdeen, which he owns with his wife, Jennifer. Between the hundreds of high school students and an equal number of young gymnasts, James and Jennifer have helped mold and develop the minds of countless youth.

The day James once imagined came three years ago when the Carthage couple established the Ayars Family Endowed Scholarship. Last fall, they expanded their gift, bringing the total investment to \$50,000 to support an award for a second student majoring in STEM and cybersecurity fields.

Chemistry major Kaley Deese was on the receiving end of James and Jennifer's generosity as one of the 2020 scholarship recipients. The extra funds will allow her to turn her passion for practicing medicine into a career as an anesthesiologist.

"This scholarship has made it possible for me to become one step closer to achieving my dreams of becoming a physician," Deese said.

After both of Greg Foldes' parents retired in 2020, he wasn't sure if they could afford to send him to college. Being awarded the Ayars scholarship gave the Raleigh freshman reassurance, allowing him to focus on his studies rather than finances. Foldes came to UNCP to pursue a degree in computer science through the cybersecurity track.

"This scholarship helped make my college education possible," said Foldes, who has aspirations of working for the CIA fighting cybercrime.

Helping students pursue their educational goals was precisely the Ayarses' motivation behind the gift. Additionally, James and Jennifer hope the scholarship



James and Jennifer Ayars

will help make UNCP more competitive in attracting and retaining high-caliber students.

"When we were establishing the scholarship, we specified that it not be based on financial need, but strictly merit-based. We understand some academically successful students do not qualify for need-based financial aid due to their demographics or family income," he said.

The Ayarses have been steadfast supporters of UNCP for many years. A lifetime member of the UNCP Chancellor's Club, James was among the founding board members in the early 1990s. He currently serves on the UNCP Board of Visitors and was the 2019 recipient of UNCP's Outstanding Alumnus Award.

"It brings us lots of joy to help UNCP students accomplish great things," James said.

Though still early in her academic career, Deese plans to follow the Ayarses' lead and pay it forward when she becomes financially able.

"When I become a physician, I want to be able to give back to students, just like the Ayars family did for me." ■

..... By Mark Locklear

*"This scholarship has made it possible for me to become one step closer to achieving my dreams of becoming a physician."*  
- Kaley Deese



# NEWLY ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIPS BENEFIT STUDENTS

## PEGGY MCLELLAN LEWIS MEMORIAL ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

**Donor: Mary F. Lewis**

Peggy McLellan Lewis of Fairmont, North Carolina, was a beloved wife, mother and friend to many. Born on a rural farm in the Bethesda community south of Fairmont, Peggy survived the Great Depression and the loss of her mother at a young age. She went on to raise her brothers before becoming a devoted mother to children of her own. Salutatorian of her class at Barnesville High School, Peggy regretted never receiving her college degree and instilled a strong commitment to higher education in her children, who have become very successful. The children of Peggy wish to establish this scholarship in their mother's memory and in honor of her support for education.

Recipients shall be students from Fairmont, North Carolina, with demonstrated financial need. If no such individuals meet this criteria, a student from Robeson County with demonstrated financial need may be selected.

## MARTHA ANN FLOYD POWELL HARRINGTON ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

**Donor: Allison Harrington**

The donor wishes to make a major contribution to students at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke by establishing an endowed scholarship that will provide an award to one student per year. This scholarship is being established because of the donor's strong belief in education.

The recipient of this scholarship will be a resident of Robeson or Brunswick counties and a full-time undergraduate student with a 3.0 GPA at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke. The recipient can be in any year of study, and there is no preference of subject major.

## LOCKWOOD & GARY WAYNE LOCKLEAR MEMORIAL ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

**Donor: Eddie Mac Locklear**

Eddie Mac Locklear chooses to endow this scholarship in honor of his late brothers, Lockwood Locklear and Gary Wayne Locklear, both of whom had deep ties to UNC Pembroke. Lockwood worked as a carpenter on the campus of UNCP until his retirement. He was deeply loved by everyone he met during his time of employment, students and staff alike. Gary Wayne was an alumnus of Pembroke State University where he was a proud member of the Braves men's basketball team. He religiously gave back to his alma mater and was always present to support when he could. Both brothers were avid sportsmen and believed in cultivating lives through sports, faith and education.

This scholarship will be solely awarded to a men's basketball player and shall be awarded annually at the discretion of the head coach.

## DR. BEN HARDIN PRE-MEDICAL ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

**Donor: Dr. Ben Hardin and family**

Dr. Ben Hardin treasured his humble beginnings growing up in Pembroke. After graduating high school as valedictorian, he attended Pembroke State College and was a well-known student leader. He served in the U.S. Navy, then chose to pursue his dream of earning a medical degree and serving his Native community in health care. Dr. Hardin was the first openly admitted Native American student to attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine. He was a trailblazer for other Native students, especially those from the Robeson County area. Dr. Hardin established his private medical practice in 1980 and served for more than 25 years as an admitting physician at Southeastern Regional Medical Center. He loved his alma mater, The University of North Carolina at Pembroke, and in accordance with his wishes, his family has established this scholarship to support students with the same dream of giving back to their community through health care.

This scholarship will be awarded to an academically excellent student pursuing a degree in Chemistry: Pre-Medical Professions or Biology: Biomedical Emphasis.

## RAYMOND CUMMINGS MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

**Donors: Sheila Cummings, Cummings family, friends and community members**

The fund is established by friends and family in memory of Commissioner Raymond Cummings, a longtime leader and public servant to Robeson County. The scholarship will be awarded annually, with first preference to students a) who are from Robeson County, b) have financial need and c) have both an intention of public service career and an academic major consistent with that aim (e.g., criminal justice, health, social work, nursing, education, political science and government, etc.).

## VICTORIA MCINTYRE COBLE ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

**Donor: Dr. Charles R. Coble and Mrs. Diana S. Coble**

Established in loving memory of the donor's grandmother, the Victoria McIntyre Coble Endowed Scholarship is to provide student financial aid for worthy and needy students in the School of Education who intend to become teachers, with a preference that student recipients be members of the Lumbee Tribe.

## BOARD OF VISITORS ACHIEVEMENT SCHOLARSHIP

**Donor: Anonymous**

## BOARD OF VISITORS ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

**Donors: Board of Visitors & Friends**

The Board of Visitors for The University of North Carolina at Pembroke assists the chancellor and the Board of Trustees in communicating the university's message in advocacy, increasing community and corporate engagement, assisting with philanthropic support, recruiting high-quality students and bringing visibility and contacts to the campus from across the region and beyond.

The Board of Visitors has established these two scholarships to support the newly established College of Health Sciences. These scholarships will be awarded to academically excellent students pursuing a degree in a program that falls within the College of Health Sciences.

## LOUIE M. AND MAXINE LOCKLEAR AMOS ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

## ROSCOE & WINNIE LOCKLEAR ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

## DELTON, CARRIE & DOROTHY LOCKLEAR ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

**Donor: Maxine Amos**

Education at UNCP is a family legacy established five generations ago by Maxine's grandfather, Anderson Locklear (Locklear Hall). She is a third-generation educator, having received degrees from Coker College and East Carolina University. Maxine served 38 years as a teacher and counselor in the Public Schools of North Carolina, working in: Burke, Cumberland and Robeson counties. She supports UNCP because she knows if it were not for the university, many people in Robeson County would not have been able to earn a college degree. Louie "Mac" was a native of Morganton, North Carolina (Burke County) who received degrees from Lenoir-Rhyne College and UNC-Chapel Hill. He was employed by Southeastern Regional Mental Health for several years prior to his retirement.

The three scholarships the donor wishes to establish are in memory of: Louie M and Maxine Locklear Amos, the parents of Mrs. Maxine Locklear Amos, and the siblings of Mrs. Maxine Locklear Amos. All three scholarships will be awarded to: residents of Robeson or Burke County, North Carolina; undergraduate students with demonstrated financial need, majoring in Education at UNC Pembroke and in good academic standing.

## ADDITIONAL NEWLY ENDOWED

### MARY ANN ELLIOTT NURSING FACULTY DEVELOPMENT ENDOWMENT

**Donor: Mary Ann Elliott**

### DR. TIMOTHY M. RITTER AND MARIE A. AMERO ENDOWED RESEARCH SCHOLARSHIP

**Donors: Dr. Timothy M. Ritter and Marie A. Amero**



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**My Fellow Alumni and Friends:**

It is truly a humbling pleasure and honor to serve as your president on behalf of the UNC Pembroke Alumni Association Board of Directors.

Even in troubling periods, BraveNation has always risen to the occasion to make progress. For years, the term "alumni" has always seemed to refer to an individual who has graduated from an institution of learning. This, in part, is accurate, and the term itself carries a lot of weight. It's that badge of honor that is bestowed upon you during your graduation. But the other part of "alumni" that can sometimes be blurry or unclear is the "returning" aspect. Let me show you how easy it is to engage the "returning" part of being alumni.

First, I ask that you dig deep to find that **PASSION** of being an alum. What is it about your collegiate experience that drives that go-getter mentality? You can express your passion in so many ways, such as coming to campus and being a guest lecturer, providing valuable content to the minds of the current students, or by visiting your favorite department or professor, as having conversations can renew passion. Perhaps they are UNCP icons like Dr. Richard Vela (page 14) or Dr. Velinda Worriax (page 50).

Second, I ask that you remember your **PURPOSE** for attending The University of North Carolina at Pembroke. Reflect on filling out that application. What were your initial thoughts as you answered each question? Also, reflect on when you crossed the stage to receive your degree. Did your purpose change? Or was it still the original plan? The goal is vital to help keep focus, especially when it comes to the future of our beloved institution of higher learning.

Finally, I would ask, how are you able to bring **PROVISION** to the vision? Well, provision comes in various forms. Giving of your resources, such as financial support, like James Ayars '86 (page 45), benefits the progression of the university. Next, giving of your time, such as attending events on campus (or even virtually), provides a sense of provision, especially for the students. When they can see alumni walking the campus or speaking to them virtually, your impact is powerful.

The Alumni Association Board of Directors encourages and welcomes your involvement. I hope you'll contact the Office of Alumni Engagement at alumni@uncp.edu or 910.521.6252. Make sure to like or follow our UNC Pembroke Alumni Association on social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). If you have ideas and suggestions, please reach out to us, because we want to hear from you. UNCP is OUR home. Just as when we go places and return home, we check to make sure everything is in place, let us return home to our university ensuring everything is in place with our **PASSION, PURPOSE** and **PROVISION**.

Best Wishes,  
Chris Peterkin '13  
President, UNCP Alumni Association



Dr. Hannah Worix performing a procedure in the operating room at The University of Alabama at Birmingham

# PAGING DR. WORIAX

**S**urgeons must possess a unique blend of skills and characteristics to be successful; they need more than just medical knowledge. While still early in her career, Dr. Hannah Worix is quickly accumulating those skills.

A bright, eager mind. Manual dexterity. Good hand-eye coordination. A calm temperament. The ability to work well under pressure. And good communication that is authentic. Luckily for Worix, she was blessed to have been raised by two career communicators with all of those skills—her mother Dr. Velinda Locklear Worix, a longtime UNCP biology professor, and her grandmother, Shirley Locklear, a public school teacher.

“Growing up with Meemaw Shirley ... she taught third grade for 35 years, so she knew how to take charge of a

room. In surgery, things can go from mundane to perilous quickly. You must always be alert and be able to get people’s attention,” Worix said.

Worix fell in love with science at a young age, long before her days of dominating state and national science fairs. In school, her advanced intellectual abilities grabbed the attention of her peers and teachers alike. A high school graduate at 16, a UNCP alumnae at 19 and a medical school student by the time she was 20, Worix excelled academically through each stage of her journey.

Her mouth curves into a smile as she reflects on the summers spent in the classrooms and labs in Oxendine Science Building—not far from her home in Pembroke—where her mother has taught biology for the last 26 years. She would help her mother

prepare weekly lessons and assist with preparation for youth science camps.

At UNCP, Worix was a RISE fellow, pursuing her passion for research. After graduating from the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University in 2014, it was off to Virginia Tech-Carilion Clinic for general surgery residency.

We recently caught up with Worix in Alabama, where she’s taking part in a one-year Breast Surgical Oncology fellowship at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

No one day, or hour for that matter, is the same for Worix. Regardless of whether she’s in the middle of a grueling 16-hour Whipple procedure or a 15-minute routine appendectomy, her patients’ well-being remains priority number one.

*“A lot of folks in rural communities do not have access to health care, and that’s why I want to come home to practice and help provide adequate care to people in my community.”*

Depending on the rotation, Worix begins her mornings at 5:30 a.m.—rounding, meeting with preoperative patients by 6:30. If it’s her month on surgical rotation, operations may begin at 7 and continue into late afternoon. But her passion drives her—a passion and purpose she discovered suddenly and unexpectedly.

“In my third year of medical school, I was doing family, pediatrics, internal medicine—working with patients in a clinic setting. I wasn’t completely satisfied with any rotation I had completed. My second to last rotation was surgery. During my first week, in the middle of an emergent trauma case, I said to myself, ‘I can’t see me doing anything else,’” Hannah said.

Developing a doctor-patient relationship is one aspect of the job Worix has always enjoyed. Recently, she treated a 45-year-old female patient for diverticulitis during her four-month hospital stay.

“I became very fond of her. She was one of my favorite patients when I was in Virginia. She would always brighten up our day. I loved her. We see patients from the early stages of diagnosis through treatment, so we form a bond.”

On the far extreme, Worix must cope with the grief of losing patients. She understands that this part of the job, though necessary, will never get easy. It’s the part of the job that takes her through a full range of emotions, which can take a toll on the most experienced physician.

“It can be very difficult, especially when you are talking with the family and having to tell a mother you couldn’t save her child. That’s one of the reasons I chose not to be a trauma surgeon.”

Though she doesn’t prefer trauma, Worix knew from an early age she was destined for a career in medicine and science. At two, she was entertaining herself with water and a pipette in UNCP’s labs. By four, she was telling her parents she was going to be a paleontologist. Science is in her blood. Her grandfather, Dr. Frank “Doc” Worix, was a well-known family physician in Robeson County for more than 30 years. Her father was a physician’s assistant in the Triad for years.

“She was an inquisitive child,” Velinda Worix said. “She had a love for asking questions. Whether it was with me at work, her daddy or grandfather at his office, she was always in a science-type setting. At a young age,

she could manipulate her thought process. She was vocal and very observant.”

It was early experiences at UNCP that shaped her future.

Worix loves every aspect of her career, but sees herself as more than just a clinician. She’s an educator and a scientist—just like the women who raised her. At the end of the fellowship at UAB, Worix’s hope is to continue her career back in North Carolina—preferably in her hometown.

“That’s always been the plan. I don’t see any reason not to give myself back to the community that helped me get to where I am. They gave me this opportunity through support, both financially and emotionally. A lot of folks in rural communities do not have access to health care, and that’s why I want to come home to practice and help provide adequate care to people in my community. For me, my job would be more meaningful if I am able to serve my community.” ■

..... By Mark Locklear



Dr. Hannah Worix



Dr. Velinda Worix

# A PARTNERSHIP MADE FROM MAGIC: BRIAN MCCORMICK & FRANCIS BAYOG

**B**uilding their business around fantasy has become a reality for Brian McCormick '10, '12 and Francis Bayog '11.

The duo has teamed up to make Epicstream.com one of the most visited websites in the fantasy and sci-fi sector. By combining their individual talents in business, English and creative writing with their love of fantasy and sci-fi content, McCormick and Bayog have made Epicstream so visible and attractive that their business was recently acquired by the online gaming firm Gfinity.

The eventual business partners first met at UNCP, where they socialized with other students around a fantasy trading card game called Magic: The Gathering. "It's a bit of a combination of poker and chess," says Bayog, who goes by the pseudonym Jake Vyper. "But that's not the only way we connected. We were both part of student council, and we were in other organizations together. We share a lot of the same friends."

McCormick's academic interest was in business, and he says UNCP was a good fit for him academically and socially. "The student-teacher ratio is great for interacting with your professors. I enjoyed them and the business program so much that I decided to go back right after graduation and get my master's degree."

For Bayog, however, the academic route was a bit more convoluted.

"I started off as a nursing major because my family has a background in the medical field," says Bayog, whose family moved to the U.S. from the Philippines in 2001 when he was 13. "But it wasn't really my passion, so I switched my major to English, which was a good decision because I love to write about science fiction and poetry."

McCormick took a job in Chicago after completing his master's degree before returning to Raleigh for a different job, while Bayog launched an initial version of Epicstream while doing book reviews and promotion services for another website, Fantasize.com. The two didn't cross paths all that much after graduation, but early in 2015, Bayog reached out to McCormick.

"I asked Brian to help create a business plan for Epicstream," says Bayog, and in March 2015, McCormick joined as a business partner. Almost immediately, they began to see demand for Epicstream's content and realized the site's growth potential.

"There was significant interest in the articles we were writing and posting," McCormick says, "and that excited us, because it's something we both enjoy and have a lot of fun with."

McCormick and Bayog continued to build content on the Epicstream site while driving traffic there using social media.

"We developed some of the first Facebook pages that really focused on fantasy and science fiction," McCormick says. "While we have writers, we still do a lot of the writing ourselves."

Still, there was a tremendous potential for even more growth, Bayog says.

"Our Facebook pages have about 6 million likes, but we knew we could do more," Bayog says. "Our weakness was SEO (search engine optimization); we weren't getting a lot of traffic from Google. We weren't reaching our full potential."

Their work to develop Epicstream's content was about to pay dividends for McCormick and Bayog. Several companies contacted them about acquiring Epicstream, but the offer from Gfinity seemed to present the best opportunity.

"Gfinity is helping us improve our SEO performance and drive more people to our site," according to Bayog, who serves as CEO and editor-in-chief at Epicstream. "With their help, we're making a lot of improvements to Epicstream's functionality. Gfinity has given us a lot more resources to help create content that improves our SEO results." With the COVID-19 pandemic's arrival, Bayog says, the Gfinity acquisition has helped Epicstream navigate the uncertainties of 2020. In February of this year, Epicstream partnered with Gfinity to launch a new website, MTGRocks.com, for aficionados of the Magic: The Gathering game.

Both McCormick, who is Epicstream's chief operating officer, and Bayog say their time at UNCP has been invaluable in launching and growing their business.

"There is so much about my business education that I'm using today," says McCormick, recalling marketing courses with the late Dr. Howard Ling. "Those classes taught me how to look at the consumer and how to think analytically about what they're interested in, and how to understand our web traffic and understand what is statistically important. There are things I use from all my courses at UNCP, like how to control costs and business concepts like managerial accounting and business law. UNCP's program gives you a good overall understanding about how business works."

"UNCP was an important place to build my skills, not just in writing but in networking with people and marketing," says Bayog. "I thought the English department was strong, and I learned a lot from Dr. Karen Helgeson in English. Extracurricular activities like fiction writing workshops were very helpful and still are today. The whole environment and the opportunity to interact with people was great." ■

By David Hibbard



Brian McCormick, left, and Francis Bayog, right



## CATCHING UP WITH

# MIKE ROBINSON

In three short years since bursting onto the scene with his unique brand of craft soda, Mike Robinson '12 has quickly built a reputation in the beverage industry in Winston-Salem, Charlotte and the Triad.

Like most self-made entrepreneurs, Robinson struggled early on to sell his concoctions at local flea markets and festivals. Through perseverance and hard work, today his company, Bingo-Bango Fresh Fruit Soda Company, is one of the only black-owned craft soda brands in the country.

Bingo-Bango comes in several bold flavors, like strawberry lemonade, blueberry mango and Robinson's favorite, lemon peach pomegranate, and can be found in 50 retailers, breweries and restaurants across the state.

Raised in a family of like-minded business-savvy entrepreneurs, Robinson—a former student-athlete—always knew this would be the path he would choose after graduating from UNCP in 2012. He was raised in his parents' trophy shop and later worked alongside his brother as co-owner of Carolina's Vineyards & Hops in Winston-Salem.

"I knew I wanted to become an entrepreneur before I got to UNC Pembroke. I've always had different business ideas I wanted to pursue, but UNCP is where those ideas were nurtured and developed. It's the place that instilled the confidence and gave me the tools I needed to be successful," Robinson said.

After leaving the brewery, Robinson worked for Coca-Cola for more than a year before he began experimenting with the exact same juicer given to his mother by his grandfather. After much trial and error, sticky floors and exploding kegs, he perfected the art of juicing and bottling, sparking the birth of Bingo-Bango in 2018.

Bingo-Bango has grown into a thriving business, with nearly 20,000 bottles sold. It's a one-man operation. Robinson does it all, from picking fresh fruit at the farmers market to bottling to labeling, marketing and making home deliveries.

"I drove 26,000 miles in 2020," stated Robinson.

As the business continues to grow, Robinson is looking to expand shipping nationwide with plans to move into a larger production space this summer. He recently brought on two production assistants and hopes to ramp up distribution to larger markets like Atlanta, New York and California. As he ponders the future of Bingo-Bango, Robinson often reflects on his college experience and the many mentors and professors who encouraged him to embrace his entrepreneurial spirit.

"One of my best mentors was my business law professor, Dr. Joseph Lakatos. He took the time to nurture me. One day, he pulled me into his office and said, 'Michael, one day you will be head of a Fortune 500 company.' That was huge for me. That's what got the ball rolling for me."

By Mark Locklear

"Often, it is not the knowledge someone requires but the compassion for those who cannot care for themselves ... that is what most patients remember."

## MELISSA LOCKLEAR: ANSWERING THE CALL

Like most health care professionals, Melissa Locklear is perplexed when trying to understand why some people, especially in her community, don't realize how important it is to wear a mask and stay safe.

She knows how quickly hospitals can become overwhelmed with coronavirus patients and the impact it can have on health care systems. She witnessed this chaos firsthand during the five weeks she worked at New York's Gouverneur Hospital in the spring of 2020, when the city was home to nearly one-third of all confirmed cases in the nation.

Locklear, an FNP and owner of Hope Health Family Practice, was among the thousands of nurses and frontline health care workers who responded to Gov. Andrew Cuomo's plea for volunteers to help fight the coronavirus.

"Gouverneur Hospital had very complex case management presentations, as they have indigent care programs for the homeless, uninsured and those that may not have active family support. They were bombarded with lots of COVID cases as the surrendering hospitals would discharge patients from high acute care areas to this hospital," she said.

The high volume of patients made it nearly impossible for hospital staff and volunteers to get a handle on the ever-changing issues that arose daily.

"Everything was complex. The staff just could not keep up. It took days to correspond with staff and families to make the necessary communication to transfer patients, talk with family and give patients a sense of security needed for coping and emotional healing during COVID."

Despite having to administer services at what probably felt like warp speed, Locklear made sure her patients remembered the Robeson County nurse with down-home southern charm.

"Often, it is not the knowledge someone requires but the compassion for those who cannot care for themselves ... that is what most patients remember."

It's the same type of compassion and kindness her patients back in Rowland have grown accustomed to. She opened her clinic in 2019 after working for Cape Fear Valley Health. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from UNCP, a Family Nurse Practitioner Master of Science in Nursing from ECU and is currently enrolled in the doctoral program at UNCW.

"The decision to go to New York during a COVID crisis was not easy, but what I left with will never be explained. I have a renewed sense of confidence in the medical providers in our area."

By Mark Locklear

Melissa Locklear responding to the nursing shortage at New York Gouverneur Hospital

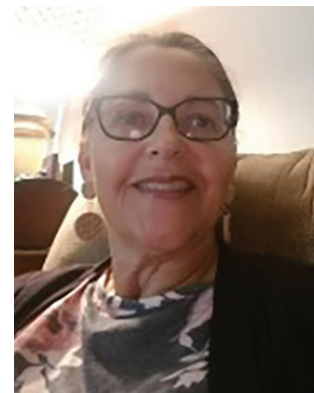


# CLASS NOTES



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT PEMBROKE  
ESTABLISHED 1887

## 1983



**Cynthia Lowery Oxendine** retired January 2020 from UNCP with 37 years of service. During her tenure, she served in several capacities, including director of the university center, and in 2014, she was appointed to assistant vice chancellor for Student Affairs.

## 1984

**Valerie Vukovich Fackler** retired after 37 years as an exceptional children's teacher with the State of North Carolina on October 1, 2020. "It was an honor to sign my first teaching contract in the fall of 1983, seven months before graduation."

## 1985

**Wayland B. Lennon III** was elected as the chairman of the Board of Trustees of UNC Health Southeastern. This was announced at the January annual board meeting, at which time the gavel was passed to Lennon from past board chairman Kenneth Rust.

## 1993

**Melanie Grooms-Garrett** was inducted into the Fayetteville Sports Hall of Fame in 2020. She enrolled at UNCP and continued her athletic success there, becoming the only player in school history to be named an NAIA All-American in the sport

of volleyball. Groom-Garrett also played softball for the Braves and was All-Carolinas Conference from 1991-92 and All-District her senior year. She returned to UNC Pembroke to serve as head coach of the volleyball and softball teams. She coached softball for two years, nearly tripling the school's win total from the first season in her final year as softball coach. She was inducted into the UNC Pembroke Hall of Fame in 2003.

## 1994

**Billenna Locklear Richardson** completed a Doctorate in Health Administration (DHA) from Capella University June 2020.

**Dr. Manuel Salazar III**, a business graduate and former controller of Lumbee Guaranty Bank, has been named the director of the Master of Accountancy program at William Jessup University (California).

## 1995

**Michelle Ingram** was elected to the Atlantic Telephone Membership Corporation (ATMC) Board of Directors.



**Dana Lowery Ramseur** has authored two books, "Strong Like Rhoda: Exploring Female Power in the Lumbee Tribe" and "Lumbee Herstory," set to be released by Candy Apple Indian Book on May 1, 2021.

**Susan Ward** is a school-based mental health counselor for Scotland County Schools. She was previously an intensive in-home therapist for Sandhills Alternative Academy. She loves working with children from infants to teens.

## 1996



**Chad Locklear** was selected to participate in South Art's Emerging Leaders of Color inaugural cohort.

## 1998

**Terry Dudney** accepted a position as the chief finance officer with Stanly County Schools. Terry has a 22-year career in finance.

## 1999

**Patty Evers** received the Charlie Adams Distinguished Service Award given by the N.C. High School Athletic Association. Evers has served for 29 years as athletic director and girls head basketball coach at East Bladen High School.

**Randall Channing Jones** is the executive director for Robeson County Economic Development.

**Fredric Worix** was promoted to lieutenant colonel on August 31, 2020.

## 2000

**Nikki Brooks** was named 2020-2021 PSRC Principal of the Year. She is the principal of Rex Rennert Elementary School.

## 2002

**Dr. Jason Atkinson** was named superintendent of Bladen County schools. Atkinson holds both a bachelor's and a master's degree in K-12 music education from UNCP.

**Dr. Kenneth L. Bowen** became the director of Partnerships with BetterLesson. BetterLesson empowers K-12 teachers to build a modern classroom, that is learner-centered, culturally responsive and personalized.



**Chris Maples** was hired as the new executive director of External Affairs for UNC Pembroke.

**Travis Wilmoth** has been appointed as vice president and market leader for the Mount Airy market at First Bank & Trust Company.

## 2005

**Jennifer Lewis** was honored to be recognized as the 2020-21 Teacher of the Year for Ed V. Baldwin Elementary.

**Terence Williams** is a family nurse practitioner at Novant Health in Charlotte, working in pulmonary medicine. He thanks God and his family for their continued support.

## 2006



**Jabarr Adams** was hired as head boy's basketball coach at West Cabarrus High School. Adams played for the UNCP men's basketball team from 2004-2006.



**Leslie Bell** was named the new director of Financial Planning and Budget at UNC Pembroke in March 2021.

## 2007

**Alexandria Cogdill** received her Ph.D. in immunology from the University of Texas in December 2020. Dr. Cogdill's Ph.D. was advised by Nobel Laureate Dr. James Allison.

## 2010

**Wade Allen** relocated to Los Angeles in 2020 and is now celebrating the release of his first book "California Dreaming: Los Angeles Through The Lens of Wade Allen." It's a 150-page coffee table book featuring his photography. He's working on his autobiography.



**Naly Rice** was named Dell Women Entrepreneur Network's Woman of the Week in April 2020.

## 2011

**Cedric Harrison** was named among Wilmington's 40 Under 40 honorees. He is founder and executive director of the nonprofit Support the Port.

**Sada Ray** is the new director of Hole County Parks and Recreation and the youngest to ever have this role. She is also a recipient of the Class of 2020 "40 under 40" and is newly engaged.

## 2012

**Jacqueline Carthen** is currently in private practice in Red Springs, providing counseling to residents of Robeson County. She provides TF-CBT and EMDR, both evidence-based practices for trauma. Bright Light Counseling offers virtual counseling and a sliding fee scale.

**Danita Thomas Wilkes** earned an M.S.N. from Phoenix University in June 2019.

## 2013

**Alecia Bryant** was voted North Carolina Social Studies Teacher of the Year for 2021.



**Marcy Bishop-Lilley** received a degree in art education from UNCP, and a Master of Fine Arts in Painting and Drawing from the University of North Texas. She is a career development specialist at UNT.



**Joshua Tew** is the director of bands and chorus at Midway High School in Sampson County. He continues to promote music education and UNCP's Music Department.

## 2014

**Robin Hunt** was accepted into the East Carolina University Doctorate of Nursing Program: Adult-Gerontology Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Program in Fall 2020.

## 2016



**Linda Council** has been admitted to the UNC School of Medicine.

**Hasina Currie-Bende** received a master's degree in psychology from SNHU in June 2020 and is currently working at local homeless shelters.

**Candace Locklear** is a physician assistant candidate at Pfeiffer University. Locklear served as student body president at UNCP.

## 2017

**Leyia Bullard Oxendine** was admitted into the Physician Assistant program at Methodist University.

## 2018

**Chima Enwere** is the new director of Music Together of Fayetteville LLC.



**Adam Peele** is the newest financial aid officer at St. Andrews University in Laurinburg, N.C.

## 2019

**Dakota Goins** was saluted for his dedication and service to the City of Laurinburg Police Department and the Laurel Hill Fire Department.



**Leanna Jacobs** has been accepted into the Physician Assistant program at Methodist University. Jacobs was a member of the women's track and field team.

**Elena Kidd** accepted a position as patient services coordinator in Alzheimer's Operations at Biogen in Research Triangle Park, N.C.

**Shannon Hunt** is enrolled in the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies (MS-PAS) program at Pfeiffer University.

**Cheyenne Story** graduated with a B.M. in Music Education. She accepted a job at Cove City as an elementary music teacher to over 300 wonderful students and is also getting married to a fellow UNCP graduate in July.

**James Upchurch** was elected as a Guilford County Commissioner on November 3, the youngest commissioner ever to be elected in Guilford County at 25 years old.

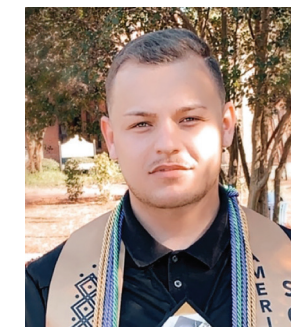


**Harley Locklear** has been accepted into the Ph.D. in Counseling and Counselor Education program at NC State University.

## 2020



**Rawan Abumohsen** is enrolled in the Pennsylvania College of Optometry at Salus University in Philadelphia.



**Phoenix Two Feathers Locklear** will begin the Physician Assistant program at Methodist University in Fayetteville.

**Laurel Tabaka** was recently hired as the business manager for the Hardin County Public Library.

**Richard Varner II** was accepted into the UNC Wilmington graduate history program.



**Justin Villanueva** will be attending the UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



**Wyatt Wall** has been accepted into the Doctor of Physical Therapy program at Mary Baldwin University.



Submit your Class Notes and alumni updates at [uncp.edu/alumni](http://uncp.edu/alumni).

## AN ESTATE PLANNING TIP FROM BRAVEHAWK

Any account with a beneficiary designation (such as retirement funds, life insurance policies and annuities) can be used to support UNCP.



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# IN MEMORIAM

## NEW SENIOR APPOINTMENTS

## Husband, wife turn tassels together

By Mark Locklear

An automobile accident forced Ted Quentin Brooks Jr. to withdraw from UNCP 28 years ago. Though he went on to enjoy more than 20 successful years in retail management, he never gave up on the thought of earning a college degree.

In November, Brooks finished what he started in 1993, graduating with honors with a bachelor's degree during Fall 2020 Commencement. To make the moment sweeter, he crossed the stage alongside his wife and best friend, Nicole, who earned a second undergrad degree.

While being chauffeured by their children during the drive-thru ceremony, Ted poked fun at Nicole, saying she managed to find a way to steal his thunder.

"I was elated to graduate with my wife," he said. "What we accomplished was something many couples do not have the opportunity to do."

The Lumberton couple, who both earned a degree in sociology, got a chance to take some classes together, invoking a healthy competitive spirit in the Brooks household, along with their son, Ted Quentin Wilson Brooks III, a senior at UNCP, and their daughter, Alyssa, a high school junior in the Brooks Academy Home School Program.

"Taking classes together empowered each of us to do our best," Nicole said. "It was wonderful being able to graduate at the same time. It was truly special for Ted, so I wanted to be an encouragement to him."

The two have since enrolled in the Master of Public Administration program at Grand Canyon University and returned to their alma mater this spring to celebrate with their son, who became a proud member of the Brave alumni family. ■



**Jessica Collogan** serves as the dean of Library Services. She has more than 20 years of unique experience in corporate, academic, public and special libraries as well as learning resource centers, most recently serving as director of the Carl Swisher Library at Jacksonville University in Jacksonville, Florida.



**Dr. Loury Ollison Floyd** is the new dean of the School of Education. Floyd has more than 23 years of experience, most recently serving as associate professor and associate dean for Undergraduate Programs at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.



**Kelvin Jacobs** was named general counsel. Jacobs joined UNCP in 2015 as the assistant general counsel. A UNCP graduate, Jacobs previously worked as a staff attorney with Legal Aid of North Carolina following a successful military career and a decade in pharmaceutical sales. In October 2019, he was asked to serve as interim general counsel.



**Steve Varley** assumed the role of vice chancellor for Advancement. He has two decades of fundraising experience in higher education. He served as associate dean for Advancement in the Yale School of Nursing and as vice president for Advancement at Gardner-Webb.

Andrew Barlow  
Marion Bass  
Dr. Paul Berghoff  
Dr. Suellen Cabe  
Dr. Manuel "Mickey" Conley  
Raymond Cummings '80, '91  
Julie Davis  
Dr. Wanda "Swanee" Dickson  
Summer E. Heath '15  
Alden Johnson  
Rosa "Rosie" Lee Locklear Jolicoeur  
Emma Lee Locklear '62  
Gary Wayne Locklear '70  
Charles Alton Maynor '70

Julia Dawn Merritt  
Ron Norman '74  
Richard Orvin  
Dr. Joseph B. Oxendine  
Karon Prince '84  
Jason Shuping '18  
Mary Alice Teets '58  
Dr. Norma Jean Thompson  
Mary Garner Upchurch  
Jasmine Nicole Upsher '15  
Tracy Vann '88  
Frances Stewart Wallace '51  
Dr. Rudy Williams

Any omission is unintentional. This list includes all names available as of publication deadline. Any names noted beyond this date will be included in subsequent issues. If you would like to submit an item for *in memoriam* in a future edition, please email [alumni@uncp.edu](mailto:alumni@uncp.edu).

## We Remember



**Mary Alice Teets '58**

was an active supporter of UNCP and served on the Southeastern Health Board of Trustees from 2010-2013. UNCP's Pinchbeck Maintenance Building was named after her father, Walter J. Pinchbeck.



**Mary Upchurch**

was the wife of Wyatt Upchurch, both supporters of UNCP, making generous contributions to the university, including the Mary and Wyatt Upchurch Endowed Scholarship and naming the Upchurch Auditorium in the Thomas School of Business.



**Jason Shuping '18**

was a member of the Esther G. Maynor Honors College and track and field. He was a Concord police officer and was killed in the line of duty December 16, 2020. His wife Haylee Gardner Shuping is a UNCP grad and former student athlete.



Husband and wife Tedd and Nicole Brooks



# GPAC BEHIND THE STAGE & SCENE



From his seat as executive director of UNCP's Givens Performing Arts Center, James Bass could see a shifting landscape on the horizon in the first months of 2020. Concerns about the coronavirus were growing, and Bass sensed that what was to come was going to be anything but business as usual.

"We knew things weren't going to be normal, but it was just a question as to what degree," Bass recalls.

On March 2, GPAC hosted the national Broadway tour of "The Color Purple." By mid-March, however, the virus was causing businesses across the country to cut their hours and capacity, and shutdowns soon followed. Bass and campus leaders initially took a wait-and-see approach toward the scheduled April 28 production of "An American in Paris" on the GPAC stage, but it soon became apparent that the show would not happen. As the performance was canceled and the magnitude of the virus' impact on every aspect of life came into focus, Bass set his sights on GPAC's future.

"We were fortunate compared to so many other performing arts venues," Bass says of GPAC's connection to UNCP. "As a state institution, we weren't going to just close up, but so many of these theatres were facing that prospect."

As spring stretched into summer, Bass carried on running conversations with other performing arts colleagues through the North Carolina Presenters Consortium as well as on the UNCP campus to share ideas on how to operate in a COVID-19 environment. His talks with Dr. Jonathan Drahos, director of UNCP's Theatre program, about an annual GPAC production that brings professional actors to campus to work with students during a short residency began to take a different turn.

"We came to realize we weren't going to be able to do that production in person, so we began to explore the idea of filming it," Bass says. At the same time, momentum behind filming stage productions was growing among theatres in North Carolina and beyond, and Bass sensed an opportunity for GPAC to remain vibrant and relevant during

unprecedented circumstances by featuring local talent in a repository of online content through the GPAC website.

Bass first turned to his colleagues on campus, inviting UNCP music faculty member Joanna Ross Hersey to explore the idea of recording live music for a GPAC content library. Bass says he had been "blown away" by a previous tuba recital Hersey had done with another performer at GPAC, and she was enthusiastic about the idea. The result of what would become the first performance in GPAC's "Front Row Arts Series" far exceeded Bass's expectations. Titled "ElevenTwelve" in honor of medieval nun, author, composer and theorist Hildegard von Bingen, Hersey's tuba performance features visuals of the graphic score of music she plays from, set in a convent courtyard from the 12th century.

"Joanna did an awesome job with it, and she really enjoyed it," Bass says, and she was the catalyst for other UNCP musicians such as Jae Won Kim, Mark Tollefsen, Nathan Thomas and Joseph Van Hassel to record their own pieces. The possibilities kept expanding as Bass, Technical Director Gary Tremblay, Technical Operations Manager Lenea Barela-Lewis and Marketing Director Chad Locklear learned on the fly how to run cameras, edit video and reimagine set designs. Those skills were on display in "Ghost Light," a collection of Lumbee ghost stories curated by UNCP's Museum of the Southeast American Indian. Posted online to coincide with Halloween, "Ghost Light" featured members of the local community reading scary stories from the GPAC stage set to spooky classical pieces performed by UNCP faculty.

"Gary and Lenea did some amazing set designs to go along with each story," Bass says. "And having members of the community, such as Lawrence Locklear, Phillip Bullard and Mary Ann Jacobs, read the stories gave it a local flair."

GPAC became an outlet for the abundance of talent in southeastern North Carolina during the pandemic.

"It is amazing how much talent we have here in this area," Bass says of the poets, musicians, actors and performers who came to his mind while brainstorming GPAC's 2020-21 format.

"The pandemic gave us an opportunity to work with artists we probably wouldn't bring to our stage under normal circumstances." One example is LeJuane Bowens, an acclaimed spoken word poet based in Fayetteville.

"We've never really done a spoken word poet from our stage," Bass says of the format, which is poetry written for live performance. "A single performer can get swallowed up by that massive auditorium, and outside of our students, spoken word poetry might not have mass appeal with a majority of our audience. But with an online presentation, the size of the auditorium wouldn't matter, and it would be available for anyone who was interested."

The possibilities grew as local artists and performers like Bowens became eager to participate in the series. Mark McKinney & Co., a Pembroke-based band that won the Carolina Country Music Awards' Vocal Group of the Year honor in 2018 and 2019, performed covers and original songs from its latest albums for the series. Mark Andersen, an internationally renowned concert pianist who returned to his hometown of Lumberton in retirement, composed three original pieces of music that made their world debut as part of the "Front Row Arts Series".

"In retirement, I didn't anticipate the opportunity to do something like this, but James called and asked," says Andersen. "During the pandemic, when there's not very much else for musicians and composers to do, it's a good time to sit down, contemplate and put new pieces to pen and paper."

Andersen enjoyed the challenge of performing for an audience that was virtual instead of live. "Without the audience there, it was very different. A performer feeds off the audience, so that was one of the major differences in this production. I had to train my mind to put myself in a concert-like setting, and it took discipline to get my mind in performance mode," Andersen says. "Another difference was the presence of the camera operators to get the various shots needed for the video production. That was a bit of a distraction, but nothing that couldn't be overcome."

Bass says Andersen's performance has had an overwhelming response on the GPAC site, plus many more through Carnegie Hall sharing it. Andersen, videographer Lynn Andersen and Bass won a NYX Gold Award for videography for the production.

Andersen has been gratified by the community's embrace of his work.

"The response has been tremendous. I moved away from here after my sophomore year of high school for my studies, yet I've had several calls recently from people from my childhood who saw this performance. It's given me the opportunity to get new music out, not only to a worldwide audience, but to the local Robeson County community," Andersen says.

As Bass looks forward to the day live performances return to GPAC, he also sees virtual productions keeping a permanent spot in its offerings.

"We've been able to bring the arts to people who would not be able to come to a live performance, even during normal times," says Bass. "That's a good thing, and I think we can find the right mix of live and virtual offerings as we go forward. The technology to do this has been there for a long time, and COVID made us figure out the best way to use it." ■

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