

FALL 2025

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# South

magazine

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

Oysters  
Scared Strong  
20

Tiny  
Fighters

Civilian  
Life

Novel  
Approach

Coast  
Train



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

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# South magazine

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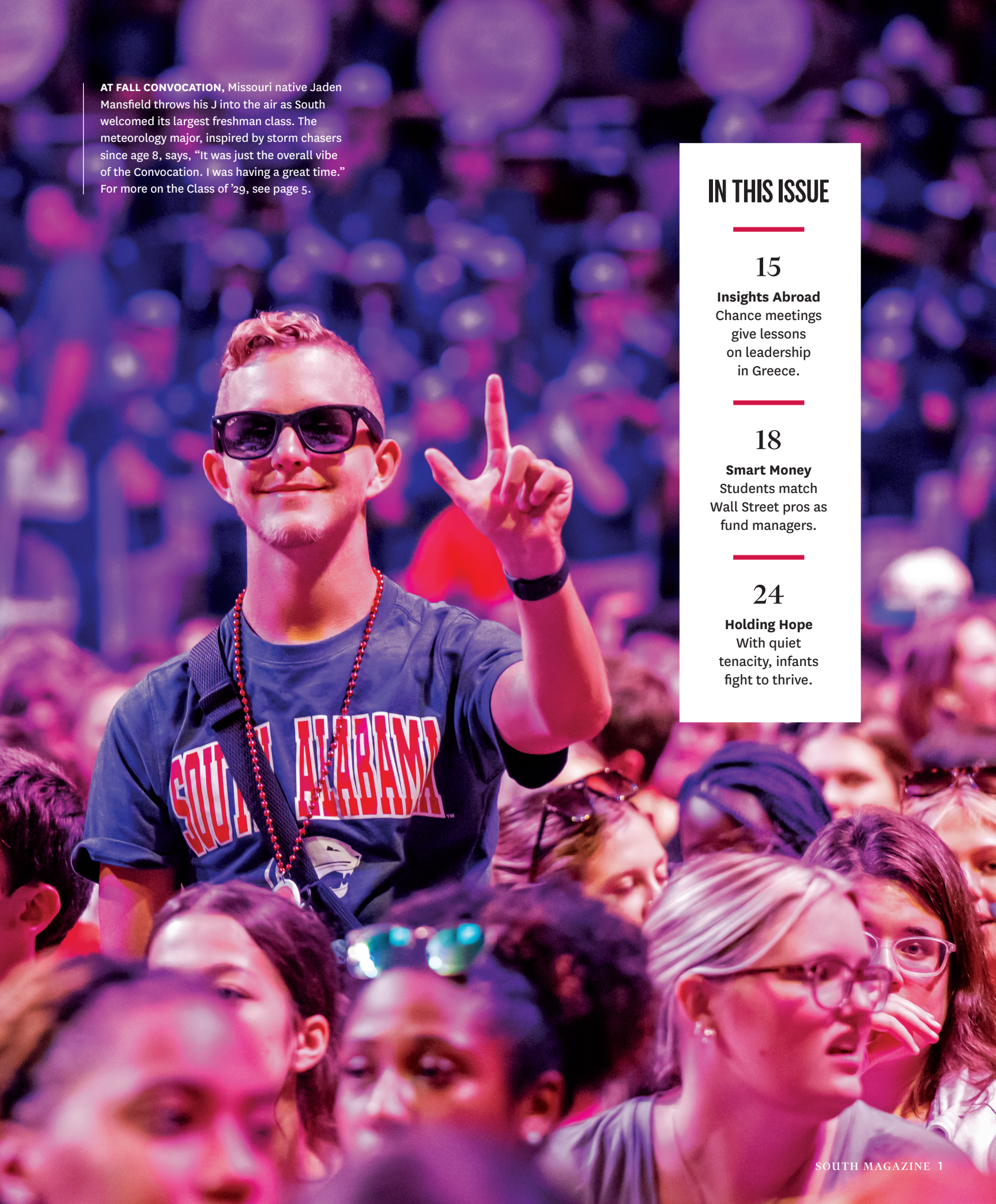
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**ON THE COVER**  
The University of South Alabama ranks among the top universities in the country for the study of a keystone Gulf species: oysters. See page 20. The mollusk's jagged, calcified shell protects the hardworking, resilient animal within. Illustration by Ale + Ale.







**AT FALL CONVOCATION**, Missouri native Jaden Mansfield throws his J into the air as South welcomed its largest freshman class. The meteorology major, inspired by storm chasers since age 8, says, "It was just the overall vibe of the Convocation. I was having a great time." For more on the Class of '29, see page 5.

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With quiet tenacity, infants fight to thrive.









## &gt;&gt; ON THE GO

Watch a video of students catching a ride with President Bonner on the Jag Trolley.

# True Grit

At the University of South Alabama,  
we believe in working harder and smarter.

**OUR UNIVERSITY** and the city we call home have both had to earn everything we've gained. That has made us both all the stronger. Mobile, with its rich culture and economic vibrancy, has always drawn people who wanted something better and were willing to work hard to get it. That was true of the defense workers who poured into the city to help win World War II — and is still true of today's engineers and other skilled employees in shipbuilding and aerospace, among other industries.

It also describes the eager young people who flooded onto campus this fall as part of the largest freshman class in South's history, helping us achieve a third straight year of enrollment growth.

Pursuing a college degree — turning your dreams into your future — takes effort and perseverance. Just ask our ROTC students, veterans and other military-affiliated Jaguars. Or the students and alumni of the Pat Capps Covey College of Allied Health Professions, celebrating its 50th anniversary this fall.

Or star wide receiver Devin Voisin, returning this fall for his NCAA record-tying seventh consecutive football season. Our coaches stuck with him through frustrating injuries, and he has returned their loyalty.

Consider, too, the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine. Nearly a decade of tenacious groundwork paid off when the college opened in January 1973. This September, medical students and members of our administration and Board of Trustees signed the final structural beam of a new, state-of-the-art College of Medicine building.

When it opens in January 2027, the facility will allow for expanded class sizes. That means more caregivers and researchers — more hope and healing. For infants fighting for survival at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital. For adults in chronically underserved areas. For all.

Just as our faculty members challenge students to stretch their capabilities in pursuit of their desired paths, so too does our University challenge itself to expand its ambitions. We have embarked on a new path in one of our core missions: research (the others being teaching and healthcare).

We are committing the necessary resources to move toward R1 classification, the top tier for research institutions (a step above our current classification of R2). We do so seeking not status but rather an improved quality of life for our community and our world.

Others already recognize our expertise in many areas — for example, oyster biology and restoration. Oyster reefs once protected shorelines all along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Helping oysters rebuild those natural breakwaters will benefit millions of homeowners, businesses and vacationers.

Success never comes easy, and having to put in a little extra effort along our journey allows us to celebrate the diligence and determination that carried us triumphantly to the good times. After all, it takes an irritant — a bit of grit — for an oyster to make a pearl.

Go Jags!

Jo Bonner  
President



VIEW FROM THE

# Bell Tower



**I SCREAM, YOU SCREAM**, we all scream "Go Jags!" when we try Jag Tracks, the newest flavor from the beloved Cammie's Old Dutch Ice Cream Shoppe.



## Jag Tracks: A Sweet New Tradition



**CAMMIE'S OLD DUTCH ICE CREAM SHOPPE** has teamed up with the University of South Alabama to create Jag Tracks, a flavor best eaten in multiple scoops. It's creamy vanilla swirled with chocolate and caramel, studded with big chunks of Old Dutch's house-baked brownies and a crunch of crushed Biscoff cookies.

The signature treat was the idea of a group of South employees, including Whitley Byrd '16, who reached out to Old Dutch owner Camilla Wayne, and Brie Thomas '18, who suggested its name, a play on her childhood favorite, moose tracks. Wayne often sources flavor inspiration from her customers, and this time the combination of decadent mix-ins and a spirited name made for a perfect match.

Although it was sampled widely throughout late summer and early fall (word of mouth led to demand), Jag Tracks made its big-time debut at an Oct. 14 football tailgate hosted by the University's Division of Finance and Administration, where Byrd and Thomas work.

A Mobile favorite since 1969, Old Dutch makes more than 700 gallons of ice cream each week, serving 47 flavors across three area locations and dozens of retail stores.

## ENROLLMENT GROWS FOR THIRD CONSECUTIVE YEAR

**THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA** welcomed its largest freshman class ever this fall and recorded its third straight year of enrollment gains.

In all, 14,285 students enrolled at South. The gains were fueled by a rise in undergraduate enrollment, including 2,137 new first-year students. Retention also continues to be a bright spot, with record numbers of students returning for their third and fourth years.

"A third consecutive year of enrollment growth is a testament to our dedicated faculty and staff who have worked so hard to make the

University of South Alabama a top choice for students," says University President Jo Bonner.

South's freshmen enrollment has surged more than 30% in the past three years. The University's enrollment team recorded 750 visits to high schools and off-campus events last year, including 51 Jag Days, when students get spirited rides to campus on red and blue Jaguar Athletics buses.

This year's class is also one of the most academically talented, with a record-tying average high school GPA of 3.75. Nearly 3,000 students are living on campus, the most in the University's history.

>> **27%**

increase in students in the Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences

>> **15%**

increase in undergraduate students in the Pat Capps Covey College of Allied Health Professions

>> **9%**

increase in undergraduate enrollment in the College of Engineering

>> **49%**

increase in graduate enrollment in the Mitchell College of Business



**ROBIN HAYES**, Airbus in North America Chairman and CEO, announced Airbus' new partnership with South at the 2025 USA Research & Technology Showcase.

## Airbus Announces Campus Move

A new partnership between the University of South Alabama and one of the world's largest aerospace companies has cleared the way for Airbus to relocate its Mobile-based U.S. Engineering Center to USA's Research and Technology Park. The goal is to develop the next generation of industry professionals on South's campus.

"We believe that we are a talent machine, and we believe that in partnering with Airbus, we're partnering with the world's most innovative, forward-looking and visionary aerospace company," President Jo Bonner said at the October announcement. That same month Airbus opened its third final assembly line

at Mobile Aeroplex at Brookley, where the company assembles its Airbus 220 and 320 family of aircraft. Airbus in North America Chairman and CEO Robin Hayes said the industry will continue to grow and develop, with the next generation of aircraft fueled by new energy sources and built with lighter, more durable materials.

"We want to harness the power of partnership with the University of South Alabama to conduct industry benchmarking, support curriculum development and research efforts and create internships to give students critical working experience while providing Airbus amazing talent for us to hire from over time," he said.



# The Next Mission

For these student veterans, the drive to serve has become the drive to grow.



**CLOCKWISE  
FROM BOTTOM:**  
Cayce Byrd, Quiton Hurry  
and Denny Nguyen

**FROM SERVICE TO STUDY**, these student veterans have leveraged the skills and endurance they developed in the military into momentum at South, proving that resilience and discipline are applicable in any situation.

## Cayce Byrd

**B.S. IN COMPUTER SCIENCE**

**FOR 14 YEARS**, Cayce Byrd served in the U.S. Coast Guard, earning EMT and pharmacy technician certifications while supporting service members' medical readiness. She retired in 2022 as an E-5, stepping into an entirely different kind of challenge.

"I was in a pretty bad mental state," she says. "My world was spiraling. I had a choice: Keep going down that road or make a change." She chose sobriety, quit smoking and focused on caring

for her family. Two years later, she set her sights on the future, enrolling at South in spring 2024. She's now a junior majoring in computer science. She hopes to work in consulting after graduation. Her military mindset remains a guiding influence.

"If all you have is 80%, try to give 85," she says. "Do what you can, take care of yourself, and finish the job in front of you." She wants other veterans to feel that sense of progress, too.

"I literally went from desperation to determination," Byrd says. "I'm happy to help in any way I can."

## Quiton Hurry

**B.S. IN SPORT MANAGEMENT**

**ARMY VETERAN** Quiton Hurry grew up in Monroe County, Alabama, where football shaped his life long before he enlisted in the military. As a cavalry scout stationed with the 2nd Battalion, 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii, he learned what it meant to push through pain for the people beside him. "My battle buddy was falling behind, and I twisted my knee helping him," he says. "We still had three miles to go. You find a way to finish the mission."

A second knee surgery led to his medical discharge in 2014, but he never stepped away from the sport he loves. He coached high school football for years before moving to Mobile and pursuing a degree at South. "I always felt like South had so much potential," Hurry says. "I wanted to be a part of helping build something great here."

Now a sport management major and volunteer with Jaguar football's recruiting and scouting staff, he hopes to keep climbing in the world of college athletics.

"You're going to mess up," he says. "How you get back up says who you are."

## Denny Nguyen

**B.S. IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING**

**AS A BLACK HAWK** helicopter mechanic and crew member with the Alabama National Guard, Denny Nguyen learned how to stay steady under pressure. "I really enjoyed fixing helicopters," he says. "That got my gears turning." But after years of turning wrenches, he wanted to take his skills further.

Originally from Greenville, Alabama, Nguyen has family roots in Mobile. His parents came to the city from Vietnam during the war, and his father once ran a seafood business here. When Nguyen decided to study electrical engineering, his father offered him the family's house in Mobile while he attended South.

Before the fall semester began, Nguyen enrolled in South's Summer Start program, earning seven credit hours while getting to know professors and classmates. "It gave me a head start that made a huge difference," he says. "It helped me adjust to college life after the military."

That transition wasn't easy, but the discipline he learned in service guided him. "In the military, goals are set for you," he says. "Now, we have to set our own and keep moving forward."





**HUGS AND SMILES**  
welcomed Marion McLaughlin, left, with “big sister” Caroline Lopez, to Greek life.



## Breaking Barriers, Building Sisterhood

**ON BID DAY**, the front lawn of the Phi Mu house was a blur of pink and white, with sisters and pledges cheering, hugging and screaming with happiness. Then one more voice joined the celebration.

Marion McLaughlin spotted her name high above the crowd, written in bold letters on a sign waved by one of her new sisters. She ran straight into the embrace waiting for her.

McLaughlin had just made history. As a student in **PASSAGE USA** (Preparing All Students Socially and Academically for Gainful Employment), a University program that offers students with intellectual disabilities a full college experience and the skills needed for full-time employment, she became the first to pledge a Greek organization.

The milestone came during South’s strongest Panhellenic

recruitment to date (a 32% increase over last year). McLaughlin’s “big sister” in the sorority is Caroline Lopez, one of three Phi Mus who also serve as her peer mentors in the **PASSAGE** program.

“I was really nervous at first,” McLaughlin says, smiling as she sat in the sorority chapter room beside Lopez. “But everyone is so nice, and they’ll always say hi or give me a hug when they see me on campus. And Caroline is such a good sister. I can talk to her about anything.”



>> WATCH VIDEO



## ADVANCE TO SOUTH

**THERE’S A NEW TWIST  
ON A FAMILIAR CLASSIC  
FOR GAME NIGHT**



**THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA** is featured in the newly released Mobile edition of Monopoly, sold online through Top Trumps USA.

The University occupies the Illinois Avenue slot. Land on Chance, and you might be selected as SouthPaw.





# Leading With Honors

## A freshman scholar finds strength in family and unexpected loss.

**NICHOLAS COOPER** arrived at the University of South Alabama in the fall as one of the most accomplished first-year students in the University's history. He earned the 2025 Board of Trustees Scholar award with a perfect ACT score, a 4.96 weighted GPA and early acceptance into the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine.

His parents, Craig and Tami Cooper, proudly took in the moment from across the Whiddon Administration Building boardroom as he accepted the award.

The next day, Sept. 6, Craig Cooper suddenly died.

"I kept looking over at him during the ceremony," Nicholas says. "He had the biggest grin on his face. It's such a blessing that one of my last memories of him is him smiling proudly at me."

At South, Cooper and his twin brother, Jacob, continued their classes, formed close friendships with other students in South's Honors College and carried forward the steady determination their father modeled.



In 2023, Craig Cooper, a longtime engineer, enrolled in South's nursing college, alongside his daughter and son-in-law, to pursue a new path.

The Coopers have deep ties to South, with graduates that include Craig '20, Tami '99, and siblings Kailan '20, Christian '21 and Kadie Grace '25.

Both Cooper twins are on a pre-med track, majoring in biomedical sciences. They're following in the footsteps of their older brother, Christian, who is in his third year of medical school at the Whiddon College of Medicine.

"My dad never complained," Nicholas says. "He showed me the value of not complaining about what you have to do and appreciating the opportunities you have."

Nicholas' long-term goal is to become a reconstructive plastic surgeon and serve as a medical missionary in Latin America. His father's influence deepened that purpose.

"He didn't push success on us," he says of himself and his four siblings. "But he knew what we were capable of. Knowing that he believed I could accomplish things motivated me. I want to fulfill what he thought about me."



**NICHOLAS COOPER**, top right, was named the 2025 University of South Alabama Board of Trustees Scholar. He and his twin brother, Jacob, top left, started together on a pre-med track and are members of South's Honors College. (Older brother Christian is in his third year of medical school.) After accepting the award, Nicholas Cooper enjoys the moment with his father, Craig.





## Fox Appointed USA Health CEO

**DR. NATALIE FOX** has been named chief executive officer for USA Health, the 7,300-employee academic health system for the University of South Alabama. Fox is a three-time graduate of the University, having earned her doctoral degree in nursing from South as well as her master's and bachelor's degrees in nursing.

"Natalie is one of the best examples I know of a true servant leader who has a head and a heart for continuously seeking to improve the quality of care our patients receive and the business operations that make compassionate healthcare possible," says USA President Jo Bonner. "She will guide an exceptional academic healthcare team whose dedication to research, education and world-class medical care will continue improving lives in our community, the region and beyond."

Beginning with patient care in 2011, Fox has held various roles across USA Health, including spearheading projects focused on improving population health outreach and reducing barriers to patient access. She also led team-based care initiatives for physician practices and served as manager of clinical operations for its pediatric division.

She was promoted in 2023 to chief physician enterprise officer, making her responsible for the overall strategy, performance and operational effectiveness of the physician enterprise, which comprises more than 700 physicians, advanced practice providers, residents and fellows who care for patients in dozens of faculty and community physician practices.

"The University of South Alabama has shaped me, challenged me and given me a mission larger than myself," Fox says. "I am deeply honored to serve as USA Health's CEO for the opportunity to give back to the place that has given me so much. My commitment is to lead with purpose and a clear sense of responsibility to our employees, our patients and our region."

She follows Owen Bailey in the position and served as interim CEO following his retirement.

## 2026 REAL ESTATE FORECAST

### Modest Rate Impact, Alabama Stability

**THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA** launched its real estate major this fall in the Mitchell College of Business and hired Dr. Grayson Glaze, a 30-plus-year veteran of the industry, to lead its program. Glaze makes these three predictions:



#### LOWER INTEREST RATES WILL HAVE MODEST IMPACT

Lower interest rates will have a modest, rather than transformative, impact on the Gulf Coast market. Even if the Federal Reserve continues to drop rates, that will not be enough to immediately offset the housing price appreciation of the past few years or trigger a massive surge in sales.

#### ALABAMA HOUSING MARKETS WILL STAY STEADY

Alabama maintains one of the most affordable housing markets in the nation, with median prices acting as a powerful buffer against national market volatility. Continued in-migration and a stable employment base, particularly along the industrial and logistics corridors, will keep demand consistent.

#### COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE WILL HEAT UP

Commercial real estate in Mobile and Baldwin counties is poised for strategic and modest acceleration, effectively capitalizing on the national logistics market's recent inflection point. Industrial space, anchored by the Port of Mobile's activity and robust manufacturing supply chain needs, will remain the most dominant asset class.

**DR. GRAYSON GLAZE**, a real estate professor at the University of Alabama for 18 years and former executive director of the Alabama Center for Real Estate, aims to expand the new major through experiential learning and industry partnerships at South, preparing graduates for the workforce.



1

**WOMEN, BUT NOT MEN, ORIGINALLY HAD A CURFEW.**

Women initially had to be in the dorm by 7 p.m. The deadline was later extended to midnight on weekdays and 1:30 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights. The curfew “was broadly unpopular.” Enforcement seems to have been “less than stringent.” By 1982, the curfew had disappeared.

2

**STUDENTS SHARED BATHROOM/SHOWER SPACES (ONE PER HALLWAY)**

and pay phones (one per wing). The first floor of each building had a common area with a television. “If it was ‘Star Trek’ night,” remembered one former resident, “you had to be really quiet if you were going out, entering or leaving. You constantly heard people saying, ‘Shh!’”

3

**FORMER RESIDENTS RECALLED A SENSE OF COMMUNITY.**

One man said that despite — or because of — the small, utilitarian two-person rooms, “We would play practical jokes on each other in the dorms, and we got to know each other pretty well.” A woman fondly described her first day of college life: “I remember getting shown to my room, which was like a prison cell now that I look back on it! But to me, I thought I was in paradise.”



>> **LISTEN TO AUDIO** of some of Alpha Hall’s early residents in a report by the USA Center for Archaeological Studies.

# CURFEWS, ‘STAR TREK’ AND BONDING

**FORMER RESIDENTS RECALL SOUTH’S FIRST DORMS.**

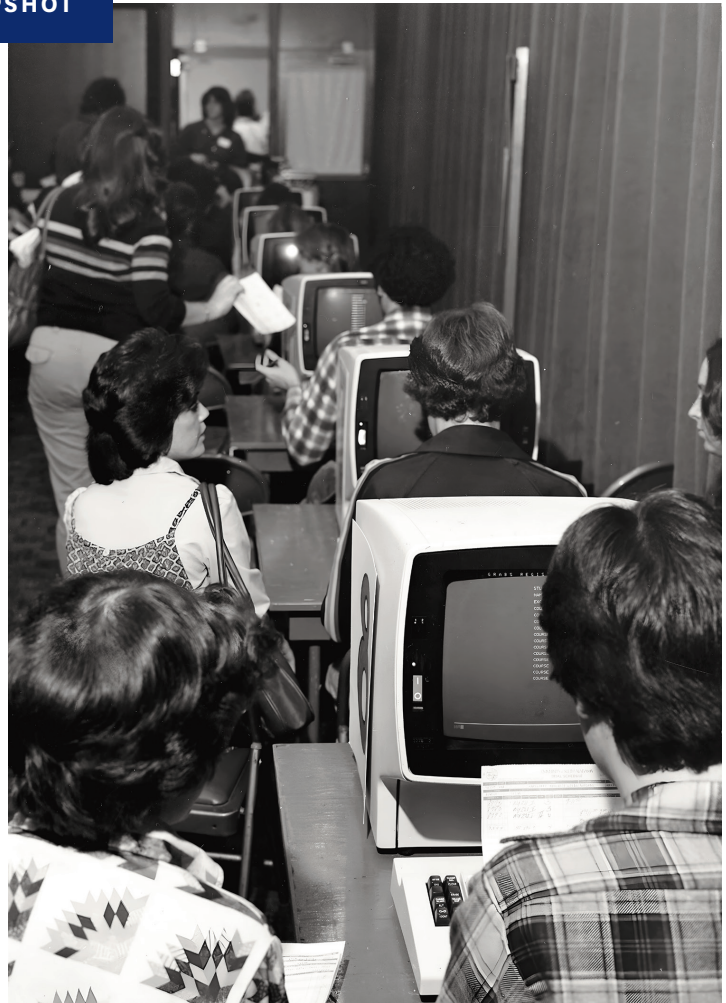
Half of South’s 1966-vintage first dormitory complex, Alpha Hall East and South, made way for the new Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine. A USA Center for Archaeological Studies report on the dorm’s history includes some fascinating reminiscences.





## SNAPSHOT

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE DOY LEALE MCCALL RARE BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY



# Registration Daze

Sometimes, filling your class schedule was like seeking a ticket at a sold-out Taylor Swift concert.

**YOU HAD TO BE THERE. AND BE THERE. AND THERE.** So went registration during South's early decades. Melissa Wold '75, '80 remembers the experience, as first a student (bachelor's in political science, master's in public administration), then a staff academic adviser for the Pat Capps Covey College of Allied Health Professions and eventually as registrar before retiring in 2013.

When the first photo was taken in 1968 or '69, departments set up tables in the Jag Gym. Boxes, one per class, contained computer punch cards that acted as class admission tickets. When the box was empty, the class was full.

To get in anyway, you needed to beg the professor for an override. Or, like a music fan seeking a scalper outside a sold-out concert,

you could look for a student with a card you needed.

"I'm sure there were side deals going on," Wold says, laughing. "I'm sure money was being handed over."

By about 1980, computers began to simplify the procedure. Rows of terminals in the upstairs Ballroom at the Student Center replaced the tables. Students trained by the registrar's office operated the machines.

Wold remembers one student who lay on the floor and said he wouldn't move till he got the schedule he wanted. (It didn't work.)

Mostly, though, everyone handled the experience with, if not contentment, at least quiet resignation. "They gritted their teeth," Wold says, "and they got through it."





# PAVING THE WAY FOR GREEN ASPHALT

How recycled plastics could reshape the way Gulf Coast communities build.

BY **TERI GREENE**  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **SETH LAUBINGER**

**DR. SHENGHUA WU**, top left, associate professor of civil, coastal, and environmental engineering, along with graduate student Ashish Gautam, center, and Ph.D student Abee Oyelere are researching the use of recycled microplastics to fortify roads when mixed with reclaimed asphalt.

**SUSTAINABILITY STARTS** from the ground up, and sometimes, that ground is paved. A leader in sustainability, Dr. Shenghua Wu, an associate professor of civil, coastal and environmental engineering, is rethinking roads by developing what could be called green asphalt.

His idea: Reuse waste plastics in paving material to make stronger, longer-lasting roads while keeping trash out of landfills and waterways. Wu and his team are testing various plastics to determine whether they can enhance the material without compromising its quality or durability.

“The goal is to create a more sustainable, circular economy where waste materials are put to good use,” says Wu, whose researchers have already paved a former dirt road in Milton, Florida, with the recycled asphalt.

One test mix uses plastics in pothole repair. This work is part of a broader initiative at South, the Gulf Coast Center for Addressing Microplastic Pollution, which aims to reduce plastic pollution in the region.



## CRUSH AND MIX

The microplastics are ground into pellets and mixed with a binder and reclaimed asphalt — the top layer of old asphalt crushed into tiny fragments.



## CHURN IT UP

The microplastic, reclaimed asphalt and binder are churned into one substance.



## APPLY PRESSURE

The new substance is put to the test. Pressure is increased until the new asphalt cracks, determining its strength.



# MacQueen

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# Postcards from Greece

Leadership isn't taught only in classrooms.  
Sometimes, it's learned one shared experience at a time.

BY **TERI GREENE**  
ILLUSTRATION DESIGN BY **PATRICK REID**

**L**EADERSHIP FEELS DIFFERENT IN THE ANCIENT BIRTHPLACE OF DEMOCRACY. Seven students spent two weeks this summer learning about leadership on a very personal level in Greece — a country slightly smaller than Alabama and alive with millennia of art, philosophy and civilization.

Executive Vice President and Provost Dr. Andi Kent and Dr. Rick Carter, South's associate vice president for global engagement, led the Study Abroad program.

From a café-side Socratic discussion in Athens to a chance meeting in Delphi that connected South's campus to an ancient oracle, every stop offered lessons in courage, curiosity and connection.

In Kastoria, a family dinner of roasted lamb, music and laughter showed that leadership can also mean hospitality.

The students hiked Mount Pelion, stood at Thermopylae and reflected beside the Ionian Sea, experiences that would reshape how they see themselves and their place in the world.

**SEVEN STUDENTS TRAVELED TO GREECE** over the summer for a global leadership Study Abroad trip. Mason Mullaney, Nolan Crawford, Ansley Simmons, Mary Elizabeth Kent, Alex Downes, Kali Johnston and Emma Harrod traveled to seven cities and towns, including their starting point, Athens, where they visited the Parthenon.





### ③ Thermopylae

**MASON MULLANEY:** “We stopped at the Hot Gates, where the Battle of Thermopylae took place in 480 B.C. — King Leonidas and 300 Spartans against hundreds of thousands of Persians. Our guide tied it to leadership and bravery in everyday life.”



### ② Delphi

**DR. RICK CARTER:** “We didn’t believe it at first — a man stopped us, recognized the Jaguar logo, and said his father helped dedicate the replica of the Tholos that stands on our campus.”

“It wasn’t planned; it wasn’t scripted. It just happened. A small-world moment in the middle of the mountains.”



### ④ Volos (Mount Pelion)

**NOLAN CRAWFORD:** “In Volos, at the University of Thessaly, we met Greek students and talked about how their college life is so different, but also how much we had in common.”

“It reminded me not to take all of the resources that we enjoy at South for granted. I was never more proud to be a Jag.”

“The 5-mile climb up Mount Pelion was a leadership lesson disguised as a hike.”



### ① Athens

**EMMA HARROD:** “It was my first time traveling out of the country and my first experience as a student at South. I sat on the plane thinking, we’re about to walk into a new environment. I don’t even know the students I’m going with — but we’re in this together.”

“I’ve seen the replica of the Parthenon in Nashville, but to stand in front of the real thing — to see how Greek history shaped leadership and government — was surreal.”

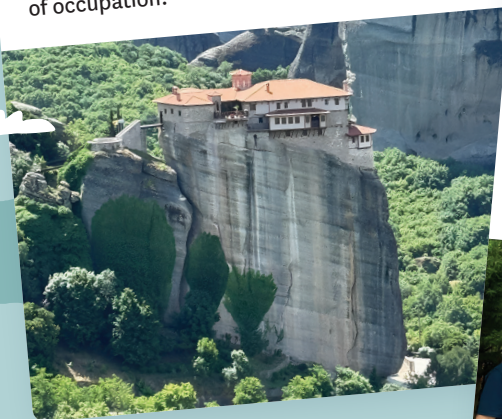




## ⑤ Meteora

**METEORA LOOKS OTHERWORLDLY**, with monasteries balanced on top of high rock pillars. Centuries ago, monks used ropes and pulleys to bring up supplies.

These monasteries became strongholds of Greek culture and language during times of occupation.



## ⑥ Kastoria

**ANSLEY SIMMONS:** “Kastoria was special. It’s not a normal tourist area, so we really saw everyday Greek life. That night at our guide’s parents’ house, we had dinner, dancing, Greek singing. It was so real and so authentic. That’s when it hit me: This was once in a lifetime.”

**DR. ANDI KENT:** “Their family had built a tiny church on their property as an act of prayer. We all went inside and lit candles. It was so moving, and it was beautiful to see.”



>> **FOLLOW** Junior Ansley Simmons’ journey across Greece.

## ⑦ Vergina

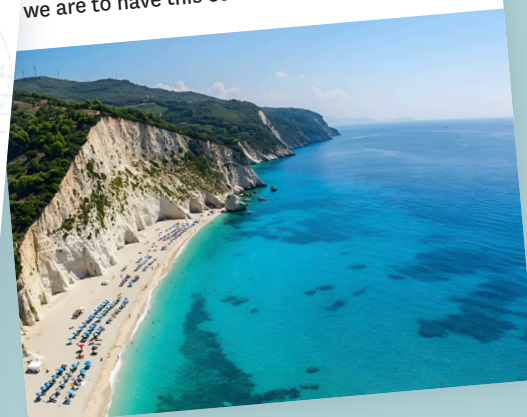
**MARY ELIZABETH KENT:** “We saw the tombs of Phillip II, Alexander the Great and his son. Witnessing the real artifacts — the untouched crowns, armor and carved stones — gave me a profound respect for legacy and leadership. These men shaped nations, and centuries later, their presence still resonates.”



“**WE BECAME LIKE A FAMILY.** I think I learned more from the students than they did from me, both from being in Greece and from seeing how they approached every challenge with curiosity and joy.” — **DR. ANDI KENT**

## ⑧ Lefkada (ISLAND)

**KALI JOHNSTON:** “That was our reward day. The beaches were incredible — the water was freezing, and the waves kept knocking us down, but it was so much fun. We sat by the sea. The fish were nibbling at our blisters. We talked about what we’d learned and how lucky we are to have this community.”



## ⑨ Returning Home

**ALEX DOWNES:** “We ended our trip where we began. After meeting with two representatives from the U.S. Embassy, we got coffee, cherishing the last freddo cappuccinos. It was a bittersweet night. None of us wanted to leave the next morning. What an amazing two weeks!”







# FISCAL FITNESS

A student-run investment fund celebrates 10 years of smart choices and lessons learned.

BY STEVE MILLBURG  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SETH LAUBINGER

JIEF Jaguar Investment Fund  
10th Anniversary

**I**N NOVEMBER 2017, an investment fund purchased stock in a tech company known for graphics processing units used in video games. The fund managers liked the company's plans to expand into a promising field: artificial intelligence.

Smart move. The company was Nvidia Corp. (ticker symbol NVDA), now the world's largest corporation, with a staggering market valuation of \$5 trillion. The 2017 per-share price, adjusted for subsequent stock splits, was \$5.23. The closing price at the end of fiscal year 2025 (Sept. 30) was \$186.58.

Those savvy fund managers were a bunch of Mitchell College of Business students. Their fund, the Jaguar Investment Fund, is celebrating its 10th birthday.

The JIF began in 2015 with contributions from Mobile banker Clarence M. Frenkel Jr. and longtime South benefactor Abraham "Abe" Mitchell totaling \$250,000. The college added another \$250,000 in 2018. By the end of fiscal 2025, the fund's value had grown to \$1.5 million.

In its decade of existence, the JIF has averaged annual gains of 13.71%. The average annual gain over the past 10 years for all comparable professionally managed investment funds was 12.46%. That's according to the mid-2025 S&P Global SPIVA Scorecard (the most recent available) for U.S. funds that invest in large companies.

“

We're managing the money fiscally and responsibly, and the students are learning things. Ultimately, that is the goal.

— DR. CHRIS LAWREY, JIF DIRECTOR

”

## HOW IT WORKS

Of the students who apply to become Jaguar Investment Fund managers, the college selects 12 or 13 each semester. They enroll in Student Managed Investment Fund, a three-credit class, for a maximum of two semesters.

Each student must make at least two pitches per semester to buy or sell stocks, usually as part of a three-person team. That involves hours of sifting through layer after layer of financial data. At least 70% of the class must approve each transaction.

The instructor has veto power. Lawrey, an associate professor of finance, says the previous teacher exercised that privilege once.



Lawrey hasn't yet. He almost did when a charismatic team talked the class into approving a sketchily researched stock buy. Then the coolest thing happened. Another team dug into the nitty-gritty of the company's fundamentals.

Two weeks later, they presented a counter pitch for selling that stock and buying shares in another company instead. Their research was so ironclad, Lawrey says, "even the guys that made the original pitch ended up voting for the new one."

## A SECOND FUND

In 2021, the student Jaguar Investment Fund managers took on a second — and greater — responsibility: managing part of the University's endowment. The University provided an initial \$750,000. In January 2025, it made the first of five planned additional annual payments of \$200,000.

The student managers earn a 1% annual management fee from each fund. That generates about \$25,000 a year, which goes for student education, such as trips to financial conferences.

## WHAT, NO CRYPTO?

The Jaguar Investment Fund normally invests in U.S. equities (mostly stocks) or equity funds. "We got permission to do commodity funds because the students wanted to buy gold," Lawrey says. "They asked, 'Where is our

hedge against inflation?'" They bought SPDR Gold Shares (GLD), a fund backed by physical gold (rather than the gold futures that back many such funds). "It's been one of our top performers," Lawrey says.

Cryptocurrency? Too speculative. At a conference, Lawrey met an exchange-traded cryptocurrency fund manager. "He said, 'Nobody should have more than 5% of their net worth in crypto.' And this is a guy that runs a crypto ETF!"

## DIY FAIL

Can you get rich by investing like the students who manage the Jaguar Investment Fund?

Don't try it, says Lawrey. They dig deeply into the revenues, profits, free cash flows, macro-economic data and much more. Most people don't have the time or patience for that.

Instead, Lawrey suggests investing in index funds, such as an S&P 500 index fund.



**STUDENT INVESTMENT FUND MANAGERS** meet in the Finance Lab — aka the John B. Saint Financial Analysis Center — equipped with Bloomberg Terminal data workstations.

# 2015

YEAR FOUNDED

# \$250,000

ORIGINAL INVESTMENT

# 13.71%

ANNUALIZED RETURN SINCE INCEPTION

# NVDA

(NVIDIA CORP.)

TOP-PERFORMING STOCK EVER  
UP 3,000% SINCE 2017

# 3 STOCKS

STILL IN PORTFOLIO FROM 2015:

- THE WALT DISNEY CO. (DIS)
- LOCKHEED MARTIN CORP. (LMT)
- AMERICAN TOWER CORP. (AMT)

# GLW

(CORNING INC.)

TOP-PERFORMING STOCK FY 2025

▲ 81.68%

# LYB

(LYONDELLBASELL IND.)

WORST-PERFORMING STOCK FY 2025

▼ 48.86%



**YOU WON'T BELIEVE** how researchers are toughening up young oysters against predators.



**BUILDING A REEF** helped Dr. Lee Smee, second from left, and others research how to boost oyster survival.



# SCARED STRONG

BY STEVE MILLBURG  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SETH LAUBINGER



**AT DAUPHIN ISLAND SEA LAB,** Dr. Smee extracts urine from the top three oyster predators in Alabama's coastal waters — oyster drill snails, sheepshead fish and blue crabs (shown above). His team has found that when young oysters are exposed to the predator urine, they respond by hardening their shells, increasing their chances of survival.

**W**ITH THE BEST OF INTENTIONS, Dr. Lee Smee and other coastal Alabama researchers are deliberately terrifying baby oysters. With the tiny oysters happily settled and starting to grow, the researchers put a red-alert danger signal in the water: urine — from specific fish, crabs and snails that love to feast on oysters.

The oysters defend themselves the only way they can. They harden their shells to fend off the predators and grow big enough to, um, get eaten by humans.

It works. Survival rates increase by up to 70%. That could have a big impact, Smee says. "This is a species that spawns in the millions and millions."

Smee is a professor of marine and environmental sciences at South and a marine scientist at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. He's partnered with scientists, graduate students, undergraduate interns, oyster farmers and even Scout troops, at South and elsewhere, to test some it's-not-crazy-if-it-works ideas to reverse the decline of oysters in Gulf waters.

He and his colleagues have attached urinary catheters to fish. They have extracted urine from crabs using tiny hypodermic needles and steady hands. Soon, with help from chemists at Georgia Tech, they hope to be able to synthesize what Smee calls "scary juice" — a mass-producible chemical containing the components in urine that signal, "Predator!"

That could be a powerful new tool for restoring reefs and boosting declining harvests in the Gulf and beyond.

All those people are going to all that trouble because the humble oyster, a filter-feeding mollusk with gills, a heart, a nervous system and no brain, is a foundation species and ecosystem engineer providing critical habitat for the Gulf Coast. Says Smee, "Oysters, I would argue, might be the most important species in the whole Gulf."

And they're in trouble.

"Oyster reefs are probably the most degraded habitat in the world," says Smee. "Somewhere around 85 to 90% of them globally are gone. And that's certainly true here in the northern Gulf."



Oysters clean the water, filtering out algae, sediment, nitrogen and other pollutants. Growing willy-nilly on top of each other, they build reefs that provide habitats for other species we love to eat, such as red drum and blue crabs. Reefs also protect shorelines, salt marshes and beach houses against erosion and storm surges.

And, of course, oysters taste delicious. Almost half of the country's \$250 million oyster industry is based on the Gulf Coast. Oyster farming produces more than \$3 million worth of oysters each year in Alabama alone, making the state one of the largest processors of oysters. Oyster festivals and seafood restaurants boost local economies, last year helping Alabama's beach counties, Baldwin and Mobile, to draw 9.7 million tourists.

Even if you hate their taste and never eat fish or seafood, you probably depend on oysters for part of your diet. Chicken eggshells are mostly calcium carbonate — the same gritty material that makes up most of an oyster shell. Chickens eat crushed oyster shells to provide the extra calcium they need to keep up their rigorous egg-laying schedules.

A single oyster species populates the entire Atlantic and Gulf coasts of North and South America from Canada to Argentina: the eastern oyster, *Crassostrea virginica*.

One female can produce 100 million eggs each breeding season. Each male releases many millions more sperm. Multimillions of offspring result. At first, they resemble tiny clams. Nearly all die or get eaten before they become large enough for humans even to notice them.

After a couple of weeks, when they're not much bigger than a grain of sand, oyster larvae look for a home. Like house-hunting humans, the swimming larvae obsess about location, location, location. Mud or sand won't do. They need a hard surface. Once they find one, Smee says, "they'll decide if they like that place or not. If they don't like it, they'll just lift off and drift away."

When they find the right surface, the right water salinity and whatever else oysters want for their dream house location, they glue themselves to the place they'll remain for the rest of their lives.

Spat (the term for oysters after they settle down) grow fast. Stationary targets for predators, they build their shells quickly by drawing minerals from the water. Blue crabs break open the shells. Oyster drills — snails an inch or two long — pry open the shells or scrape holes and suck out the meat. Sheepshead fish crush the shells.

When a wolf howls in the middle of the night, humans sacrifice their sleep to guard their livestock. Oysters can't hear, but they can sense chemicals in the water. Smee and his colleagues guessed correctly that predator urine might work as a kind of chemical howl, stimulating a young oyster to expend extra energy on strengthening its shell at the expense of fast growth.

In tanks at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, they exposed oysters to urine from crabs, drills and sheepshead, as well as chemicals released by oysters being crushed. They tried the substances singly and in combinations.

The oysters did indeed harden their shells, by varying amounts depending on the threat chemical. Did that actually help? To find out, the researchers transplanted the oysters to a test reef they'd built near Lightning Point in Bayou La Batre, Alabama, southwest of Mobile.

"After a year," Smee says, "survivorship was up to 70% higher." For a species that reproduces in the millions with minuscule survival rates, every percentage point helps. That drives Smee to continue his research.

"If you increase survival 1 or 2%, that's potentially thousands of oysters," he says. "And the difference between a reef that makes it and one that doesn't is often a couple hundred to a few thousand individuals. So I think it could be super important."

## THE GULF'S OYSTER THINK TANK

**SOUTH ALABAMA RANKS AMONG THE TOP UNIVERSITIES** in the country for the study of oyster biology, ecology and fisheries.

Five USA faculty members — Drs. Sean Powers, Ronald Baker, Ruth Carmichael, Steven Scyphers and Lee Smee — conduct research on topics including:

### RESTORING WILD FISHERIES

for oysters and understanding the role of oyster reefs as habitat for finfish and crabs.

### IDENTIFYING CONTAMINATION

sources and water quality impairment and mitigating their negative impact on oyster reefs and oyster fisheries.

### USING NEARSHORE OYSTERS

as natural breakwaters (living shorelines) to mitigate coastal erosion.



**RESEARCH IN ACTION,** from top: measuring the size of young oysters in the field; nabbing an oyster drill (green shell), the most significant oyster predator in Alabama; Dr. Smee at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab working with mesocosm (simulated ecosystem) tanks, which draw Gulf seawater for oyster experiments.





IN HER FIRST YEAR,

# She's Giving Oysters a Start, Too



## IN PURSUIT OF THE PERFECT OYSTER

### AT ISLE DAUPHINE OYSTER CO.

in south Mobile County, Doug Ankersen '81 and his team have engineered their way into cultivating boutique Gulf oysters.

"The perfect oyster," he says, "comes down to balance: about 3 inches long, 2 inches wide and 1 inch deep, with a salinity between 20 and 28 (parts per thousand)."

Ankersen first launched a commercial oyster nursery in 2014 from the pier of his family's Mobile Bay home; it was a part-time venture during his career as a mechanical engineer. He purchased Isle Dauphine in 2021.

The oysters, grown in floating cages where tides and saltwater sculpt their flavor, develop deep cups, plump meat and a clean, briny finish before they make their way to restaurants across the Gulf Coast.

**TWO YEARS AGO**, Lilli Moore's dad, Michael, set up an oyster hatchery business for her: Biloxi Oyster Co. in downtown Biloxi, Mississippi.

Now, the first-year marine sciences major is fully immersed. Her words tumble over each other as she dives into such oyster arcana as the merits of Gulf water versus lab-made seawater and the spawning-tank color that indicates success: "It looks like pink lemonade."

She keeps a quarter of the larvae for her family's oyster farm. She sells the rest to Spat-Tech, a Mississippi company that specializes in oyster reef restoration.

Oysters can be finicky about water quality, temperature and salinity. Even the rumbling of classic cars parading nearby during an annual tourism event

bothered them. Larvae are usually ready to ship out on day 11, at about 200 microns in size. (A grain of table salt is 120 microns.) Moore looks for the tiny black dot that indicates the imminent emergence of the foot that the oyster will use to attach itself to its permanent home.

Enrolling at South was never in doubt. "Uncle Jimmy is an alumnus," she says. That's former National Alumni Association President Jim Moore '90. "All three of his children have gone here. My brother (Bradley Brimmer '19) is still here, getting his Ph.D. in chemical engineering."

Lilli, who is minoring in business, plans to get a master's degree and then return full time to her beloved hatchery. "Oysters are where my heart is at."



**ALABAMA OYSTERS** get their mild, buttery flavor from the region's uniquely balanced mix of fresh and salt water.



# Tiny Fight

A blue-tinted photograph of a newborn baby lying in a hospital bed. The baby is positioned in the center, with their head turned slightly to the right. Medical equipment, including an IV drip and various tubes, is visible around the baby. The background is blurred, showing the structure of the hospital bed and some medical equipment. The overall mood is somber and clinical.






# nters

**IN THE NICU** at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital, strength begins small, measured in breaths, heartbeats and the determined push of a foot no larger than a thumb. These tiny patients keep showing us what resilience looks like with a rise in the chest or a stretch of an arm. It's the hardest work they'll ever do. But they won't do it alone.

PHOTO ESSAY BY **SETH LAUBINGER**  
TEXT BY **TERI GREENE**





**PARENTS QUICKLY LEARN** the unit's language: terms like sats (a baby's oxygen level) and FiO<sub>2</sub> (how much oxygen the team is giving). It becomes part of how they understand each day's progress.

**ABOUT 1,000 BABIES A YEAR** are admitted to the Hollis J. Wiseman Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. On this day in the NICU, more than 75 babies and their parents move through a rhythm of feedings, vitals and long waits. Nearly 50 NICU nurses staff the unit each day — part of a multidisciplinary team of more than 300 supporting the hospital's largest unit.





**IN A PLACE** where conditions can shift quickly, nurses stay ahead by absorbing information wherever they are, even in the brief steps between one pod to the next. Some infants arrive here, in the region's only Level III NICU, at just 21 weeks and 5 days — an age when survival depends on a highly specialized team and environment.











**PARENTS CREATE “CORNERS”** and live within them: Families bring family photos and other items from home. In an open, sterile, often chaotic unit, it’s a necessary family comfort zone. Learning to eat independently is one of the toughest hurdles for some babies. Parents practice feeding routines here day after day as their child gains strength.



**COLOSTRUM** — the first milk, rich with antibodies — is handled with care. Though advanced machines can do the work, this nurse prefers to warm and mix it by hand, a method honed through years of caring. Below, NICU physicians review each baby's progress several times a day, adjusting ventilator settings, feeds and medication based on even small changes.







**A SMALL CAMERA** above each NICU bed allows parents to check in through a secure app. When families are here in person, they see what they can also view from home: a tiny body surrounded by care.



**BECAUSE** stroking can be overstimulating for the smallest babies, parents offer a still “hand hug,” providing gentle pressure for comfort. A curled finger around a parent’s hand can be a reassuring response.









**THE DOORS** never close for long. Inside, teams continue their work around the clock: stabilizing, supporting and celebrating every inch of progress. What unfolds here is shaped by expertise, technology and the steady human touch that holds everything together.





# After the Crisis

South research explores how technology can help ICU nurses recover from the toll of trauma-filled shifts.

BY TERI GREENE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAN ANDERSON

**I**N THE INTENSIVE CARE UNIT, calm can be scarce. Monitors hum, alarms blare and every sound signals urgency. Through the constant noise and motion, nurses keep going, shift after shift. The cost to their well-being can be significant, even if it is invisible.

A new study led by Dr. Paula Levi, assistant professor of nursing, aims to help ICU nurses recover some of what that work takes away. The study combines scientific precision with human care, exploring how technology can make nursing more sustainable.

“ICU nurses have among the highest rates of post-traumatic stress symptoms of any clinical group,” says Levi, who was awarded \$24,300 as part of the 2025 Research and Scholarly Development Grant program for a new project. They’re trained to respond in emergencies, but the body doesn’t always return to a calm,

balanced state afterward. Chronic stress can place ICU nurses at risk for long-term adverse physiological and psychological health problems, such as cardiovascular disease, mental health disorders and a weakened immune system.

That matters not only to nurses but also to the hospitals that rely on them. In 2024, the turnover rate for registered nurses in the U.S. was approximately 16.4%, according to a 2025 report by NSI Nursing Solutions, a national recruiting agency that issues an annual look at trends in the industry.

A meta-analysis in the journal *Nursing in Critical Care* found that, globally, about 27.7% of ICU nurses intend to leave their jobs. Job stress is one of the main causes of ICU nurses making that decision.

Some signs of post-traumatic stress disorder in ICU nurses, including irritability, are easy to spot. But much remains hidden: nightmares, intrusive thoughts, dissociation, and even avoidance of family and friends.

Levi’s team is testing a small device — one currently used to alleviate migraines — that delivers mild electrical stimulation through the neck to the vagus nerve, which is a critical pathway that helps regulate heart rate, digestion and the body’s stress response. Fifteen USA Health ICU nurses will be the first group to use the devices.

Participants will use the device twice a day for two minutes at a time. They will document stressful events during their workdays and wear Fitbits to measure their heart rate variability, which can be a key indicator of stress and/or post-traumatic stress disorder.

“When a person gets stressed, their heart rate will go up. After the stressor is over, the normal reaction is for the heart rate to come back down,” Levi says. “When a person has PTSD or chronic stress, the heart rate tends to stay high and not come back down.”

The device uses gentle neuromodulation to “remind” the nervous system that the crisis is over, helping the heart rate variability and cortisol levels return to balance after long, stressful shifts.

By tracking biometric data, the study aims to explore how noninvasive technology can promote measurable recovery from stress.





**DR. PAULA LEVI**, assistant professor of nursing, joined South's faculty in 2023. Her connection to the University reaches back further. Her family moved to Mobile from Boston in 1977 when her father, Drayton Miller, joined basketball Coach Cliff Ellis' staff. Her mother, Hannelore DuBose, was hired at the USA Biomedical Library before being promoted to head of cataloging at Marx Library, where she remained until retiring in 2003. Levi earned her undergraduate nursing degree from South in 2014.

## MAKING TIME TO BREATHE

### THE U.S. MILITARY KNOWS

a lot about staying ready under pressure. Now, a South researcher is adapting its strategy to support nurses through the everyday demands of the job.

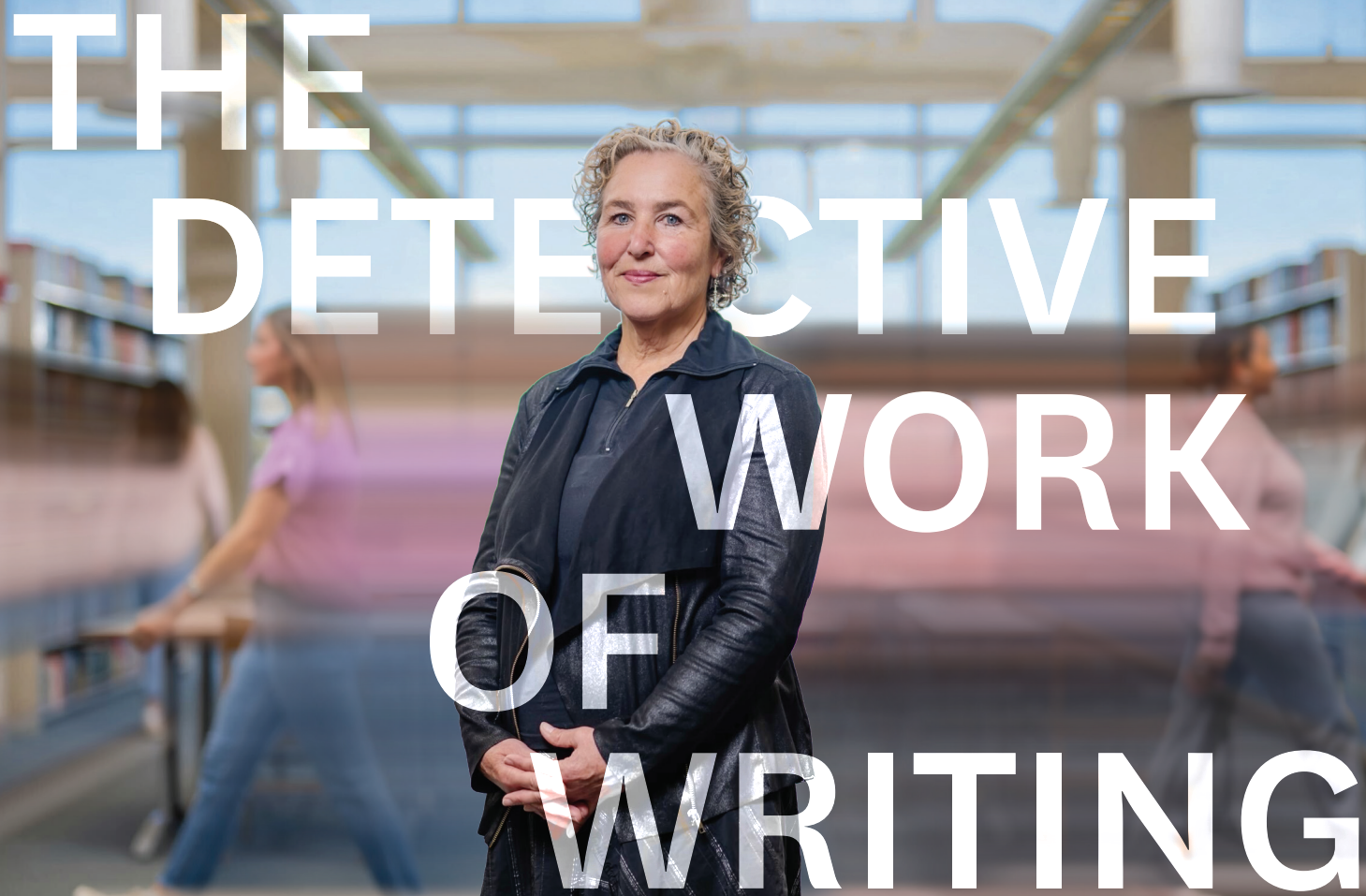
Dr. Amy Campbell, assistant professor in the School of Computing, worked with her co-principal investigator, Dr. Kristen Noles, director of quality and performance improvement for USA Health, to lead a well-being initiative funded by the American Nurses Foundation. They adapted a military-developed model called Stress First Aid for use in hospitals.

The program uses a color scale of green, yellow, orange and red to train nurses to recognize, express and address early signs of stress and burnout in themselves and their peers before exhaustion hampers their ability to perform their jobs. What began as a pilot in six University Hospital units has expanded throughout the hospital.

The support structure pairs short training sessions with access to "decompression spaces" that give nurses permission to pause, breathe and reset. The rooms offer an oasis of peace and quiet, with massage chairs, TV monitors streaming calming images of nature and, most importantly, alone time — something nurses find in short supply.

"Nurses are great at identifying the needs of others," says Campbell, who taught informatics in the College of Nursing for six years before switching to Information Systems and Technology. "We're not always great at identifying our own."





# THE DETECTIVE WORK OF WRITING

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New Stokes Center for Creative Writing director brings  
rigor and a mission to resurrect forgotten voices.

BY TERI GREENE | PHOTOGRAPHY ILLUSTRATION BY SETH LAUBINGER AND PATRICK REID



**W**HEN DR. JOCELYN CULLITY talks about writing a novel, she doesn't mention inspiration that strikes out of nowhere. She talks about work, the kind that takes years and demands checking every detail, like a film's release date, the pattern of a bird's feathers or the way a street sounded in 1857.

"Writing historical fiction is detective work," says Cullity, who became the director of the Stokes Center for Creative Writing in August. "You follow one clue to the next."

That mindset — patient, persistent and unafraid of difficulty — is the foundation she's laying for her students.

### ORDINARY WOMEN CARRYING EXTRAORDINARY BURDENS

Cullity, whose English family lived in India for five generations, was drawn to that country's past through her great-great-great-aunt's diary from the Siege of Lucknow in 1857.

The uprising and the British civilians caught up in it were well-documented in British records. The story of the African Indian women who fought to defend their home was not.

“  
Once I understood who  
those women were, there  
was no turning back.  
”

Her award-winning novels, "Amah and the Silk-Winged Pigeons" and its sequel, "The Envy of Paradise," center those women as warriors and leaders. In the official historical record, their voices were silent. Cullity resurrected them from fragments with help from historian Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, who has translated hundreds of surviving diaries and memoirs from Lucknow.

Born in Australia and raised in Toronto, Cullity came to the United States for graduate school, earning a master's degree from the University of Iowa and a Ph.D. from Florida State University, before teaching at several colleges, including a decade in the BFA in creative writing program at Truman State University in Missouri.

She also worked in documentary film, and evidence of that background is easy to see: The walls of her office are mapped with penciled notes and taped-up index cards that chart characters, scenes and notes from history.

Writing historical fiction requires diligent fact-checking. If she writes of characters listening to a Billie Holiday song only to learn that the song had not been released yet at the time of that scene, she rewrites. News events, models of cars and other historical details undergo similar scrutiny.

"You want to get it right," she says. "You do everything you can to honor the people who lived in that moment."

Her latest novel, now in the editing stage, moves closer to home: Depression-era Arkansas. "The Nurse at Baker Hospital" follows a young nurse searching for stability in a hospital run by a charismatic showman who sells false cures. Cullity began writing it during the pandemic, reflecting on the resilience of nurses who bear so much during the hardest moments.

It's a different setting and a different century, but it has the same heartbeat: ordinary women carrying extraordinary burdens.

### PASSING THE TORCH TO SOUTH WRITERS

Cullity believes South students have their own kind of resilience. Members of Generation Z, she says, are deeply connected to the world and their own communities. Her role is to gently, firmly guide them toward the professional lives they want.

She also wants them to recognize the opportunity in front of them. The United States treats creative writing as a serious pursuit, she says, enabling talented writers to learn directly from working artists. In some other Western countries, writing is seen as an elite, inaccessible profession.

"You only understand how special that is if you've lived somewhere else," Cullity says.

South pays for students to join the Association of Writers & Writing Programs, connecting them to national seminars about the craft, publishing advice and a wider literary community.

Cullity's mission is to help emerging writers find their voices, build their confidence and connect to Mobile's creative community, the national literary landscape and the long line of storytellers who came before them.



## South Stacks

A QUICK GUIDE TO A SELECTION  
OF BOOKS WRITTEN BY MEMBERS  
OF THE SOUTH COMMUNITY

*Literary Case Studies in Cowardice: Parolles, Waller and Hirsch* by Richard Hillyer, professor, English; Springer Nature, 2025

*Pitfalls of Prestige: Black Women and Literary Recognition* by Laura Elizabeth Vrana, associate professor, English; The Ohio State University Press, 2024

*The Consequences of Confederate Citizenship: The Civil War Correspondence of Alabama's Pickens Family* edited, with commentary and notes, by Henry M. McKiven, professor, history; LSU Press, 2025

*Commemorative Acts: French Theatre and the Memory of the Great War* by Susan McCready, professor, modern and classical languages and literature; University of Toronto Press, 2025

*Digging All Night and Fighting All Day: The Civil War Siege of Spanish Fort and the Mobile Campaign, 1865* by Paul Brueske, USA track and field coach, graduate student of history; Savas Beatie, 2024



# GOING LONG

BY STEVE MILLBURG  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SETH LAUBINGER

**THE FIRST HOME GAME** for Jaguars wide receiver Devin Voisin '24 wasn't at "home." The 37-14 victory over Jackson State was actually at Ladd-Peebles Stadium, seven miles from the University of South Alabama campus.

That was on Sept. 7, 2019. Hancock Whitney Stadium wouldn't open until a year later.

Fast-forward six years. In his NCAA record-tying seventh season, Voisin was the Jaguars' leading receiver, finishing third all time at South in career receptions and receiving yards.

"There's not a better young man that I've coached ever in my life," says Offensive Coordinator and Receivers Coach Paul Petrino. "He's a great player and probably an even better person."

Voisin, a graduate student with a degree in marketing and still only 24 years old, played under three head coaches. Cam McCormick holds the record for most seasons of football eligibility with nine (2016-24 at Oregon and Miami), but he played in only six.

"I just love playing football," Voisin says. For three seasons, 2019-21, his teammates included older brother Keon '22, a safety, and twin brother Jaden '24, also a safety and South's career interceptions leader with 11. Their hometown, Crestview, Florida, is less than two hours from campus.

Love of the game carried Devin through serious injuries that shortened his season in 2021 (broken collarbone; four games) and 2023 (torn ACL; two games). The NCAA counted each as a redshirt year, preserving a year of eligibility. All 2020 COVID-season players also got an extra eligibility year.

Voisin could have transferred to a power-conference school. His 2022 season — 64 receptions, 871 yards, 5 touchdowns — put him on the preseason watch list for the Biletnikoff Award, which goes to college football's top receiver.

"This school chose me when I wasn't 'a thing,'" he says. "The school has never tried to replace me when I got hurt, never cast me to the side. They've always supported me through everything. That's why I chose South every single time."

**LOYALTY PAID**  
**OFF** for both  
receiver Devin  
Voisin and Jags  
football.





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UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

**[USAHealthSystem.com/Liver](http://USAHealthSystem.com/Liver)**



# Rosette

**USA HEALTH IS THE FIRST PROVIDER IN ALABAMA** to offer histotripsy, a noninvasive treatment that uses focused sound waves to destroy liver tumors without surgery or radiation. Funded by the USA Foundation, the new Edison system represents a major advancement in precision cancer care and patient recovery.



>> READ MORE





# HIGH BEAM

## CLASS OF 2029

### CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW,

\$230 million Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine reached a significant milestone in September with the final structural steel beam signed and installed.

The 250,000-square-foot, five-story building is constructed with more than 2,073 tons of structural steel. It is supported by approximately 28,000 linear feet — more than 5 miles — of driven concrete piles.

University leaders and second-year medical students gathered around the beam and signed their names with permanent markers before it was lifted into place days later above the fifth floor.

Construction began in 2024 and is expected to be completed in December 2026. The facility will allow for expanding the class size of first-year medical students, even as the nation faces a projected shortage of health-care providers.

“This building will provide so many incredible opportunities for our students to learn and for our faculty to conduct research,” says Dr. Andi Kent, executive vice president and provost. “It is yet another example of why the University of South Alabama is truly the Flagship of the Gulf Coast.”

The 79 medical students in the University of South Alabama’s newest M1 (first-year) class represent fewer than 7% of applicants. Here’s more about the class:

# 94%

FROM ALABAMA

# 20%

FROM RURAL  
AL COMMUNITIES

# 31

COLLEGES  
REPRESENTED

# 53%

FEMALE

# Record Fundraising to Usher in Capital Campaign

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA, for the fourth year in a row, and as it prepares to launch a capital campaign in 2026, ended the year with record fundraising from alumni and other supporters.

The 2024-25 fiscal year finished with \$47.5 million in new gifts and commitments from nearly 5,000 donors — nearly a third of whom had never given before.

The banner year sets the stage for a spring public launch of a campaign that has been in the quiet stage for several years.

“The remarkable generosity we have witnessed these past few years is not a final chapter, but a powerful reaffirmation of a shared purpose that serves as a foundation for bold ambitions,” says University President Jo Bonner. “The commitment made by our supporters allows us to embark on the work that will define the University of South Alabama’s next great era of achievement.”

Strategic priorities include student scholarships, healthcare services, research support, construction of a new Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine and a Jaguar Marching Band Complex (both underway), and the move of the College of Education and Professional Studies from a former shopping mall fronting University Boulevard to a more central location on campus near other academic buildings.





## For Bass-Baritone, a Welcomed High Note

**THE 2025 INTERNATIONAL OPERA AWARDS** Male Singer of the Year has come a long way from the football field at Theodore High School, just south of Mobile. Bass-baritone and former offensive lineman Nicholas Brownlee '12 has singing engagements booked into 2032.

That means intensive rehearsals and a grinding travel schedule. "If I fly back home on a Monday," he says, "I don't think about that next plane flight on Wednesday morning, or I will spiral into a puddle."

Two things give him the joy that keeps him going: joining his wife, operatic mezzo-soprano Jennifer Feinstein, in putting young daughters Madeline and Lillian to bed at their home in Frankfurt, Germany — and stepping out onto the stage.

High school music teacher and South alum Karen Combs '74, M.Ed. '89, led the choir that focused his interest on music.

"It was like finding my people for the first time," Brownlee says. "My dark, weird humor was accepted, and my spazzy, crazy, no-filter brain."

At South, Dr. Thomas Rowell, professor of music, enticed him into the chorus of Giuseppe Verdi's romantic tragedy "La Traviata." The \$500 performance fee sealed the deal. Says Brownlee, "The first opera that I ever saw, I was in."

And he was hooked. This May, a decade and a half later, he won the 2025 Richard Tucker Award, given to an American singer deemed on the verge of superstardom.

“

I feel incredibly,  
incredibly lucky.

”



>> READ MORE



## LISTENING TO THE YELLA FELLA

**JIMMY RANE**, founder of Great Southern Wood Preserving Inc. and best known to many Alabamians as the horse-riding, yellow-hat-wearing “Yella Fella” cowboy who promoted his company’s YellaWood pressure-treated pine, saddled up for a conversation with President Jo Bonner in September at the MacQueen Alumni Center.

Rane was the featured speaker at the spring meeting of the President’s Cabinet of supporters. Students also attended the event.

A longtime supporter of higher education and trustee at Auburn University, Rane spoke of his initial rejection by Auburn before his persistence earned him a probationary spot. That drive served him well.

He went on to law school at Samford before turning his in-laws’ small, struggling lumber treatment plant into a multibillion dollar success story. Hat tip to him.



## PLANTING A SEED

**THE HOME & GARDEN SHOW** is set to make its debut March 19-22, 2026, at the Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center in downtown Mobile. The uniquely curated event will offer a one-of-a-kind experience for design enthusiasts, antique collectors and those seeking inspiration to create beautiful living spaces.

Hosted by the Providence Foundation, the Home & Garden show will feature opportunities to meet renowned artisans, designers and lifestyle experts. Proceeds from the event will benefit a new ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) program at USA Health Providence Hospital, which will provide a revolutionary advancement in life support technology for the region as the first of its kind in Mobile.

ECMO is an advanced system that temporarily takes over heart and lung function, ensuring that oxygen reaches vital organs. The technology is often the bridge to recovery, transplantation or other medical interventions for patients treated for heart attacks, pneumonia, sepsis, pulmonary embolism, respiratory failure, influenza or other illnesses.

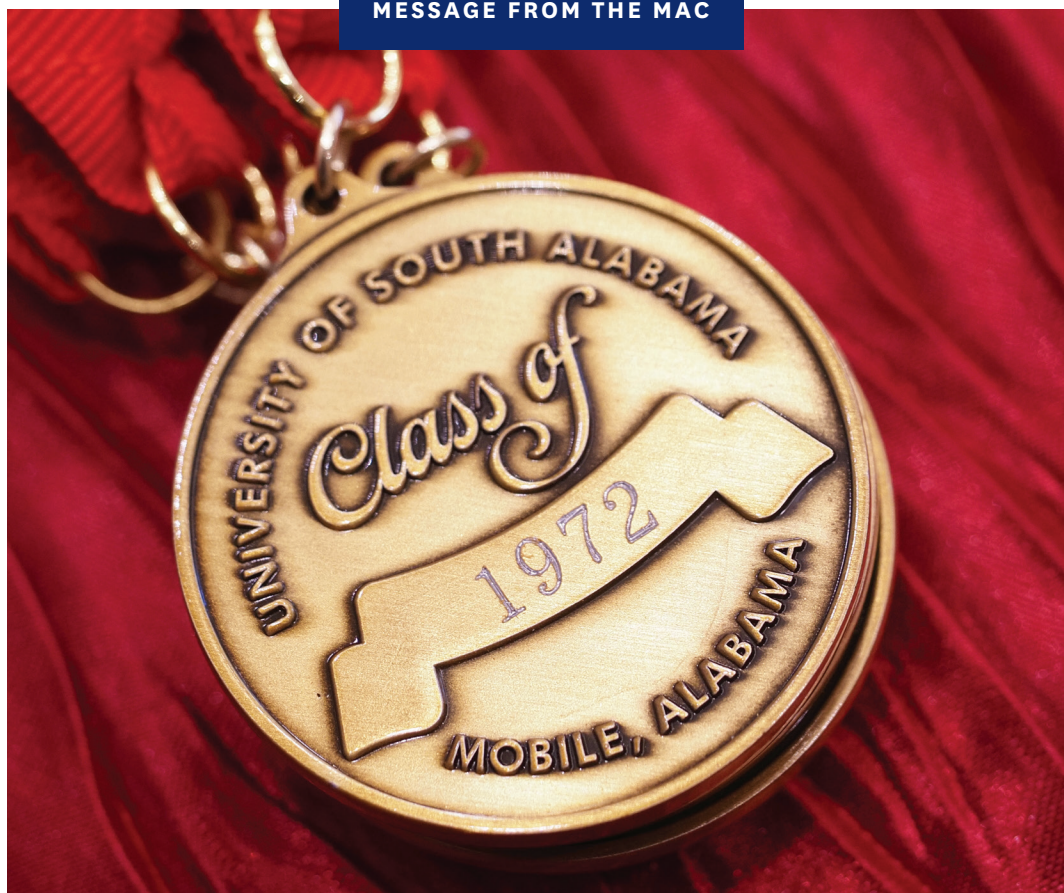
**FOR SCHEDULE AND SPONSORSHIPS:**  
[HOMEANDGARDENSHOW.INFO](http://HOMEANDGARDENSHOW.INFO)

**50**  
**12,000**  
**25,000**

**THE PAT CAPPS COVEY COLLEGE OF ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONS** celebrated its 50th anniversary this fall with several on-campus events. More than 12,000 graduates have earned degrees from the college. Fall also marked a milestone for the College of Education and Professional Studies. December’s Commencement will see the college award its 25,000th degree, more than any other college at the University.



## MESSAGE FROM THE MAC



## 2025-2026 NATIONAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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#### DEAR JAG ALUMNI,

What a joy it was to celebrate our community during Homecoming 2025! It is such a pleasure to welcome alumni from near and far to celebrate this special weekend. Your Jaguar spirit was on full display, and your presence served as a powerful reminder to our current students of the incredible legacy and strong foundation you have built.

One of my favorite annual Homecoming events is always the Golden Jaguars Luncheon, which this year celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Class of 1975. Also included in the festivities were Golden Jaguars from the classes of 1967-1974. Seeing so many reconnect and reminisce was truly inspiring. This important milestone celebration wasn't just a look back; it was a powerful reminder of the profound impact this generation has had on our beloved University.

The University of South

Alabama thrives today because of the bold vision our founders set in motion decades ago. They envisioned a vibrant center for innovation, discovery and community — a place where students would be prepared to lead and shape the future of our region and the world.

However, a vision only becomes reality through dedication and determination, and that's where the legacy of those early alumni is evident. Classes began at the University of South Alabama just 13 months after the Alabama Legislature approved its founding, and our growth since then has been truly remarkable. We will always be grateful to South's founders, along with early faculty and students who had the vision to take a chance on our fledgling university.

The excellence we celebrate today — the groundbreaking research, the success of our students, the expansion of

our facilities — all grew from the commitment of our first graduating class and has been carried forward by alumni through almost six decades. The foundation built by our more than 100,000 alumni continues to support us and propel us forward, ensuring the University remains an engine of progress and opportunity for generations to come.

As we continue to move forward as the Flagship of the Gulf Coast, we thank you. Your legacy of perseverance and purpose continues to inspire every generation of Jaguars. You didn't just attend this University; you helped make it, and for that, we owe you our deepest gratitude. We look forward to seeing you soon!

Karen Webster Edwards '80  
Executive Director  
USA National Alumni Association



# 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 \$100,000 in scholarships will be awarded in the 2025-26 academic year.

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



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

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



## Stay Connected, Stay Jaguar Proud!

Join the South Alabama National Alumni Association today



Stay connected to **more than 100,000** South Alabama alumni through your membership to the South Alabama National Alumni Association. Your membership not only grants you access to member-only benefits, but it also supports your alma mater and Jaguar community.

For more information on how to join or get involved, visit [Alumni.SouthAlabama.edu](https://Alumni.SouthAlabama.edu) or call us at (251)460-7084.





AN

UNBREAKABLE

COAST





## Amtrak's Mardi Gras Service embodies how Mobile and the Mississippi Gulf Coast move in tandem.

BY TERI GREENE

**AMTRAK'S NEW MARDI GRAS SERVICE** prepares for its 4:30 p.m. departure from downtown Mobile. It also offers a morning run at 6:30.

**AT 6:29 A.M.**, the horn sounds across the Port of Mobile. The train moves westward, past cranes and warehouses. Within minutes, the view shifts from skyline to marsh. Amtrak's Mardi Gras Service once again links Mobile to the Mississippi Gulf Coast and New Orleans after a two-decade break.

For many along this route, the excitement that began 20 years after Hurricane Katrina's decimation of tracks interrupted passenger train service isn't so much about celebration; it's more of an acknowledgment of something that already exists. The coast has always acted like one place. From Mobile to Bay St. Louis, families live in one direction and work in the other. Patients travel to Mobile for specialized neonatal and cancer care. Ten percent of University of South Alabama students are from Mississippi, most from coastal towns along these tracks.

Industry reinforces the same idea. Shipbuilding in Pascagoula supports the success of the Port of Mobile. Seafood moves up and down the shoreline. Storm recovery has always been a collaborative effort, from 1969's Hurricane Camille to Katrina and beyond. If the view suggests a continuous coastline, daily life confirms it.

The Gulf Coast's unity predates modern boundaries. French colonial settlements viewed this shoreline as a single community. Mardi Gras traditions, still celebrated centuries later, show how culture united long before state lines mattered. The railroad's path through Mississippi followed those

connections.

Outsiders have not always recognized that identity. During national coverage of Hurricane Isaac in 2012, one media outlet pointed to a weather map and referred to Mississippi as "the land mass between New Orleans and Mobile." Locals turned the phrase into a joke, but it hinted at a deeper dismissal. The Mardi Gras Service offers something visible and everyday that pushes back. People boarding and stepping off in coastal towns show the region is not a gap, but a series of destinations. Getting here took time.

"It was one of the most difficult collaborations I have ever been involved with, but anything worthwhile is usually hard," says David Clark, president and CEO of the Visit Mobile tourism agency. States, cities, federal agencies and the Port of Mobile all had to unite to make it happen.

Local leaders see a clear opportunity. Clark says the train is already bringing new visitors into downtown. Hotels are seeing guests arrive from the train platform, next to the National Maritime Museum of the Gulf in the heart of downtown Mobile, with luggage in tow. In a tourism economy built on movement, passenger rail expands the range of where visitors come from and where they go next.

Gulfport Mayor Hugh Keating, a 1974 University of South Alabama alumnus, sees the same potential along Mississippi's coast. He says residents regularly take the trip just for the experience. The train itself becomes part of the destination. He points to Gulfport's



evolving tourism district, including the Mississippi Aquarium and the Gulfport Museum of History, as a place now easier for riders to reach without driving.

The convenience, Keating says, matters for more than weekend plans. It keeps young adults connected to the region for entertainment, work and family. “Whether you get off in Gulfport, Mobile or New Orleans,” he says, “you’re still on the Gulf Coast.”

The service also aligns with broader investments in culture and commerce on both sides of the Alabama-Mississippi line. In Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, Biloxi and Pascagoula, tourism and economic development leaders are preparing for a steady increase in visitors who don’t need a car. In Mobile, riders can walk straight into historic districts, galleries and eateries. The same is true in Mississippi’s coastal cities, where stops place passengers near waterfront districts and downtown blocks.

The route follows the curve of the shoreline through Bay St. Louis and along working waterfronts, then traverses the thin, watery strip of land between lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne toward New Orleans, where the Mississippi River becomes the defining landmark. The ride covers about 145 miles, crossing borders that hardly register in the landscape. What begins in Mobile and ends in New Orleans feels less like a departure and more like a reminder of what connects the coast.

The Mardi Gras Service doesn’t create that link. It provides access to the route via a trip that feels nostalgic, even for riders who have never stepped onto a train before. And for the first time in a long time, it makes that connection visible and tangible.

**IF YOU GO:** Trains leave downtown Mobile twice a day, at 6:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., with stops in Pascagoula, Biloxi, Gulfport and Bay St. Louis in Mississippi, ending at the Union Passenger Terminal in New Orleans at 10:13 a.m. and 8:13 p.m. Adult coach fares end-to-end start at \$15 each way.





BAY ST. LOUIS   GULFPORT   BILOXI   PASCAGOULA

# AMTRAK-tions

**FUN WITHIN A SHORT WALK** of Amtrak's  
Mardi Gras Service stops in Mississippi

## PASCAGOULA PLATFORM

505 RAILROAD AVE.

### 2 MINUTES

**THE FLAGSHIP DISTRICT**  
Dining, shopping along  
and near Delmas Avenue.

### 9 MINUTES

**MAGNOLIA BIRDING PIER**  
2901 MAGNOLIA ST  
Overlooks marsh and bayou.

## GULFPORT PLATFORM

1419 27TH AVENUE

### 2 MINUTES

**CHANDELEUR ISLAND BREWING  
COMPANY, 2711 14TH ST.**  
Craft beers, pub food; kid friendly.

### 17 MINUTES

**MISSISSIPPI AQUARIUM**  
2100 BEACH BLVD.  
Buy tickets online to avoid waits.

## BILOXI PLATFORM

890 ESTERS BLVD.

### 6 MINUTES

**GROUND ZERO BLUES CLUB BILOXI**  
814 HOWARD AVE.  
Food, live music, including during  
weekend brunch.

### 16 MINUTES

**BILOXI SMALL CRAFT HARBOR**  
679 BEACH BLVD.  
Dining, gaming, boat tours, beach.

## BAY ST. LOUIS PLATFORM

1928 DEPOT WAY

### 5 MINUTES

**BAY ST. LOUIS LITTLE THEATRE**  
398 BLAIZE AVE.  
Community theater, concerts,  
comedy.

### 14 MINUTES

**BAY ST. LOUIS BEACH AND  
WASHINGTON STREET PIER**  
598 S. BEACH BLVD.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Gulfport Mayor Hugh Keating speaks to a crowd from the platform at the Gulfport station; passengers get on board in Mobile; light fixtures hang at the historic Gulfport station; business-class seating offers added legroom; a close view of one of the train's steel wheels; crowds gather as the train arrives in Bay St. Louis; the on-board muffuletta has quickly become a passenger favorite (\$9); the station platform in Biloxi catches the late-afternoon light. Center: Petunias brighten the platform at the Pascagoula station.





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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Doc Rock

Benefiting USA Health  
Jan. 29, 2026  
Soul Kitchen, Mobile

### 21st Annual Distinguished Alumni & Service Awards

March 5, 2026  
MacQueen Alumni Center

### Home and Garden Show

Benefiting USA Health  
Providence Hospital  
March 19-22, 2026  
Mobile Convention Center

### Local Goodness

Benefiting USA Health  
Children's & Women's  
Hospital  
May 3, 2026  
Magnolia Manor, Mobile

>> FOR MORE EVENTS



**MILITARY SERVICES FLAGS** at Veterans Memorial Plaza symbolize South's commitment to those with military affiliations. On page 6, meet three student veterans who know what it means to stay the course. On page 35, learn how military stress-reduction techniques are helping nurses.