

South

magazine

FLAGSHIP OF THE GULF COAST

LEGACY

PIVOTAL MOMENT

ECONOMIC GROWTH



PHILANTHROPY

BRIGHTER FUTURE
OPPORTUNITY



Where

GOLDEN ERA

USA WAY

NEXT CHAPTER

BOLD



HEALTH, HEALING AND RESEARCH & DISCOVERY

AND HUMAN IMPACT

Begins

STUDENT-CENTERED
CALLED TO LEAD

AMBITION → ACTION
LIFELONG LEARNING



A New Era
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Future Focused

Going to Wichita

Peak Challenge

The Builders

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

South

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

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ON THE COVER
A vibrant typographic landscape brings the University of South Alabama's largest comprehensive campaign to life. Illustration by Kate Forrester.



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA launched its largest comprehensive campaign ever, *Where Bold Begins*, with supporters at the Student Center on April 23.

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Bold Ambitions
Our comprehensive campaign is in full swing, turning donor vision into tangible results.

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Aero Dynamic
Preparing for Airbus, South looks west for inspiration.

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South 2037
A 10-year master plan taking shape promotes connection, recreation and discovery.

Bold Futures

Here's our commitment to invest in human potential and ensure a thriving Gulf Coast.

IN THE FOUR AND A HALF YEARS that I've had the honor of serving as your president, I've had the great fortune to meet students from all across this state and beyond.

Recruiting trips with Executive Vice President and Provost Dr. Andi Kent and our talented admissions team have taken us as far north in Alabama as Ardmore High School, just three blocks from the Tennessee state line, and down south to the beaches of Baldwin County.

In those visits, we see the future of our state. We see young women and men who are ready to make a bold claim on their own futures — just as we're making on the future of our University.

A remarkable number of these students are drawn to the health sciences, inspired by a calling to care for others that our caregivers at USA Health fulfill each day as they transform medicine along the Gulf Coast.

It is clear from our visits that the energy we feel on campus is contagious. I can say this from meeting with both prospective students and alumni on these trips: The excitement for the University of South Alabama is real.

So are the benefits of a college education. By now, we all know what the data shows: College graduates will earn significantly more over their lifetimes compared with those with only a high school degree.

At the University of South Alabama, we also know that going to college is about more than a paycheck. It's about the transformation that happens when a student finds purpose and gets rewarded for their hard work with a first-class ticket to a brighter future.

For sure, there is value in all jobs. And while I may be the first university president to tell prospective students and families that you don't have to go to college to be successful, I quickly add that nothing should stand in your way if you have the opportunity, drive and God-given talent.

Doing everything in our power to remove barriers that might keep someone from enrolling at South is a foundational driver of our largest comprehensive campaign ever, Where Bold Begins.

Together, we want to make sure we're supporting our students, recruiting and retaining the best and brightest faculty, building facilities that match the quality of the education offered inside them, and providing top-quality academic healthcare to our communities as we educate the next generation of healthcare providers. (Starting on Page 10, you'll find stories showing how such enhancements can make an impact.)

I want to be clear: We aren't just raising money; we are investing in human potential, elevating our standard of excellence and securing our future in this state and region.

Spring Commencement in May recognized our newest class of graduates. Many of those who walked across the stage arrived at the University shortly after I did.

Over those years, I've seen our students live out what we call The USA Way — carrying themselves with integrity, dedication and class. Being bold.

The University of South Alabama is the educational, economic and cultural engine of the Gulf Coast. Creating our vibrant community takes all of us. It is the direct result of the bold, strategic choices we are making together today.

From that graduation stage at the USA Mitchell Center to the front lines of USA Health where our work saves lives every day, the University of South Alabama is making an undeniable case for the value of what we do — serving as the Flagship of the Gulf Coast.

Jo Bonner

JO BONNER, PRESIDENT

PRESIDENT JO BONNER delivered the Commencement address at May's ceremony. He urged the graduates, many of whom arrived at South at the beginning of his presidency, to continue to uphold The USA Way in their lives.

VIEW FROM THE

Bell Tower



IN ALABAMA, the calendar year is bookended by duck hunting season — an opportunity for six natural science graduate students to take part in the University Hunting Program of the conservation nonprofit Delta Waterfowl. The initiative introduces firearm safety and game processing to students who may pursue careers in natural resource management. Faculty leaders included Dr. Jason Strickland, associate professor of biology, pictured here.



South's Triple Gold

THREE STUDENTS from the University of South Alabama earned 2026 Goldwater Scholarships, one of the most prestigious honors for undergraduate researchers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Anya Powell, Bailey Baxter and Cambridge Cooper joined a national class of 454.

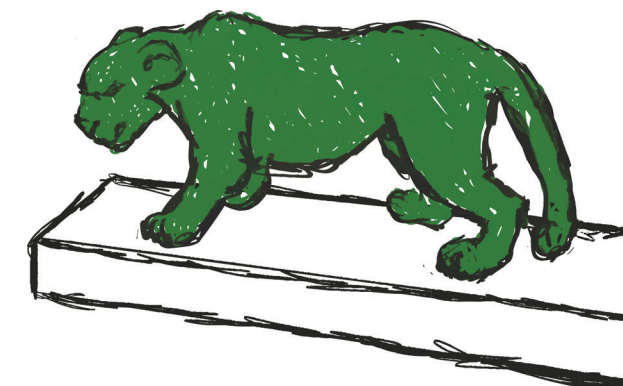
Powell, a biology major, is driven by a love for animals and the conviction that small

studies build the bigger picture of conservation. Turning her gaze to the Gulf Coast shoreline, she investigates how light pollution impacts Atlantic ghost crabs.

Baxter, an Honors College student with aspirations of obtaining an M.D.-Ph.D., is majoring in biomedical sciences and chemistry. Her research focuses on developing small-molecule inhibitors targeting enzymes associated with cancer.

Cooper, an Honors College student majoring in biomedical sciences, integrates engineering and medicine to create clinical instruments that are both practical and scientifically sound. He draws inspiration from his study-abroad experience in Kenya.

The 2026 class increases the total number of Goldwater scholars in South's history to 20.



PAWS AND REFLECT

BEFORE SOUTHPAW AND MISS PAWLA, there was Mischka, a live jaguar that was housed on campus. Beginning this fall, Mischka will come to life again — in the form of a movable, self-watering topiary made up of creeping fig vines.

Modeled after the jaguar statue on the Mitchell Center north lawn, the wire frame was handcrafted in South San Francisco, California, by Barrango, a company specializing in custom seasonal decor.

Upon Mischka's arrival to campus, the USA facilities team installed an internal irrigation system and mounted her on a movable aluminum base. A coat of creeping fig will continue to fill in over the summer, requiring regular pruning and maintenance.

The topiary is scheduled to debut in the fall. Until then, a 3D miniature of the topiary is on display in the lobby of the Whiddon Administration Building.



HOME, AT LAST

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA Jaguar Marching Band now has a spacious home designed to elevate preparation, performance and pride.

The University dedicated the \$13 million Geri and Gordon Moulton Jaguar Marching Band Complex in March. The facility is named after the late University president and his wife, who committed more than \$2.5 million to the project.

"We are so incredibly proud that these student-musicians will now have a permanent home, which is second to none in the state of Alabama," says Dr. Andi Kent, executive vice president and provost. "I can think of no better way to help our band students thrive while they are here than providing them with this extraordinary facility."

The nearly 25,000-square-foot complex includes a full-size, lighted practice field to match the Abraham A. Mitchell Field at nearby Hancock Whitney Stadium.

SKETCHING YOUR BIG IDEA

IF ONLY YOU COULD REMEMBER that life-changing idea that popped into your head — and then popped right back out. Alma Hoffmann knows what can capture those skittish thoughts: the humble sketch. “You have to stop and seize that inspiration, or it says, ‘I’m going to find some other vessel, because you’re too busy for me.’”

The compulsively creative Hoffmann, an artist, author and former dancer, is an associate professor of graphic design at South. She envisioned “a kind of looseness” for her three striking artworks in a current online exhibition called Symbiosis V. So she attached her brush to a stick, à la Henri Matisse, and actually danced as she painted big, dark swirls. Poetry — improvised on the spot — and snippets of song lyrics added layers of color and meaning.

She sketches every day, even while watching a movie or attending church. In her book, “Sketching as Design Thinking,” she cites research showing that sketching, or just doodling, improves memory.

Sketches also convey ideas. “Isn’t that how we started to communicate with each other,” she says, “making marks on cave walls?”



**>> LEARN MORE
SEE HOW CREATIVITY
plays out in Alma
Hoffmann’s artwork.**



With SouthPaw Village, USA Invests in Campus Growth

WITH THE \$40 MILLION PURCHASE in May of the Central House on Stadium apartment complex, South has nearly doubled the number of student housing beds in the past five years.

The complex, built in 2007 on University-owned land just south of Hancock Whitney Stadium, has been rechristened SouthPaw Village. It will bring the total number of beds available through USA Housing to approximately 4,000. In fall 2021, the total was 2,330.

Increased demand comes from rising enrollment and students choosing to remain on campus after their initial year for the convenience and sense of community that residential living provides.

“The number of students wanting to live on campus has significantly increased due to that positive first-year experience,” says Dr. Jeremy Sheffield, executive director at USA Housing.



The acquisition of SouthPaw Village is the second apartment complex purchased by the University in as many years. USA purchased Traditions at South on Old Shell Road, across from the Student Recreation Center, in 2024 and immediately began extensive renovations.

From 2021 to 2025, the University invested more than \$12.4 million in housing improvements. That included

new roofs and new climate-control systems, plus a lot of new furniture. Sheffield expects \$30 million worth of additional upgrades in the next couple of years.

Residents apparently appreciate the makeovers. Surveys find student satisfaction with living on campus at an all-time high, Sheffield says. “And we outperform our peers in our region and on a national level.”

SURVIVAL INSTINCT

How one Honors College student is turning his experience as an advanced emergency medical technician into a student-led movement to empower thousands with lifesaving skills



WHEN A HEART STOPS, the first three to five minutes are crucial. After that, irreversible brain damage begins.

Suhas Patil, a University of South Alabama Honors College student, knows this all too well. In addition to pursuing majors in biomedical sciences and philosophy, Patil works as an advanced emergency medical technician in Baldwin County, where a trip to the nearest hospital can take up to an hour.

One call early in his time at South — for a grandmother who

didn’t get care soon enough — stood out.

“Her grandkids were around my age,” says Patil. “That got me thinking.”

Bystander intervention increases a patient’s chance of survival by two to three times, according to the American Heart Association. So Patil got to work: With a two-page proposal, he went to the dean of the Honors College and began building what would become the CPR Initiative.

Using borrowed equipment from South’s health simulation

program and the American Heart Association, Patil’s student-led program in its first year taught 775 freshmen how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation and how to use an automated external defibrillator. One year later, the number of trainees had doubled, with eight other universities now interested in launching their own version of the program.

“Eventually, whole schools could be trained to save lives,” says Patil, who has his eye set on medical school. “That’s my vision.”

BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

increases a patient’s chance of survival by two to three times.

— AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION

WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS, VOLUNTEER

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA’S OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT found a refreshing way to boost volunteerism through its Squeeze Service into Your Schedule campaign, which popped up across campus during the spring semester.

Operating out of a giant inflatable lemonade stand, the office served cold drinks alongside information on how to give back. Foam squeezable lemons also were handed out to encourage community involvement.



NEW NAME FOR BALDWIN CAMPUS

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA has renamed its USA Baldwin County campus to USA by the Bay.

The University established a branch campus in Fairhope in 1984. The current property, previously St. James Episcopal Church, features 15,000 square feet of interior space on approximately 2 acres of land. It includes an auditorium that is home for the USA by the Bay speaker series, the Fairhope Film Festival and other events. In addition to hosting college courses, the campus is a premier venue for continuing education programs, workshops, retreats, receptions and community events.

“The name is reflective of the magical beauty of the campus’s location and setting,” says Dr. Richard Carter, associate vice president for global engagement.



DR. JEFFREY S. LA ROCHELLE arrives at the Central Services Administration Building early on May 4, his first official day on the job.

“We spend most of our time **IN THE GRAY.**”

— **DR. JEFFREY S. LA ROCHELLE**

The Art of Medicine

DR. JEFFREY S. LA ROCHELLE, the new dean of the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine, holds undergraduate degrees in both English, with a focus on Shakespeare and the Victorians, and microbiology. Before he entered medicine, he read as much classic literature as he could, knowing the demands of training and practice would eventually crowd it out.

That choice reflects how he thinks about the profession itself. To La Rochelle, medicine has always belonged to the humanities as well as the hard sciences, even when the field loses sight of that.

“We get enamored by the technology,” he says. “New MRIs, new ways of imaging. But what physicians are really doing is applying a humanity.”

He breaks that application down as “something in the mind,

something in the hand, something in the heart.” Knowledge and skills, he says, can be taught in labs and classrooms. Influencing the heart is another matter.

La Rochelle, a retired Air Force colonel with 25 years of service, was most recently an associate dean and professor of medicine at the University of Central Florida. He arrived at South on May 4.

He joins the University — already feeling like he belongs, he says — just as the College of Medicine readies for a move into a new, 295,000-square-foot building in spring 2027. The question of how to protect medicine’s human core in an AI-driven era is one he’s already thinking about carefully.

Medicine rarely deals in black and white.

“We spend most of our time in the gray,” he says.

MacQueen

ALUMNI CENTER

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

The Gulf Coast’s Premier Event Venue

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OUR BOLD ERA

Born from boldness, the University of South Alabama now embarks fearlessly on its next chapter. The University that began with a single building and an ambitious vision to empower its region has launched Where Bold Begins, its largest-ever comprehensive campaign, with a goal of raising \$400 million. Minimum.

Success will enable investments with impact in four strategic pillars. Strengthening academic excellence. Intensifying South's drive toward the top tier of research universities. Preparing the next generation for the challenges of leadership. Setting new standards of healthcare excellence.

Big plans. Big goals. Big payoffs. Keep reading to see how the Flagship of the Gulf Coast is setting its course for a future Where Bold Begins.

TEXT BY LANCE CRAWFORD, TERI GREENE,
LYNA MEYRER AND STEVE MILLBURG
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAN ANDERSON, SETH LAUBINGER,
RILEY NAVARRE, JAMES PALOMO AND BISHAR SAWAN



Stepping Up

Two new leaders take the field at the the Jaguar Marching Band's new complex.

LEADING MORE THAN 280 MEMBERS of the Jaguar Marching Band for the first time is a daunting task. But fronting the band on a full-size, lighted practice field that replicates the field at the stadium across the street? That's kind of legendary.

Two new drum majors, Nathan Sansom and Hailey Romoser, will join returning drum major Rivers Lewis for the 2026-27 season at a new, 250,000-square-foot complex. The field is just a highlight — the complex also has a full ensemble rehearsal hall, drumline and color guard studios, dressing rooms, a music library and expanded storage for uniforms, instruments, props and equipment.

Sansom and Romoser were two of six finalists who showed off their skills in conducting, teaching and mace work leading up to the final step — a Q&A session with current marching band students — before being selected. They say the new complex will only amplify a momentum that was already growing.

"It's something we can make our home, a collective place for us to grow together," says Romoser, a sociology major from Biloxi, Mississippi. "So many schools nationwide don't have what we've got. I'm so happy that we have people at South that care about us in the way that they do."

Sansom, a music education major from Gulf Shores, Alabama, shares that excitement and gratitude.

"I'm excited to see what type of recruiting we can do with a full year in this new facility," he says. "I see growth in the future of the JMB not just in numbers, but in performance quality and community engagement, and I am excited to see where the future takes us."

NATHAN SANSON tries out for drum major at the new Geri and Gordon Moulton Jaguar Marching Band Complex. He and Hailey Romoser, third from left behind Sansom, were selected to join returning drum major Rivers Lewis to lead the band for the 2026-27 academic year.



From Commons to Core

Bringing education back to the heart of campus

EACH YEAR, thousands of visitors pass through South's College of Education and Professional Studies, including these teachers who took part in a writing retreat this spring. Each of them is a potential ambassador for the University, no matter where they earned their degree.



THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES considers itself to be a welcome center. There are big plans for its new home.

Because it provides extensive professional development opportunities, especially for educators, the college draws thousands of visitors every year — all of them potential University ambassadors. They fill their social media feeds with photos and gush to their friends back home about their experiences.

Dr. Angela Barlow, the college dean, hopes to supercharge that promotional opportunity. The college resides across Old Shell Road in University Commons. South's new comprehensive campaign, Where Bold Begins,

will bring it back to the primary campus footprint.

The college offers undergraduate and graduate programs for teachers as well as those in such other fields as counseling, hospitality and tourism management, nutrition, exercise science and sports.

Barlow envisions a building explicitly designed to show off the college, with suitably striking photo backdrops, flexible event spaces and classrooms with big windows so tour groups can witness education in action.

"We're sort of the unofficial welcome center for the University," she says. "This is allowing us to really dream up purposeful spaces that support our research and our work."



SIERRA ROBERTSON pilots an electrofishing boat near Justin's Bay with fellow Ph.D. student Aleah Dokter, who is researching fish populations along the Causeway.



Estuary of Innovation

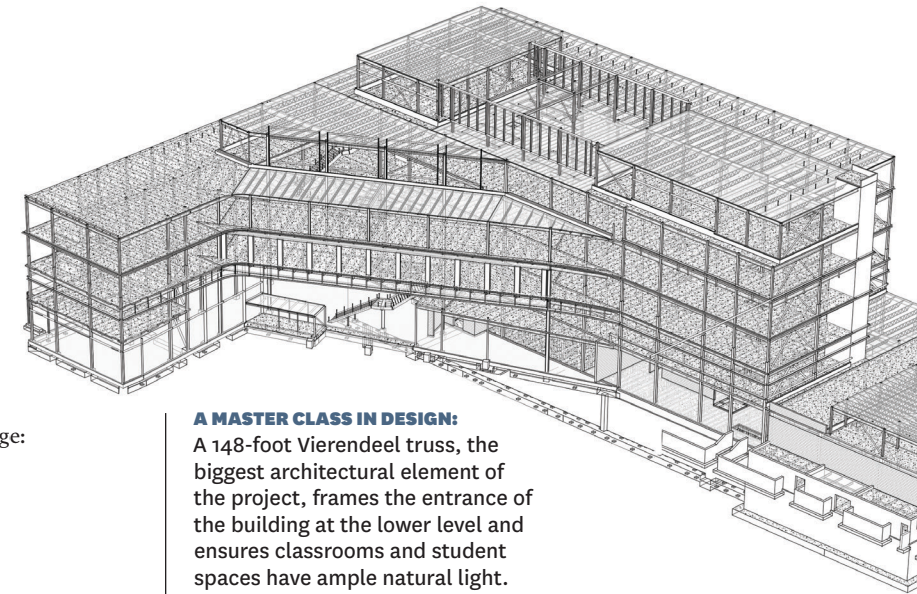
THE SCIENCE OF LIGHT

Designers ran advanced daylight studies to ensure that spaces throughout the building, even the college's 25 interior labs, are washed in natural light, supporting student mental health and focus during long hours of study and research.

How Mobile Bay's rhythm shaped South's new Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building

THE FREDERICK P. WHIDDON College of Medicine building, opening in spring 2027, will be a landmark that redefines the University of South Alabama's campus and the region's medical landscape.

Enclosing 295,000 square feet in glass, steel and brick, the new College of Medicine is inspired by the Mobile Bay estuary. The design mimics the natural mixing zones of estuary waters, creating a fluid environment where students, researchers and faculty collide and collaborate. Everything from the gravity-defying Vierendeel truss that clears the way for massive, column-free learning studios to the precision-mapped daylight that floods every floor sends a clear message: The future of healthcare has a new home, right here on our soil.



A MASTER CLASS IN DESIGN:

A 148-foot Vierendeel truss, the biggest architectural element of the project, frames the entrance of the building at the lower level and ensures classrooms and student spaces have ample natural light. By minimizing the need for columns, the design creates areas that feel vast and open.

Open Water

Aleah Dokter's Mobile Bay research explores impacts of proposed new Causeway opening.

NEAR MOBILE'S CAUSEWAY, Aleah Dokter and a fellow researcher maneuver an electrofishing boat through the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta, collecting fish samples that could help scientists better understand one of the Gulf Coast's most complex ecosystems.

Dokter, a first-year Ph.D. student in the Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences, is studying the relationships between aquatic plants, water quality and marine life along the Causeway.

The research comes as Alabama considers changes to the Causeway, the 7-mile land-and-bridge crossing between Mobile's western

shore and Baldwin County. A proposed bridge would open a passage between Justin's Bay to the north of the Causeway and Bay John to the south, replacing a solid section of the Causeway to allow water and marine life to move naturally through the estuary. Dokter and other researchers are studying the possible impacts.

The Stokes School offers deep expertise in Gulf Coast ecology and research with broad, even global applications, facilitated by a partnership with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. The school's research portfolio is funded by \$28 million in state and federal grants; individual donors also support its work.



>> LEARN MORE
WATCH ALEAH DOKTER talk about her research in Justin's Bay.

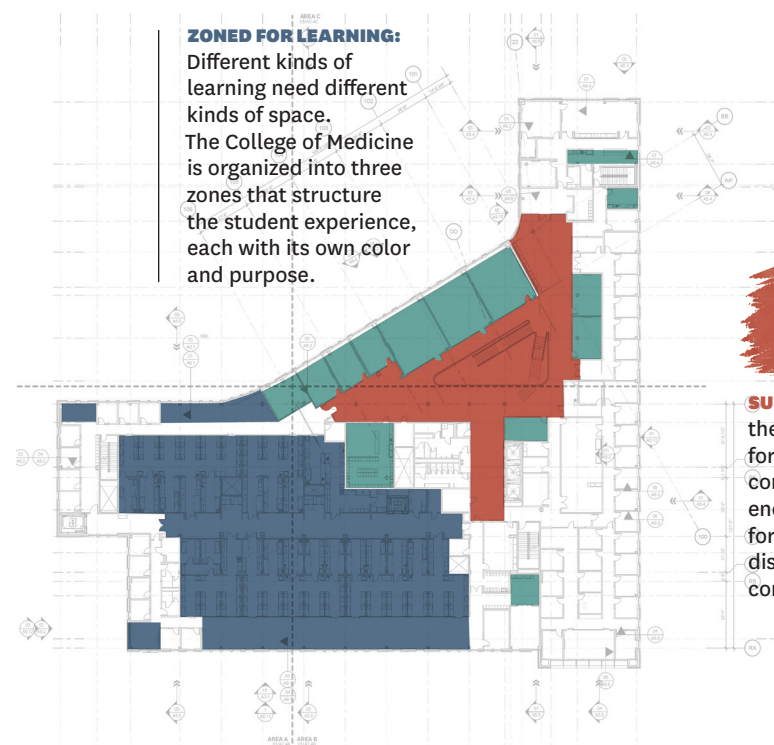
Dokter spends long days collecting samples and tracking seasonal changes in fish populations and habitats. Her work aims to better understand how development and environmental change can shape delicate coastal food webs.

She came to South from Minnesota expecting salt water and dolphins. Instead, she found herself immersed in the rich, ever-changing estuary where fresh water from inland rivers meets the Gulf.

"It's a huge biodiversity hot spot," she says. "There's so much to study and so much to appreciate about it."

ZONED FOR LEARNING:

Different kinds of learning need different kinds of space. The College of Medicine is organized into three zones that structure the student experience, each with its own color and purpose.



COLLABORATE AND CONNECT

SUNSET ORANGE fills the spaces designed for collaboration and connection. Warm and energizing, it pulls you in for study groups, open discussions or casual conversation.

LEARN AND GATHER

THE GREENS of the marshland bring balance and a sense of growth to the building's learning and gathering spaces. They appear in the classrooms, teaching kitchen and student lounge.

FOCUS AND REFLECT

GULF BLUE runs through the focus zones, including study spaces and faculty offices, carrying a sense of quiet that invites deep thinking.

The Suite Spot

New facility for kids will offer more options, less ‘ouch!’



KID-FRIENDLY FEATURES of Dr. Kevin Wong’s planned pediatric interventional radiology suite will include colorful, soothing lighting and video screens.

Base Camp

South to scale up support with new military services home.

WITH 13,500 ACTIVE-DUTY MILITARY PERSONNEL, more than 26,700 National Guard and Reserve members, and 339,300 veterans living in Alabama, not to mention major military bases just east and west along the Gulf Coast, South’s Office of Military Services represents a significant tool for increasing enrollment while serving members of the military community.

Now, a new home is planned to serve a growing mission.

More than 1,000 military-affiliated students attend South, including active-duty and Reserve personnel, veterans and dependents. The office, currently in the Academic Services Center, energetically recruits such students.

It helps them take advantage of financial assistance and other benefits they’re eligible for, and offers support during their time as members of the University community.

South upgraded its military outreach in 2024 and signed up retired Army sergeant major David Blair as director of the program. The new home, a 7,200-square-foot addition to the ROTC Building (opened in 2024 on Aubrey Green Drive), will include a lounge, a computer lab, study rooms and other amenities for students, as well as office and instructional space.

In a nod to the program’s success, plans also include room for future growth.

PLANS CALL for building a new Office of Military Services home (the flat-roofed addition at left) connected to the ROTC Building.



ON THE UPPER GULF COAST, only Dr. Kevin Wong practices pediatric interventional radiology full time. Without him, many children and their parents would have to drive hours for simple medical procedures — some as critical as stopping emergency bleeding.

USA Health Children’s & Women’s Hospital, where Wong practices, soon will build the region’s only dedicated pediatric interventional radiology suite.

The reason is simple. “This is about offering complete care,” Wong says.

“Right now, there are procedures I’m trained to perform that we can’t fully support here without the right space and equipment. The suite allows us to change that so families don’t have to leave the region for care we should be able to provide locally.”

The initiative is being funded through philanthropic support, including Local Goodness, a farm-to-table event that raised \$145,000 in the spring of 2026.

An interventional radiologist peeks inside the body using such imaging technologies as X-rays and ultrasound to guide minimally invasive procedures that can often replace traditional surgery. Getting a tissue sample to test for cancer requires only a stick from a needle, not an incision from a scalpel. Less pain. Fewer complications. Faster recovery.

The new suite will be designed with colorful lighting, video screens and other amenities designed to soothe fearful children. Even more important are the understanding and empathy of the caregivers.

“Children, especially those facing serious illness, have so much of their lives dictated to them,” says Wong, father of a 7-year-old son and a 6-year-old daughter. “We try to give some of that control back. They can choose what they want to watch or listen to. Those small choices matter.”

“CHILDREN, ESPECIALLY THOSE FACING SERIOUS ILLNESS, have so much of their lives dictated to them. We try to give some of that control back.”

— DR. KEVIN WONG

Rooted in the Coast, *Invested in the World*

Studying abroad changes more than where students go — it changes who they are.



>> LEARN MORE

HEAR ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES of “frequent flyer” Abby Russ, who trekked through eight European countries over three weeks.

THE WORLD IS A CAMPUS

for Tiffany Pogue as she strolls through Helsinki, Finland, wearing her “haalarit” — student overalls that signal her university, field of study and interests through color and hand-collected patches.



**“THE GREEKS
HAVE A SAYING**

that I still think about a lot. Siga, siga — which means slowly, slowly. I think about this when I’m feeling myself being taken out of a moment when I want to be more present.”

— JASON CONRAD ’26

WHEN TIFFANY POGUE ’23

STUDIED ABROAD in Madrid, Spain, she discovered just how far life could take her. The psychology graduate, who grew up with family in the Philippines and Switzerland, says she has long known that “life is not just here.”

Today, she has traded the Gulf Coast’s humid heat for the long, snowy winters of Finland, crediting her time abroad with expanding her sense of what is possible. “It made me realize that you can literally do whatever you want in the world; the only thing that limits us is our mind.”

Attracted by Finland’s education system and a chance to continue her travels, Pogue is pursuing a master’s degree in education at the University of Helsinki. Her university and area of study are represented by her overalls — haalarit in Finnish, and what in the U.S. we would call coveralls. “It’s a Finnish student tradition,” she explains. “Each faculty has a different color, and students are encouraged to collect patches to fill their haalarit throughout the year.”

Pogue is among a growing number of University of South Alabama students who are opting to study abroad through support

from the University. This year, nearly 320 South students are participating in study abroad programs to 24 different countries.

Jason Conrad ’26, a web design specialist at South, was a student working in Computer Services when he went to the Office of International Education to fix a computer problem. That encounter would nudge the computer science major in an unexpected direction, eventually to a faculty-led trip to Greece to study Blue Zones — regions known for exceptional longevity. He returned with not just an appreciation for the local culture, but also a new philosophy for daily life.

“The Greeks have a saying that I still think about a lot,” he says. “Siga, siga — which means slowly, slowly.” It’s a lesson he now intentionally builds into his weeks. “I think about this when I’m feeling myself being taken out of a moment when I want to be more present. Whether it is a peaceful moment by the pool or time spent with family and friends, I try to stay present and not let external stressors pull me away. Greece taught me that.”

Both Pogue and Conrad received Office of International Education

scholarships, in addition to national Gilman Scholarships, for their study abroad experiences at South.

“Studying abroad does more than broaden a student’s view of the world,” says Dr. Bri Ard, executive director of global engagement at South. “It shapes the kind of person they become. It is an investment in yourself that pays dividends over your lifetime.”

The stakes of that investment are real. In a global economy that rewards adaptability and international perspective, the benefits extend far beyond the classroom and into careers and lifelong opportunities.

Pogue says she almost certainly would not be pursuing her master’s degree in Finland if not for her time at USA and the opportunity to study in Spain. Surrounded by people from all over the world, in every conversation she learns something new, quietly expanding her horizons.

“I learned that there will always be more for me to learn,” she says. “I don’t know where I will end up one day, but I know those are insights that I’ll carry for the rest of my life.”

A Good Sport

WHAT'S YOUR GREATEST MEMORY?

It's not possible to point to one; it's the numerous achievements. Whether they're championships, amazing individual performances, new facilities, watching coaches do their work at a high level. Ultimately, I get the greatest joy watching our student-athletes walk across the stage and get their degrees. In many cases they're the first in their family, and that's about as rewarding as it gets.

HOW DID THE DEBUT OF FOOTBALL A MONTH AFTER YOU STARTED AFFECT YOUR GOALS?

I'm very proud that when we started football, I talked with our staff and administrators to let them know that we cannot neglect any of our other sports for the benefit of football. Football actually enhanced, directly or indirectly, all of our sports.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG STUDENT-ATHLETES GREATLY IMPROVED UNDER YOUR TENURE. WHAT WAS YOUR APPROACH?

We made sure that our coaches and student-athletes understood that graduation is important and that we were all philosophically on the same page. That impacted who we recruited and who we hired as coaches. It also meant being good partners with our tremendous faculty.

ANY REGRETS?

You're never satisfied, but I think we have over many years adapted to a lot of changing landscapes, from conference realignment to shifting rules and legislation to the world of revenue sharing and name, image and likeness to the world of unlimited transfers.

WHAT SHOULD YOUR SUCCESSOR KNOW?

This job is filled with opportunities thanks to the people who came before me. The growth from the '60s to the '90s, into the 2000s and where we are today, if you look at it, it's really quite impressive. So take advantage of that. You're in a situation where you have amazing support around the campus from the president's office, our board of trustees, faculty and staff, students and alumni, and our community.

WHERE ARE COLLEGE SPORTS HEADED?

Absent some type of federal antitrust protection, significant changes to transfers and limiting the amount of money that can be provided to student-athletes are going to be very difficult. So I think we all just need to embrace this and not only live in that world, but we've got to be good in that world.

HOW CAN FANS SUPPORT THE UNIVERSITY?

Everything helps. Coming to a game helps. Talking about us helps. Posting about us on social media helps. Giving to the Loyal, Strong & Faithful Fund helps. Buy the gear, come to a game, talk about us, and make us a part of your life.

WHAT WILL BE YOUR LEGACY?

I hope it's that I ran a department based on strong values and principles and that we enhanced people's lives. That we did things in a way that was ethical, fair and transparent. I hope that we made people proud to be a Jaguar.

Dr. Joel Erdmann '92 kept the Jaguars ranked as a multisport powerhouse both on the field and in the classroom before retiring this spring after 17 years as South's director of athletics. He looks back at big wins and proud moments — and talks about ways fans can continue to support the Jags.

DR. JOEL ERDMANN, hired as athletics director in July 2009, was the longest serving AD in the Sun Belt Conference when he retired in May. His time at the University began long before — he earned a master's degree in physical education from South in 1992 while working as a graduate assistant coach with the baseball team. During his directorship, Erdmann was a constant presence on the sidelines, as he was here at Stanky Field during an April series against the University of Southern Mississippi.



Flagship Futures

Meet three students who are leading the way with the help of a new scholarship.

ONE OF THE NEWEST SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS at the University of South Alabama is the Flagship Leaders Scholarship, awarded to first-year students who have shown impact in the classroom, student organizations and their communities. The renewable scholarship connects them with mentorship and extra leadership opportunities, turning that momentum into four years of growth, service and involvement. Get to know three honorees of the inaugural 2025 class:



Charlie Snyder

MAJOR: POLITICAL SCIENCE

Growing up in Chicago, Charlie Snyder didn't expect his college story to unfold on the Alabama Gulf Coast. But then he met Mike Hryndza, a regional out-of-state student recruitment associate director for South, at a college fair. South stayed on Snyder's short list. He toured campus, interviewed for the Honors College and the Flagship Leaders Program, and earned a merit scholarship. Additional scholarships and federal aid added up to the chance to attend college for free; his choice was certain.

Snyder is a Student Government Association senator, a Southerner and a volunteer with PASSAGE USA. He was a peer mentor in a special education program at his Catholic school. He saw how his younger sister, who has autism, was underserved in the public school system; that helped shape his plan to attend law school and become a special education attorney advocating for families like his own.



Fernanda Sanchez Villafranca

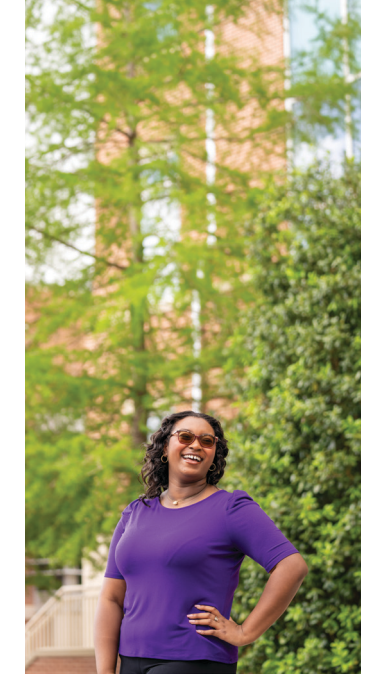
MAJOR: BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES WITH SPANISH MINOR

When Fernanda Sanchez Villafranca's family moved from Lima, Peru, to the U.S., she wasn't ready to leave her parents. Choosing South allowed her to stay close and help them navigate a new language and culture.

"South has given me the opportunity to pursue upper-level classes with incredible professors who have given me valuable advice throughout my first year," she says.

Sanchez Villafranca is involved with Alpha Epsilon Delta honor society for aspiring health professionals and the Spanish Club and volunteers weekly at USA Health Providence Hospital. Medicine runs in her family: Her mother was a nurse, and several relatives are physicians.

Volunteering has shown her how important effective communication and creative problem-solving are, especially for patients who don't speak English.



Kiersten Jackson

MAJOR: BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Coming to South from Montgomery, Kiersten Jackson joined Friends of Internationals to learn about the world beyond the U.S. That experience now shapes the way she thinks about business, from how culture influences communication and decision-making to how companies can approach global markets with more respect and nuance.

She'd assumed college life would be highly structured, with a clear path. Instead, she found a self-directed world that rewards initiative, adaptability and saying yes to the unexpected. That mindset traces back to a decision she made in high school to join activities outside her comfort zone. It helped her build the confidence and communication skills to engage with people who are different from her.

Where *Bold Begins*.
THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA



>> GIVE
BOLD BEGINS WITH YOU.
Support South and turn ideas into action.

FINDING HER PEAK

Pairing advanced orthopaedic healthcare with the unbreakable spirit of a Marine, Beth Wiggins navigates a 10-year medical journey at USA Health to reach new heights.

BY CAROL MCPHAIL



IT WAS WHILE MOWING HER 5 ACRES that Beth Wiggins prayed about and then decided to attempt to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. Supported by USA Health, the double amputee and Marine veteran proves that the ultimate peak is never out of reach, no matter where the journey starts.

“THAT KIND OF MINDSET, especially in moments that don’t go as planned, is what resilience really looks like.”

— LISA PARMETER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MERGING VETS & PLAYERS

THE WEATHER WAS NOT HER FRIEND THAT DAY. Rain turned the trail on Mount Kilimanjaro into a muddy stream for Beth Wiggins and the other expedition members as they trekked up the world’s largest freestanding mountain. Wiggins, the only person climbing on prosthetic legs, fell behind as her residual limbs slipped painfully inside the artificial sockets. She stumbled, adjusted and trugged on with the help of her guides. She reached a stretch of trail covered by fallen trees. A guide said it would not be safe for her to continue the climb.

“It was very hard to hear, but with his experience, I knew in my heart he was right,” says Wiggins. She turned and, with her guides, struggled back down the mountain in the storm to meet a safety vehicle. “I was relieved when I saw that truck, but also so heartbroken because I felt like I had let so many people down.”

That was far from the case.

“Beth understood the decision, supported the team and continued to show up with the same strength of character she brought from day 1,” says Lisa Parmeter, executive director of Merging Vets & Players, the nonprofit that organized the climb. “That kind of mindset, especially in moments that don’t go as planned, is what resilience really looks like.”

THE BRIDGE

Wiggins had lived by that standard as a pro athlete on the softball field, a Marine military police officer in the Marshall Islands and a mother pulling security shifts for Airbus in Mobile to support her son, Eli. She had built a life centered on two things: service and strength.

The ultimate test came one night on a bridge north of Mobile. She was on her way to work when a truck and her motorcycle collided.

Wiggins lay on the pavement with crushed ankles and feet and a damaged femoral artery — the main vessel supplying blood to her leg. Yet, as she called her mother, Carol Wiggins, she was eerily calm.

“Mom,” she said into the phone, “I need you to call 911.”

When Carol Wiggins called back from her home in Atmore moments later to ask how badly she was hurt, her daughter’s voice didn’t waver.

“Mom,” she said, “I’m broken in half.”

MEDICAL MARATHON

Paramedics rushed Wiggins to USA Health University Hospital in Mobile, where doctors addressed bleeding and irrigated her wounds to prevent infection. With the only Level I trauma center along the Alabama and Mississippi coasts, University Hospital has the resources to take on such complex cases. Trauma surgeons and other specialists are available 24/7.

The next day, Dr. Jeffrey Brewer, an orthopaedic surgeon new to USA Health, took on the case, marking the start of a 10-year medical marathon. Brewer saw Wiggins’ athletic mindset as one of her greatest assets through multiple surgeries, including the amputation of both legs and, in recent years, procedures to address nerve pain.

“Right from the get-go, Beth was an incredibly strong person,” Brewer says. “She accepted her condition and dealt with it as well as anybody I’ve ever seen. Then, in addition to that, she embraced it to a point where she was going to do everything possible and prove to people that she could.”

Brewer would follow Wiggins’ progress from when she took the first tentative steps on carbon fiber limbs to the high-impact adventures that followed: skydiving, scuba diving and eventually the call to climb.



BETH WIGGINS APPROACHES LIFE without a pause button. Over a 10-year medical journey, Dr. Jeffrey Brewer at USA Health has tailored orthopaedic support to serve as the launchpad for Wiggins' milestones.



“

He's the most patient-oriented doctor I've ever met. He listens to me, and he asks about my adventures.

”

THE 5-ACRE PRAYER

Wiggins reclaimed her life in the outdoors, working for a veterans' nonprofit and taking people with disabilities on hunting trips.

This past September, when she heard about the all-female expedition to Kilimanjaro, she thought and prayed about the climb as she rode her lawn mower across 5 acres of grass. "All I kept hearing from God was, 'Go for it,'" she says.

While her grit was forged in sports and the Marines, she credits a deeper source for the endurance she needed to navigate the decade after the bridge.

"The truth is that you're a child of God and that you're loved unconditionally," Wiggins says. "No matter what, he'll give us the strength we need to keep going."

She spent the next few months training — shouldering a weighted vest and grinding out

miles on an inclined treadmill. Two weeks before Africa, she went to the USA Health Strada Patient Care Center in Mobile for a final checkup with Brewer (now chair and associate professor of orthopaedic surgery at South's Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine). After a decade, he knew the rhythm of her life better than anyone.

"He's the most patient-oriented doctor I've ever met," she says. "He listens to me, and he asks about my adventures."

THE NEXT HORIZON

A week after returning from Kilimanjaro, Wiggins emerges from Brewer's office. "Nothing's broken," she tells her mom. She is bruised and sore from the climb but still smiling, remembering the beauty of the mountain rather than the pain of descending

prematurely. Around her neck hangs a gold pendant with the word that has defined her last decade: Strength.

The mountain did not defeat her. On Kilimanjaro, success wasn't going to be measured in vertical feet. Wiggins has been facing mountains for the last 10 years. In each approach, she finds her peak.

"I leave Friday for Utah," she says, announcing a trip to the National Ability Center in Park City. "I've been asked to go to the Olympic training facility to try winter sports."

And just like that, she's on to her next adventure.

The Wichita Blueprint: from Fairways to Flight Paths

As South prepares to welcome Airbus engineers to USA Technology and Research Park, University leaders look to Wichita State University's Innovation Campus as a model for growth.

BY **TERI GREENE**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GAVIN PETERS**

WICHITA, KANSAS — On a sunny, clear afternoon on Wichita State University's Innovation Campus, locals trudge through a constant circular wind with the same nonchalance that Alabamians show in dealing with oppressive humidity.

In this wide-open landscape, there is little to buffer the breeze. That stately, settled vibe of a traditional university just isn't here. But it doesn't feel like the concrete canyons of a big city, either.

Instead, it's a vast plain dotted with glassy horizontal monoliths bearing the names of multinational leaders in aerospace, defense and advanced intelligence — among them Airbus. This is a 120-acre industrial ecosystem of regional headquarters spaced out with room to breathe, connected by miles of wide, white sidewalks.

Starting in the 1920s, this property was a Wichita landmark: the picturesque, tree-lined Braeburn Golf Course. After Wichita State purchased the course in 1967, it became the home turf of Wichita State's golf teams and a favorite recreational spot for alumni and staff. But by 2014, the greens were gone. Everyone knew what was coming; the change fulfilled a vision nearly 50 years in the planning.

The fairways of Braeburn made way for a prototype hub of academic and industrial growth built to move at the same speed as the companies it was designed to house.



The Wichita State story can serve as a road map for the University of South Alabama. As the global aerospace giant Airbus prepares to relocate its Mobile-based engineering team to South's Technology and Research Park, the city and the University are facing their own seismic shifts in how higher education and heavy industry coexist.

The partnership's announcement at the MacQueen Alumni Center in fall 2025 brought plenty of fanfare, but it also left a lingering question back home: How, exactly, does this work?

To find the answer, it helps to look 720 miles northwest to the "Air Capital of the World," where a prototype for this connection has been running at full throttle for a decade.

THE START

In Wichita, a year after the fairways closed, the Innovation Campus was announced, and work started. The progress between 2016 and 2020 alone was staggering.

A foundational partner was The National Institute for Aviation Research — here, they just call it NIAR — a nonprofit aerospace research and testing center established in 1985 to support the aviation industry.

Dr. John Tomblin, the executive director of NIAR and the architect of the Wichita State model alongside the late Wichita State President Dr. John Bardo, envisioned a place where boundaries were erased between school, work and life.

Pierre Harter, Wichita State's associate vice president for research and industry engagement and a former student of Tomblin's, represents the living history of that vision. After 20 years in the private sector, Harter returned to Wichita State and served on the Board of Trustees. His very first vote was for the official authorization to tear up the abandoned fairways to build this innovation hub.

"Most universities do basic or fundamental research — theoretical science that doesn't necessarily solve a problem today," Harter says. "The niche Wichita State found is applied research. We ask the companies, 'What's your problem?' and then we figure out how to solve it right now."

Airbus was the first company to relocate its engineering center to Wichita State, in 2016. In the early 2000s, Airbus was seeking a meaningful expansion, looking not only for another building but also for access to the crash test labs, wind tunnels and material research that NIAR possesses. Now, hundreds of its engineers and student employees work on the future of commercial flight.

VALUE PROPOSITION

While engineers at the Wichita facility design and test the skeletons of aircraft, specializing in the heavy physics of stress, loads and structural integrity, the Airbus Engineering Center in Mobile designs the "living" parts of the plane. That includes cabin interiors, seating and electrical systems.

The center opened in 2007 following a commitment from the European aerospace company to expand its U.S. footprint. Less than a decade later, Airbus opened its first U.S. production site with construction of the A320 family final assembly line.

In April, a group of University of South Alabama administrators and deans visited Kansas to witness the Wichita blueprint in action, spending hours on-site and in strategic sessions with the Wichita State Innovation Campus leaders to study the operating system behind this success.

The value proposition for Mobile is measured in a single metric: time.

According to Harter, traditional straight-A students with no internship experience typically require two years of professional training before they're fully productive at a company like Airbus. An internship may shrink that time to 18 months. But a student immersed in the applied learning model at Wichita State is ready to "take the training wheels off" in just three to six months.

"They get a meaningful resume with years of experience on it while they're still in college," Harter says. For Airbus and other companies on the campus, he says, this isn't just a real estate deal. It's a four-year working interview that creates a "sticky" workforce, with graduates who are already coded into the company culture before they ever receive a diploma.

IT'S A FOUR-YEAR WORKING INTERVIEW that creates a "sticky" workforce, with graduates who are already coded into the company culture before they ever receive a diploma.

A DELEGATION FROM SOUTH, top left, which included Dr. Michael Chambers (writing), chief economic development officer, and Dr. Michael Capella (next to Chambers), dean of the Mitchell College of Business, visited Wichita State University's Innovation Campus in April. At NIAR's Hub for Advanced Manufacturing and Research, center, a short stroll from the Airbus facility, are engineering bays where rows of students sit at monitors, building the digital twins of the aircraft being modified nearby.

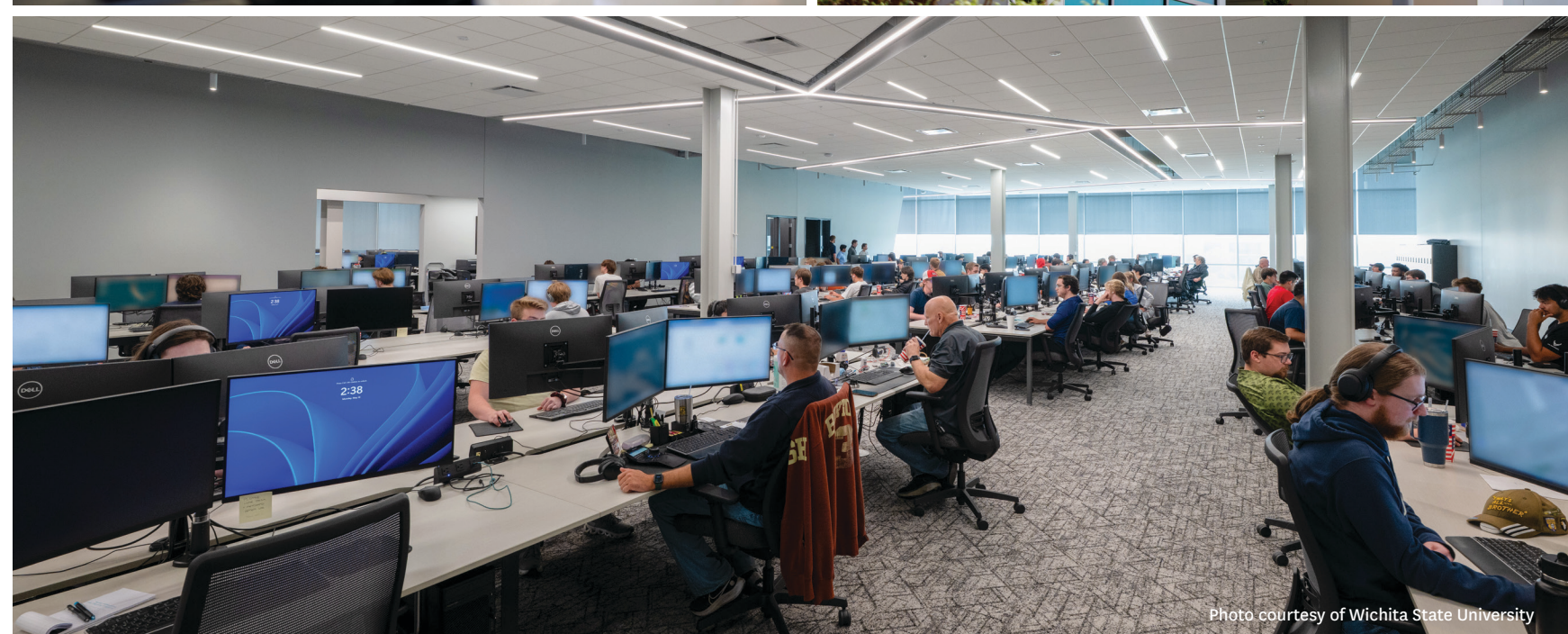


Photo courtesy of Wichita State University





RAPID PROTOTYPES, REAL-WORLD SCALE

The heart of Wichita State’s applied research model is visible at NIAR’s Hub for Advanced Manufacturing and Research. The 170,000-square-foot facility is a research, development and training space powering innovation in emerging technology, advanced materials, digital twin modeling, advanced machining, additive manufacturing, automated fiber placement and factory automation. The atmosphere is one of clinical precision.

While it occupies the footprint of a hangar, the facility is a sophisticated hive of interlocking zones. One corner houses robotics, where autonomous arms pivot with to-the-millimeter precision and beyond-human speed. Another is a digital forge for additive manufacturing, where 3D printers hum as they “grow” complex aerospace prototype parts from high-strength polymers and continuous carbon fibers that, in their raw state, look like simple spools of twine.

But the true engine of the facility is upstairs in the engineering bays, where rows of students sit at monitors building the digital twins of the aircraft being modified nearby.

At one workstation, a student is working on a digital model using a 3D mouse, a specialized controller with a glowing blue ring that looks more like something from a flight deck than an office desk. By twisting the center knob, he “flies” through an aircraft’s internal skeleton, rotating a tiny component to see it from every angle. He’s created a digital twin of a metal part that will be printed on the floor and installed on a modification project by the end of the week.

“It’s about seeing the end result before you even start,” he says, gesturing to the component’s image on one of his monitors. No, this exercise won’t result in a grade, but

A SMALL STANDOUT on the Innovation Campus is the original brick Pizza Hut restaurant, relocated as a museum to represent entrepreneurial history at Wichita State. Two students started the now-global company in 1958 from this building. The Innovation Campus also offers working eateries and hangouts for students, engineers and other Wichita residents to come together for fun and socialization.

it’s actual intellectual labor that he and his fellow employees know will result in actual aeronautical advancement.

The immersion is total. At another kind of campus, the students might be called interns. Here, they are professional associates earning \$12 to \$18 an hour while they learn. For many, the lines between class time and work time have vanished. They spend a massive portion of their week here, clocking in as employees before they ever graduate as engineers.

INNOVATION IN THE AIR

In addition to NIAR, the campus is a sleek glass-and-steel directory of global supply chain leaders. There’s the 90,000-square-foot outpost of Airbus. Across the way are satellite labs for Textron Aviation, the parent company of the city’s heritage aircraft brands, Cessna and Beechcraft, and Spirit AeroSystems, recently acquired by Boeing, one of the world’s largest fuselage manufacturers.

Nearby is the NetApp building, which houses a global cloud data giant. Deloitte’s Smart Factory is a 60,000-square-foot laboratory where AI-driven robots manage production lines in real time and optimize supply chain management for global business.

“It’s about seeing the end result before you even start.”

This trail of industrial leaders attracts visitors year-round, and they can stay right on campus. Hyatt Place at Wichita State University opened in 2020. All these structures represent partnerships — they’re co-owned by the companies and the university.

At any given hour, a student might finish a calculus lecture and walk 200 yards to a paid shift with a global corporation, trading their backpack for a security badge.

The path from the engineering hub to the campus’s social center is marked by a curious outlier. Tucked among the industrial buildings is the original, humble brick Pizza Hut, relocated from across town and reopened as a museum in 2018. It shows that the Wichita spirit of student-led industry isn’t a recent invention; the global franchiser was founded in 1958 by two Wichita State students with a \$600 loan. The name was chosen because the sign could accommodate only eight letters.

THE SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

If the labs represent the brain of the Innovation Campus, Braeburn Square is intended to be its heart. Named for the golf course that once stood here, it’s an upscale, modern hangout with a Starbucks, pizzerias, sandwich shops, Indian fare, and corn dog and taco joints, considered as the campus living room.

On a Tuesday night, Social Tap, the centerpiece of the square, is buzzing. The bar/restaurant is a microcosm of the campus experience. Patrons order burgers and craft beers via QR codes. A patio extends out to one of the campus’s lakes, which are prime dog-walking sites.

The crowd is diverse: students with laptops open next to their meals, pairs of young engineers shooting the breeze over beers and older Wichita residents who’ve driven onto campus just because it’s a great place to spend an evening out. A server mentions that weeknights draw a steady crowd; sometimes, it’s packed.

The university installed firepits with the hope of creating a kind of neighborhood, serving both engineers and students after hours. The infrastructure is in place, but that social collision is still a work in progress.

GLOW IN THE GLASS

At night, the campus takes on a different character. Behind the low-emissivity windows, many of the lights glow for employees and students at the always-on aerospace engine — the ones who are still refining digital twins, monitoring 3D printers and solving the problems of a global industry.

This is the vision that USA leaders are bringing to Mobile: a talent pool of students fast-tracking their careers under the wing of industry experts. The infrastructure, South’s Technology and Research Park, is already in place on the north side of campus. The presence of Airbus could not only boost the park’s power as an advanced learning and engineering hub, but perhaps serve as a magnet to draw other national aerospace and tech companies to break ground here.

Twelve years ago, Wichita had a golf course. Today, it has a flight path. As South prepares to open its doors to Airbus, the lesson is clear: The future belongs to those ready to build it in real time.

TIME FLIES

The past decade has seen explosive growth since the 2014 Innovation Campus groundbreaking of what was once a golf course. Here are some of the top moments.

2014
Braeburn Golf Course closed to make way for development.

2015
Plans announced for Braeburn Square, a 20-acre mixed-use development with restaurants, shops and lodging.

2017
Experiential Engineering Building opens; Dassault Systemes opens its 3DExperience Center.

Airbus Americas Engineering opens its 90,000-square-foot facility.

2018
Spirit AeroSystems and FirePoint Innovations Center become major tenants. The original Pizza Hut building is relocated and reopened as the Pizza Hut Museum.

2020
National Institute for Aviation Research’s Advanced Virtual Engineering and Testing Lab opens.

Hyatt Place at Wichita State University opens on the Innovation Campus.

2022
The Smart Factory by Deloitte @ Wichita opens in its 60,000-square-foot building. Fortune 500 company NetApp opens its 168,000-square-foot Wichita headquarters.

2023
Digital Research and Transformation Hub opens, housing offices of the National Institute for Research and Digital Transformation.

U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives’ Crime Gun Intelligence Center, with more than 200 employees, opens and announces an expansion that will add a \$75 million forensics lab adjacent to the building.

2024
National Institute for Aviation Research (NIAR) Hub for Advanced Manufacturing and Research breaks ground on the Innovation Campus.

2025
Shocker Fly Lab, an enclosed universal access transceiver flight facility, is announced for the Innovation Campus.



BY STEVE MILLBURG

Explore the possibilities for a reimagined campus. A master plan for growth meets at the intersection of pragmatic planning and blue-sky thinking.

IT'S A LOVELY SPRING DAY at the University of South Alabama in 2037. Students throng the heart of campus near the Student Center. They soak up the sun, chase Frisbees and study. Food trucks and coffee carts do brisk business. An outdoor class meets by Three Mile Creek, which is now deep enough for kayaking. Students cross a bridge toward their internship at USA Technology and Research Park. That's one vision for how the University could evolve as it implements its 2027-37 master plan, which is now taking shape. The campus could feel like a cluster of neighborhoods, each with their own identity and energy. Wide, smooth pathways would connect them all, friendly to bicycles and electric scooters as well as pedestrians.

"I think this is fully reenvisioning campus," says Dr. Steven Scyphers '12, professor of marine science and sociology, the University's chief sustainability officer and a member of the master plan committee. "And why is that important? I think probably the short answer is that the ambition for growth and ambition for the future of the University are just accelerating so fast, we need to make sure that the natural and built environment on campus is ready to match." The plan, expected to be completed by fall, is a building and design guide for the next 10 years. It's a document of potential and possibilities, not a fixed blueprint. Many of the ideas need funding sources; priorities could change. But it does give a glimpse into South's campus of the future.



THE MASTER PLAN TAKING SHAPE calls for improved pedestrian pathways across campus. Two possibilities include a boardwalk over Three Mile Creek, opposite page, and a corridor that would cut across the campus's central traffic circle, left, pending traffic control measures. An amphitheater could host performances.

YOU BE THE ARCHITECT

"Think about creating a core of vibrant academic activity with a perimeter of sports, performing arts and other amenity-type programs **WHERE EVERYONE COMES TOGETHER.**"

— CHRISTIAN RODRIGUEZ, ARCHITECT

Some proposals already have significant momentum behind them, including a new College of Education and Professional Studies building, supported by the Where Bold Begins comprehensive campaign (Page 10), closer to the heart of campus. Other ideas include:

AN OUTDOOR CLASSROOM constructed along Three Mile Creek, which would hold more water through stormwater management.

A NEW CENTRAL GREEN SPACE between Marx Library and the Student Center, with improved access across the ravine to the west.

A PEDESTRIAN CORRIDOR that would link SouthPaw Village (Page 6) and the dining hall to the rest of the campus residential core. From there, it would cross the traffic circle to reach the chemistry and humanities buildings, pass through the Student Center's new central green and ultimately connect to the east side of campus.

REPURPOSING OF UNDERUTILIZED BUILDINGS for laboratories and other facilities that will support South's drive to reach the top tier of research universities.

BETTER DEFINED CAMPUS DISTRICTS for campus life, academics, research and sports.

"The neighborhoods exist," says Christian Rodriguez, a consultant with EskewDumezRipple, a firm that is working with the master plan committee. He cited the medical district around the new Whiddon College of Medicine and the business-engineering zone anchored by the Mitchell College of Business and Shelby Hall. For the campus as a whole, Rodriguez says, "Think about creating a core of vibrant academic activity with a perimeter of sports, performing arts and other amenity-type programs where everyone comes together." If the 2037 campus achieves the vision in the final planning document, its success will be rooted in a decision made at the start: to bring a diversity of interests — from budget and facilities to sustainability and institutional effectiveness — into the same room.

On a recent spring afternoon, the committee trekked the route of a proposed pedestrian artery. The walk offered a perspective missed by car and called to mind a practice attributed to the University's first president, Dr. Frederick P. Whiddon. He was said to have placed sidewalks where the grass had been worn down by student foot traffic.

Today's planners are extending that student-centered philosophy. Except that this group is not only watching where students walk today. They're also engineering the landscape of tomorrow.

Part of the master plan committee's efforts included soliciting feedback from campus constituents. Here are some of their visions for campus in 2037:

We have a beautiful campus with lots of nice open green space, and I hope we can continue to preserve and enhance that asset. Since our climate is a selling point, we need to make being outdoors on campus as enjoyable as possible.

A state-of-the-art facility for tours and recruitment events to welcome and engage new and future students.

I would love to see some of the pathways between Humanities and the Marx Library reopen, and more benches and better lighting around green spaces.

I hope to see intentional investments that better support both students and employees. This includes expanded and modernized spaces where students can gather, collaborate and build community.

I hope the physical changes to campus reflect a deepening of our mission as we solidify our standing as a premier research university.



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Movers and Shapers

Some legacies are measured in titles. These are not.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA'S 2026 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AND SERVICE AWARDS HONOREES are architects of something harder to quantify: careers spent dismantling barriers, growing communities and ensuring the next generation finds a stronger foundation to build on. Their leadership and service were celebrated at the National Alumni Association's 21st Annual Distinguished Alumni and Service Awards on March 5 at the MacQueen Alumni Center.

A COLLECTION OF OBJECTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS that trace the lives of alumni and supporters celebrated in the following pages.

Roddy Lee McKinney II

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

Roddy Lee McKinney began running in the eighth grade. A few years later, driven by a clear directive from his family to earn a college scholarship or enlist in the military, he chose college, running cross-country for the University of South Alabama under the guidance of coaches who provided a sense of belonging and care.

He began his professional life in insurance sales but answered a call to join the family business, McKinney Communications Corp., and embrace his entrepreneurial spirit.

McKinney helped transform that family-owned company into a field services powerhouse and a national partner for Dish Network, guiding its growth from a team of 12 to an employee-owned organization of over 700. Despite this national scale, his focus is tethered to South.

His commitment is etched into the landscape through the MacQueen Alumni Center and its McKinney Family Greek Plaza. By creating scholarship opportunities and supporting new infrastructure, he ensures that future scholars find a strong support system, just like he did.



Dr. Patricia Sanders '77

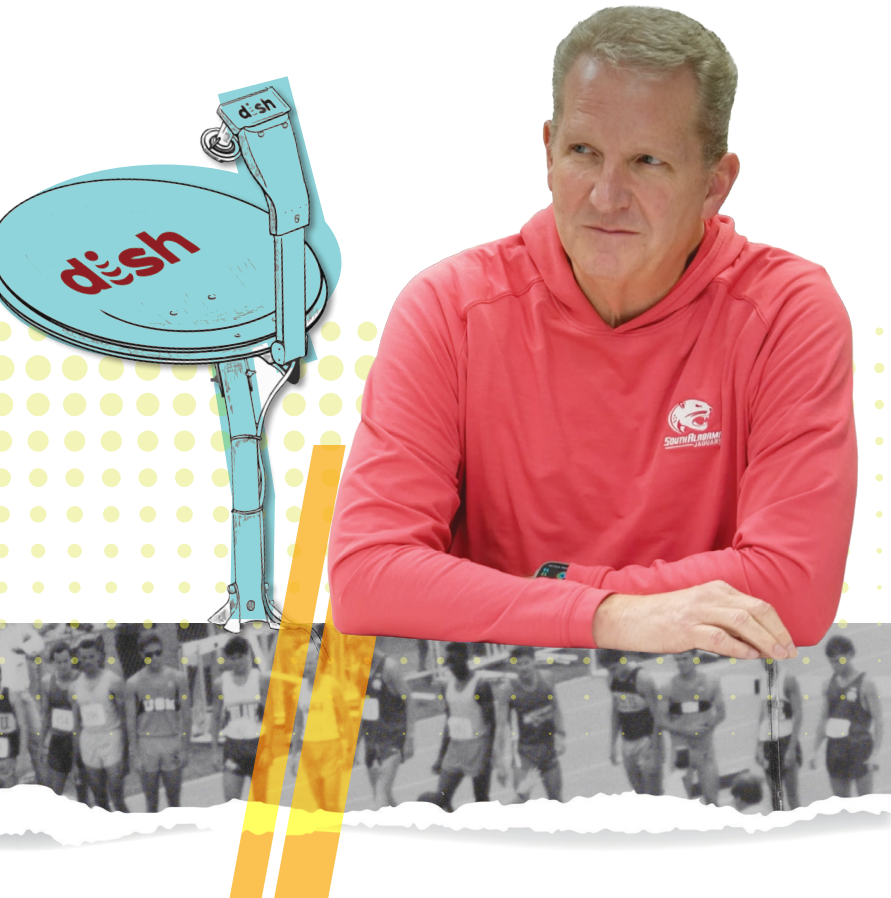
DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

Dr. Patricia Sanders shattered systemic barriers in 1977 as the first African American woman to graduate from the University of South Alabama's College of Medicine. She was the youngest of 12 children in her family and the first to earn a college degree. As a child, her most prized possession was a toy doctor's bag.

But her future in medicine was uncertain. After graduating as the first Black female premed student from the University of Alabama, she saw one medical school after another turn her away. The moment she learned that the University of South Alabama was interested, she redirected her life, working to become the first African American female gynecological surgeon in Alabama.

Throughout a 36-year career, Sanders balanced surgical excellence with medical leadership. Faced with the reality that patients in rural areas often lacked access to gynecological specialists, she expanded her reach from Birmingham to Sylacauga and Clanton, ensuring that her expertise reached those who needed it most.

Sanders' body of work serves as a blueprint for service, dismantling obstacles and forging an equitable path for those who follow.



Carol '94 and Jim '72 Statter

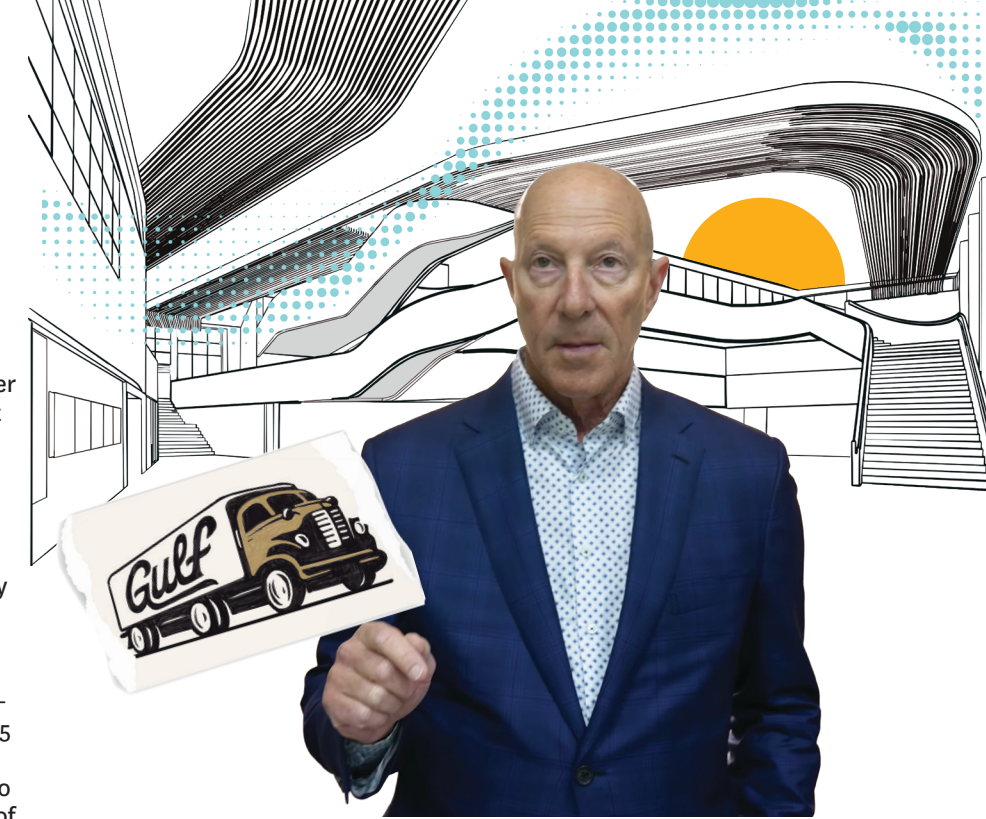
DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Carol and Jim Statter view the University as the bedrock of their shared life, a place of return and rediscovery. South welcomed Jim home in 1968 after 13 months of service in Vietnam, offering him a seat back in his fraternity and a bridge to his future as a graduate. For Carol, the University is a source of profound pride, a "true flagship" for the region.

Since the USA football program began in 2009, the couple has become a fixture at home and away games. The stadium is a gathering place where they reconnect with friends from long ago.

The Statters, now retired, translate their professional success — Jim as the owner of Dixie Leasing and Carol as a leader at Infirmity Health — into contributions to the University. Their latest \$2.5 million gift reflects their deepest personal values. While their support bolsters Jaguar athletics, it also funds a literacy program that Carol calls an "issue of the heart," designed to ensure no child is lost in the educational system because they cannot read by the fourth grade.

The Statters are pillars of the campus community. Their body of work proves that when alumni reinvest their hearts into their alma mater, they empower those who follow.



Elliot Maisel

V. GORDON MOULTON DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Elliot Maisel champions a vision of regional growth that treats the University of South Alabama as the primary engine for progress. As chairman and CEO of Gulf Distributing Holdings, he transformed a modest family warehouse into a vital economic force, supporting what he calls the "Golden Age of Mobile" by relocating his company's headquarters and nearly 300 employees to the heart of downtown.

Maisel strengthened the future of local healthcare in September 2024 by becoming the largest individual donor to the Whiddon College of Medicine's new education and research building. His \$5 million gift supercharges the University's capacity to train physicians at an institution that is performing better than 83% of all medical schools in the nation at keeping graduates in state.

Honored as Alabama's 2024 CEO of the Year, Maisel operates on the belief that the University is the single most important driver of regional stature. For him, the true measure of success isn't found in a warehouse or a boardroom, but in the enduring strength of the community that launched his career.



Dr. Alvin Williams

WILLIAM J. "HAPPY" FULFORD
INSPIRATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Dr. Alvin Williams discovered his calling at age 21, stepping into a college classroom filled with students older than himself and realizing, within a week, that teaching marketing would become his life's work. Nearly five decades later, his legacy is measured not in titles, but in the careers of the students who grew into professionals and stayed in his life long after graduation.

After retiring from teaching and academic leadership in Mississippi, Williams arrived at South as a distinguished professor of marketing. He never intended to return to administration, but when the Mitchell College of Business needed a leader, he answered the call, first as department chair and later as interim dean.

As a child, he dreamed of becoming a "world correspondent." That curiosity later fueled decades of study-abroad experiences — over 40 of them — that helped shape students' worldviews.

For Williams, the destination wasn't a place on a map. It was the moment a student became who they were meant to be.



Hargrove Foundation

COMMUNITY PARTNER AWARD

The Hargrove Foundation redefines corporate citizenship by treating community prosperity as a personal responsibility rather than a business metric. As the charitable arm of Hargrove Controls & Automation, the foundation has channeled nearly \$4 million into the Gulf Coast since 2011, supporting everything from disaster relief after numerous tornadoes to the Hargrove Adaptive Toy Project, which modifies vehicles for children with limited mobility.

For the University of South Alabama, the foundation serves as a vital conduit for professional growth. While it has supported major physical projects like Hancock Whitney Stadium, its greatest impact lies in the rising professionals it mentors and hires. The parent firm, Hargrove Controls, consistently leans on the University's engineering and medical programs, opening doors for nearly 200 South Alabama alumni and a steady stream of interns who represent the region's future.

Founded by Ralph A. Hargrove, a 2019 recipient of the V. Gordon Moulton Distinguished Service Award, the foundation fosters a culture in which industry and academia work hand in hand.



>> [LEARN MORE](#)

GET TO KNOW the award winners and their stories via video.

JAGUAR SPOTS

Rosette



THE INAUGURAL HOME & GARDEN SHOW, supporting USA Health Providence Hospital, drew 42 vendors, including specialists in Americana antiques, memorabilia and collectibles. The show was held in March at the Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center.



Inspiration and Impact Bloom

THE INAUGURAL HOME & GARDEN SHOW, held March 19-22 at the Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center in downtown Mobile, blended antiques and design inspiration with meaningful community impact in its successful debut.

Hosted by the Providence Foundation, the event welcomed more than 2,220 ticket holders representing 18 states, along with 42 vendors from 13 states, 25 community partners, and 41 event committee members from across Mobile and Baldwin counties. The event introduced a new experience for the community and exceeded fundraising results from previous signature events benefiting the Providence Foundation and USA Health Providence Hospital.

The show opened with a sold-out preview party and featured four special events, including a bourbon tasting and lectures featuring Christopher Spitzmiller, Paloma

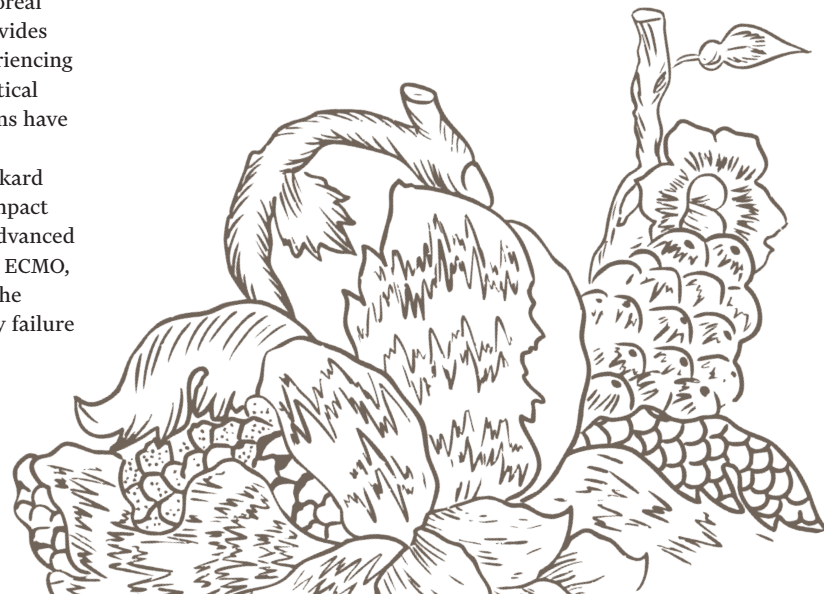
Contreras and Barry Dixon, all nationally recognized leaders in design expertise and lifestyle inspiration.

Beyond its celebration of home and garden design, the show had a deeper purpose: supporting the ECMO program at Providence Hospital. As the region's first extracorporeal membrane oxygenation program, it provides advanced life support for patients experiencing severe heart or lung failure, offering critical care close to home when all other options have been exhausted.

Already, patient stories like Earl Drinkard Jr.'s highlight the program's lifesaving impact and the importance of rapid access to advanced care in the Gulf Coast region. Thanks to ECMO, the 33-year-old recently walked out of the hospital after having been in respiratory failure and spending 24 days in intensive care.



>> LEARN MORE
WATCH EARL DRINKARD JR. leave USA Health Providence Hospital smiling after 24 days in intensive care.



STALLWORTH SELECTED TO USA BOARD OF TRUSTEES

RONNIE STALLWORTH '03 is a fixture courtside at Jaguar basketball games. Now, he is playing both ends of the floor with dual roles.

Stallworth, who is finishing his term as president of the University of South Alabama National Alumni Association,

will remain on its board after his term ends in August. He is also the newest member of the USA Board of Trustees; Stallworth was selected to fill the expiring term of Bill Lewis, who stepped down upon his appointment to the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Alabama.

"Alumni engagement is a critical piece to connecting current students with those who are out

in the workforce with the means and experience to make a greater impact on current students, the University and the community," says Stallworth, vice president for business development strategy at Hargrove Engineers & Constructors. "As a trustee, I will be on the lookout for these connections, which allow our alumni to 'pay it forward' through knowledge, mentoring and financial support."



1. CARVE YOUR OWN NICHE

You can't control every turn your career takes, but you can master where you land. Wojciechowski credits serendipity for his path into real estate. "It picked me," he says. His key to success? Becoming a subject-matter expert in a niche tax law, which made him as essential as "one of two plumbers in town."

2. IT PAYS TO PIVOT

Leaving MD Anderson Cancer Center after 14 years working there was a turning point for Owen, but her biggest shift was moving from academic leadership to the biotech industry. "It was like starting at the beginning," she says of her move into human therapeutics. "I had to become an early influencer just to get products out there. It was humbling, but it paid off."

3. ALL ABOARD THE AI TRAIN

Both leaders urge students to embrace artificial intelligence. Owen uses her own dedicated AI agent. "Ten years ago, understanding social media was your edge," Wojciechowski says. "Today, that edge is AI. If you don't have a basic understanding of large language models, you'll struggle to compete against those who do."

Billions, Biotech and Bots

A TALK WITH LAURIE OWEN AND MICHAEL WOJCIECHOWSKI

Alumni trailblazers Dr. Laurie Owen '80 and Dr. Michael Wojciechowski '78, MBA '81, shared insights on entrepreneurial leadership during an April session of the President's Cabinet at the MacQueen Alumni Center.

With 35 years in biomedical research, Owen has guided multimillion-dollar initiatives at University of California, Riverside; University of California, San Diego; and USA Health. She now advises global investors. Wojciechowski brings 45 years of experience in real estate and tech, having developed 60,000 multifamily units and raised over \$3 billion. He currently serves as a senior lecturer at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

THE GARDEN WAS CREATED WITH A VISION of fostering “a culture of togetherness within a safe therapeutic space.”

— LYNETTE PARKER '97



Growing Community Connections

AS SPRING BEGAN TO FADE TO SUMMER,

the USA Health Center for Healthy Communities' garden, maintained by Lynette Parker '97 was in full bloom.

“It's looking gorgeous right now,” says Parker, research manager at the center. “We've got squash blooms; we've got cucumber blooms. We've got cherry tomatoes.”

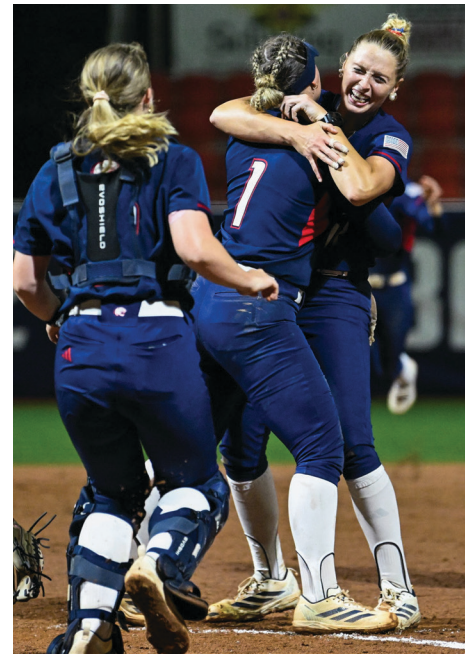
Established in December 2025 with a \$10,000 grant from the Junior League of Mobile and support from Mobile Urban Growers, the garden was created with a vision of fostering “a culture of togetherness within a safe

therapeutic space,” says Parker, who earned her bachelor's degree in anthropology from South.

Since its first planting and harvest, the garden has provided organically grown produce to individuals and families facing difficult circumstances, including patients recovering from gunshot wounds and justice-impacted youth involved in USA Health programs. In March and early April alone, 18 bunches of collard greens, 19 heads of lettuce and 64 radishes were distributed from the garden's harvest.

Mobile Urban Growers provided early technical support, including the donation of three garden beds, initial collard green plantings, ongoing coaching and spring plants. There are now 10 raised beds at the site on North Catherine Street in Mobile.

“We see the garden as a place of connection and community building,” Parker says.



TEXAS HOLD 'EM

THE JAGUARS ARE SUN BELT CHAMPIONS in softball again, 11 years to the day since their last conference title win, after beating Texas State 3-2 in tournament play in Lafayette, Louisiana.

With the May 9 victory, South claimed its fourth tournament title in program history, in its sixth title game appearance.

The Jags (32-25/13-11 in the conference) were the tournament's fifth seed, but defeated fourth seed Southern Miss, first seed Louisiana-Monroe and third seed Texas State on their way to the title. The Jags scored all three runs in the top of the fourth inning. Texas State cut the lead to one in the seventh inning before the Jags held on to win.

JAGUAR SPIRIT DOMINATES

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA'S CHEER AND DANCE TEAMS won national recognition at the spring College Classic competition in Orlando, Florida.

The Prowlers took home the top prize in the Division I Small Jazz and Rally Dance categories. Members of the cheer team earned first in Partner Stunt and All-Girl Group Stunt categories.



Bay Watch

South alum Jason Kudulis safeguards the Mobile Bay watershed in an era of rapid change.

WHEN JASON KUDULIS '06 LOOKS TOWARD THE GULF COAST, he sees a delicate balance between its natural beauty and increasing development. As the new director of the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, Kudulis is tasked with managing that tension.

His primary tools are a newly approved 10-year comprehensive conservation and management plan and the first major assessment update in 18 years to the State of Alabama's Estuaries and Coast Report.

Both arrive at a critical juncture: In the last two decades, the region has weathered a historic oil spill, intensifying hurricanes and an influx of new residents.

“People want to move here, and I don't blame them,” says Kudulis, who has been with the program for nearly 10 years. “But as they do that, we're seeing repercussions from the past 20 years of growth that we're trying

to manage. It's a mindset of, ‘How can we minimize our impact so we're not compounding and intensifying them over the next several decades?’”

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, funded and guided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, is one of 28 such programs around the country that aim to protect and restore water quality, restore natural habitats and maintain ecological integrity in the region's estuaries. It comprises government, industry, nonprofit organizations and academia, including USA faculty.

To safeguard an estuary fed by one of the nation's largest freshwater inflow systems, Kudulis draws on his education, including a bachelor's degree in geography from South, and years of outdoor experience in the National Park Service. He doesn't see science,

JASON KUDULIS stands near the banks of Joes Branch, a tributary to D'Olive Creek in Baldwin County that was removed from Alabama's list of impaired waters after the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program led a major restoration of the site. The program also is working with USA, using bioswales and other natural measures, to filter stormwater to prevent it from carrying sediment and other pollutants into Three Mile Creek.

preservation and protection as foils to growth and industry. Instead, he takes a holistic view, believing that everyone has a place at the table. Even before he started his position in February, he was hyperaware that every rooftop, strip mall, parking lot and industrial site in the region poses a challenge for the bay and surrounding waters. With the annual economic value of Alabama's coastal resources measured in billions of dollars, he's protecting the foundation of the region's prosperity and preserving its natural assets at the same time.

“If we turn that spigot off, not just financially but in the way we're managing things, that's going to be a disservice. We've got to keep our foot on the gas of continuing to identify stressors and make decisions using the best available data to tackle them,” Kudulis says.

SNAPSHOT



A PHOTO FROM 1985, donated to the Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library by Clinton King, shows then President Frederick P. Whiddon, seated, in his office.



Her Father's Desk

A midcentury minimalist workstation that once anchored the president's office finds a second life as a sentimental centerpiece and utilitarian workhorse.

DR. KAREN PETERSON'S DESK fits the midcentury era of the Humanities Building, but a desk like hers wasn't built to live within concrete block walls. It's the desk of an executive with a list of bank presidents and their phone numbers taped on the sliding shelf — the kind you would pull out for extra space when the desktop got cluttered with 20th century tools like ledgers, desk calendars, paperweights and such. It shows its age, having lived in storage above the College of Education and Professional Studies before making its way to Humanities 263, Peterson's office. It was the desk of her late father, the University's first president, Dr. Frederick P. Whiddon. For years it anchored his office in the administration building now named after him. "He had a lot of books ... and pictures of us on the bookshelf," says Peterson. "He had his desk, and then he had a credenza behind him with a bunch of phones. Because he had to have what

they called a WATS line, one that you can make long distance calls without paying extra." A photo from 1985 shows a large ashtray on the edge of the desk, a courtesy for visitors. Whiddon is photographed receiving the final settlement papers for a case brought against the state by the University and the USA Foundation that ended up securing their claim to oil and gas revenues from submerged Mobile Bay acreage at Grant's Pass. Behind him is a gathering of faculty and staff, including Gordon Moulton (far left), who succeeded Whiddon as president, and Maxey Roberts (seventh from right), then the University attorney and now the managing director of the USA Foundation. Written on the top right of the photo is a note from Whiddon to Clinton King, a research consultant who donated the photo to South's Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library: "Thanks for sharing the moment."

Peterson came into possession of the desk soon after she started as an English instructor at the University in 2004. (She finished her bachelor's degree at South in 1984 and earned a Ph.D. at the University in 2020.) After she was hired, she was notified by then-Deans Dr. David Johnson (Arts and Sciences) and Dr. Richard Hayes (Education) of its existence. "They arranged for me to go get it," Peterson says. "So I called one of the fraternities, Pi Kappa Phi — my husband was chapter adviser there — and asked them if they would come and help me move it. We picked it up out of the attic, put it in the back of one of their trucks and brought it over here." She keeps a Newton's cradle on it, just like the one her father used to have. She remembers as a child lifting the outer steel ball and letting it clack against the next — energy transferred from one to the other.

Jag Tags

for scholarships

In Alabama, proceeds from the University of South Alabama collegiate license plates go to the "Jag Tags for Scholarships" Endowment Fund, a statewide student scholarship. More than \$147,000 in scholarships will be awarded in the 2026-27 academic year.

We invite our alumni and friends to join this effort by purchasing a Jag Tag for your vehicle.

SouthAlabama.edu/Alumni

Introducing the newest design, voted on by South Alabama Alumni!

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MESSAGE FROM THE MAC



CHEERS TO THE CLASS OF 2026!

One of my favorite spring traditions on campus is the annual New Grad Champagne Toast. Hosted by President Jo Bonner and Executive Vice President and Provost Dr. Andi Kent, this gathering is more than a celebration – it is a formal welcome into an alumni family that spans the globe with more than 100,000 Jaguars.

The Class of 2026 is, by every measure, exceptional. Throughout their time on campus, these students have balanced academic rigor with an innovative spirit and a deep sense of social responsibility. But they also share a special milestone: They were the very first class to arrive under President Bonner's leadership. They started their journey just as a new chapter for South began, and they have been authoring its success ever since.

As they transition from students to alumni, we see them as the new torchbearers of our

legacy. They carry our same commitment to excellence, now fueled by a modern perspective and the drive to solve the challenges of tomorrow.

In this spirit of excellence, this edition of South Magazine also honors our newest Distinguished Alumni and Service Award recipients. These individuals set a gold standard for leadership, embodying a lifelong commitment to professional achievement and the public good.

Please join us in raising a glass to the USA Class of 2026. As they move from the Commencement stage to the global stage, they join a distinguished legacy built by you. We truly live by the maxim "once a Jag, always a Jag," and we cannot wait to see how they shape the future.

KAREN WEBSTER EDWARDS '80
Associate Vice President,
Alumni Relations

ON THE AFTERNOON BEFORE SPRING COMMENCEMENT, graduating Jags celebrated their achievements with a champagne toast at the MacQueen Alumni Center.



2025-2026 NATIONAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Mobile Entry

BY STEVE MILLBURG
PHOTOS COURTESY OF
ALABAMA PORT AUTHORITY
AND BY SETH LAUBINGER

Imports via the Port of Mobile, 12th-largest in the country, help keep store shelves stocked from Alabama to Chicago.

FOR EVERYTHING from dolls and action figures to giant-screen TVs and just about any other consumer goods you can think of, the fastest way from Asia to Chicago can run through Mobile.

Specifically, through the Port of Mobile. It ranks 12th among U.S. ports in the amount of stuff that moves through it every year — more than 50 million tons' worth.

Doug Otto, who became director and CEO of the Alabama Port Authority in November 2025, hopes to make it even busier by boosting Alabama businesses. The idea is to show retailers, wholesalers and manufacturers how the port's efficient supply chain network could help them prosper.

Otto also sees the port as a potential catalyst for growing the state's industrial base. "If, for example, we can be a differentiator for persuading an automobile manufacturer to come to Alabama, then it helps Alabama, and it helps us."

Everybody in Mobile knows about "the docks." Residents have gotten accustomed to giant cranes on the skyline and massive cargo ships along the waterfront.

Few realize the port's true scope. It encompasses some 4,500 acres and dozens of docks, terminals, storage buildings, transfer facilities, and other structures and machines, mostly on both sides of the Mobile River just north and south of downtown Mobile.

One terminal, owned by the port and operated by APM Terminals, handles container ships. The largest are built to take advantage of the widened Panama Canal. They are loaded with thousands of 20- or 40-foot-long steel boxes, stacked improbably high on their decks and filled with everything from auto and airplane parts to retail merchandise and fertilizer. USA's Mitchell College of Business has built a strong relationship with APM Terminals that includes an internship program.

MASSIVE CRANES at the Port of Mobile unload and reload in less than a day the immense container ships that reach the port via the Panama Canal. Each crane costs up to \$20 million and can ride out a hurricane.

Other terminals specialize in steel (the port authority says Mobile is the country's second-largest steel port, handling \$2 billion worth of steel coils in 2025), coal and roll-on/roll-off ships that carry motor vehicles.

The port also handles forest products (\$1.7 billion worth in 2025) and "project cargo": airplane fuselages headed for the Airbus plant, immense wind turbine blades, gigantic machines and structural pieces for new factories, and other supersized freight. As the port authority's vision statement puts it, the port is remarkably "cargo-diverse."

"Being so diverse has insulated us from market uncertainties," says Otto. "We have so many different product lines, so many different terminals. We had a record-breaking year last year. And the year before was a record breaker. And the year before that."

To help him build out the infrastructure for growth, the new CEO recently brought on Jason Krick '03 as the port's chief engineering officer; Krick also sits on the Industrial Advisory Board for South's College of Engineering.

The port owes much of its success to connections: two major interstate highways, five of the nation's six largest (Class 1) railroads, two airports, and more than 15,000 miles of barge-navigable inland and intracoastal waterways.

"A port is a much bigger system than just the waterfront," says Dr. Peter Simonson, assistant professor of marketing, supply chain management and analytics at the Mitchell College of Business.

"It's the ships that come in. It's the trucks that handle the material. It's the rail that moves it out. It's the highways that can support that transportation. It's the distribution centers and warehouses. All of that is really part of the port ecosystem."

"BEING SO DIVERSE HAS INSULATED US FROM MARKET UNCERTAINTIES. We have so many different product lines, so many different terminals. We had a record-breaking year last year. And the year before was a record breaker. And the year before that."

— DOUG OTTO, DIRECTOR AND CEO OF THE ALABAMA PORT AUTHORITY

DR. PETER SIMONSON, center, assistant professor in the Mitchell College of Business, collaborates with leadership at the Alabama Port Authority and APM Terminals to make sure coursework in supply chain logistics aligns with industry needs. He is here with two APM employees, both USA alumni, and a South student intern.



PORT PROFILE

- 12TH** in annual tonnage, U.S.
- 7TH** in annual import tonnage, U.S.
- 15TH** in annual container units, U.S.
- 1ST** in noncontainerized steel, U.S.
- 1ST** in depth (50 feet), Gulf container ports
- 2.4 MILLION** square feet of covered warehouse space
- 50%** of U.S. population reachable by rail, truck or barge in 72 hours

Sources: Alabama Port Authority, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Descartes Datamyne



The Port of Mobile forms the root of a vast supply network that spreads through the heart of America like a mighty, many-branched oak, reaching north to the Upper Midwest and into Canada.

That's why it can be faster to transport a container of sneakers from Asia to Chicago and other cities farther north via Mobile than through a West Coast port.

A ship from China does take a week or two longer to reach Alabama (via the Panama Canal) than California. After that, the advantages shift to Mobile.

West Coast ports can get notoriously congested. Days can stretch into weeks as a ship waits to dock. After unloading, a container may sit a few more days in a warehouse until a railcar is available. On the long journey east, trains work their way through urban sprawl and summit the Rocky Mountains.

By contrast, the 130 or so large vessels that call at Mobile every month normally berth immediately with no waiting. Most container ships are unloaded, reloaded and sent back to sea within 24 hours. Crewmembers complain that the port's efficiency gives them too little time ashore.

And freight trains shooting north through the heartland face few natural or manmade impediments.

"A container can move from off the ship to Chicago in three days coming from Mobile," says Maggie Oliver, the port authority's chief development officer. "It takes 10 to 15 days coming from the West Coast." That container can travel to Toronto in another couple of days, and on to points north.

Dredging the ship channel to 50 feet, completed last fall, moved Mobile to the head of the line for ships coming through the Panama Canal. It gave Alabama's port the deepest channel in the Gulf except for the 54-foot channel at Corpus Christi, Texas, where the port deals chiefly in petroleum and liquefied natural gas exports.

Heavily laden container ships can now unload first in Mobile so they ride high enough in the water for shallower ports.

In addition to its Mobile base of operations, the port operates eight inland river ports, is building a \$100 million train-to-truck container transfer facility in Montgomery (expected to open next year) and is contemplating a similar project in the fast-growing Huntsville area.

The Alabama Port Authority estimates that in 2024, the most recent year for which statistics are available, the Port of Mobile contributed \$89.1 billion in economic value to Alabama and is directly or indirectly responsible for one in seven of the state's jobs.

South graduates fill some of those jobs, and the relatively new Mitchell College supply chain and logistics major, launched in fall 2021, will add to those ranks. The program has grown quickly since its inception, and it has evolved — the University recently became the first in the country to offer a marine terminal operator certificate to undergraduate students through a collaboration with the International Association of Maritime and Port Executives.

Mitchell College students have transitioned seamlessly to APM Terminals internships because their coursework accurately reflects real-life experience at the docks. South graduates also stay in the Mobile area for employment at higher rates than those of other universities, so the company benefits from its investment in their training.

Consumer goods and jobs spread north across Alabama and beyond, thanks to the powerful economic engine that hums along the Mobile waterfront.



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

FLAGSHIP OF THE GULF COAST.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

USA Health GO Run

for Gynecologic Oncology
Sept. 26
Hancock Whitney Stadium

Wall of Honor Ceremony

Presented by the USA National
Alumni Association
Oct. 1
Moulton Tower and Alumni Plaza

Homecoming/Family Weekend

USA vs. ULM
Bonfire, pep rally and tailgate
Oct. 1-3

Holiday Concert

Presented by the
Department of Music
Dec. 3
USA Mitchell Center

>> MORE EVENTS

