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Five-year capital campaign crosses the finish line above goal
Although it may be tempting to look at what we’ve lost, there is so much for which I am thankful. We kicked off this year by opening the MacQueen Alumni Center. This incredible facility was built by our alumni for our alumni, and we can’t wait to share it with each of you.

Since May, more than 3,500 students have become alumni. Our students have been resilient during an uncertain year and have continued to follow their dreams despite facing hurdles unknown to previous classes.

On September 12, alumni and friends cheered on our jaguar football team during the first game at Hancock Whitney Stadium. Many of you helped make the longtime dream of an on-campus stadium a reality, and we are so thankful.
Hundreds of alumni joined us in October for our Virtual Alumni Reunion. Although we couldn’t gather in person, alumni from across the country enjoyed reconnecting through our virtual events.

After five years, the University concluded its $150 million Upward & Onward campaign on September 30. Our Jaguar family helped us reach and exceed this ambitious goal, crossing the finish line at more than $160.9 million!

As we all look forward to a new year, I am certain that, no matter what challenges we encounter, we will conquer them together. We Are South Alumni.

Karen Edwards ’80, Executive Director
USA National Alumni Association
Sirmon appointed to Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Alabama Governor Kay Ivey has appointed Ann Forbes Sirmon ’87 to the Alabama Commission on Higher Education.

“The professional experience that Commissioner Sirmon will bring to ACHE will be invaluable during these unprecedented times in higher education,” said ACHE Executive Director Jim Purcell.

Sirmon is the executive director of the Mobile Bar Association and Mobile Bar Foundation. Her career has included management positions with the Mobile County District Attorney’s Office, Distinguished Young Women and the Mobile Convention and Visitors Corporation. She served as president of the USA National Alumni Association in 2013-2014.

Faculty and young alumnus honored

The University of South Alabama National Alumni Association awarded its Faculty Excellence Awards and Young Alumni Award during its annual membership meeting in September. Five USA faculty members were recognized for their achievements as well as one outstanding young alumnus.

Dr. Christy West, associate professor, chemical and biomolecular engineering in the College of Engineering, received the Andy and Carol Denny National Alumni Excellence in Teaching Award. Angie O’Neal, academic advisor, research and education training in the College of Medicine, received the Beth and Don Davis National Alumni Association Excellence in Advising Award.

Dr. Joseph F. Hair Jr., professor, marketing and e-commerce in the Mitchell College of Business, received the Olivia Rambo McGlothlen National Alumni Outstanding Scholar Award. Dr. Lesley A. Gregoricka, associate professor, sociology and anthropology in the College of Arts and Sciences, received the Semoon and Youngshin Chang Endowed Award for Humanitarian Services. Dr. Natalie Gassman, assistant professor of physiology and cell biology in the USA College of Medicine and USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute, received the National Alumni Association Endowed Award for Faculty Innovation.

The Lisa Bethea Kavanagh Young Alumni Award recognizes outstanding achievement of an alumnus who is age 40 or younger. This year’s recipient is Michael T. Odair. Odair graduated from USA in 2004 with a B.A. in communication with a concentration in digital cinema and television. He is currently senior vice president of creative at Superjacket Productions in Los Angeles.

Notably, Odair served as executive director for the A&E series “Duck Dynasty” from 2012-2015. He has received numerous industry awards and has been nominated for others, including two Daytime Emmys.
Mississippi Jag Tag
The Mississippi Department of Revenue has approved the University of South Alabama to create a Mississippi Jag Tag. USA must pre-sell 300 of the specialty license tags before production can begin.

For information about how to apply for this specialty tag, visit southalabama.edu/msjag-tag or call (251) 460-7084.

North Alabama student named Trustees Scholar
Neil Chaudhary is the USA Board of Trustees Scholar for 2020-2021. Chaudhary, 18, is a freshman biomedical sciences student who plans to become a doctor.

He chose South because of the Honors College and early acceptance medical school program. “I wasn’t anticipating extra financial aid or anything, but I was definitely very happy and grateful,” said Chaudhary.

At James Clemens High School in Madison, Ala., he earned a 5.2 weighted grade-point average and earned a 35-composite score on the ACT. He served as president of the Red Cross Club and belonged to several service groups and national honor societies.

Mobile freshman awarded first social justice scholarship
USA freshman Madison English was selected as the first recipient of the 100 Black Men USA Scholars of Perseverance and Social Justice scholarship. The new award is funded by the University and the 100 Black Men of Greater Mobile organization. The recipient receives a full-tuition scholarship to South for four years.

English, a graduate of Davidson High School in Mobile, was a student in EPIC — the Engineering Pathway Integrated Curriculum. She also joined the Key Club, competed in basketball and track and field, and served as a class representative. She plans to study nursing at South.

South wins AI forecasting grant
USA is one of five institutions to receive a four-year National Science Foundation grant totaling $5 million dollars for a project titled Using Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in weather. This is a collaboration between USA’s School of Computing and meteorology in the department of earth sciences.

The grant will provide funding to support the South Alabama Mesonet, a network of 26 automated weather stations located in the north-central Gulf Coast that Dr. Sytske Kimball, department of earth sciences chair, founded in 2004. The stations collect meteorological data that is used in a wide range of applications from agriculture, to air quality and health, to climate change.
USA Health breaks ground on freestanding emergency department

USA Health held a groundbreaking ceremony in October for a new freestanding emergency department. When complete, the state-of-the-art facility will provide people who live and work in west Mobile with convenient access to the most advanced emergency and diagnostic care available in the region.

“In addition to providing advanced emergency care, this facility also will support our mission to train the next generation of healthcare providers,” said USA President Dr. Tony Waldrop.

GO Run jump-starts oncology research

Since it began 12 years ago, the GO Run has provided seed money to jump-start scientific research on gynecologic cancers conducted at the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute. Now some of those projects are starting to bear fruit.

One project involves a vaccine, now in clinical trials, that may prolong the lives of certain ovarian cancer patients. Another project builds upon findings from an anti-cancer compound tested in chickens, with the hope that it may treat or prevent ovarian cancer in women.

“Because of the GO Run, we’ve really grown our research portfolio,” said Rodney Rocconi, M.D., Elsie Colle Chair of Oncology Research and professor of gynecologic oncology at the Mitchell Cancer Institute.

Rocconi founded the GO Run, a 5K and 1-Mile Fun Run named GO for Gynecologic Oncology, in 2008 to raise awareness about GYN cancers and fuel local research. More than $700,000 has been raised since its inception.

Morris named Sun Belt female student-athlete of the year

Former USA soccer standout Briana Morris has been voted the Sun Belt Conference’s 2019-20 Female Student-Athlete of the Year.

Morris becomes the first Jaguar female to ever win the award after being selected one of the league’s NCAA Woman of the Year Award nominees as well as the Jaguar Female Student-Athlete of the Year following her senior campaign.

As a senior in 2019, Morris was voted the Sun Belt Player and Offensive Player of the Year, was a first-team all-conference honoree and was chosen the Most Outstanding Performer in addition to being named to the all-tournament team at the Sun Belt championship. Her efforts helped lead the Jaguars to a 16-4-2 record overall, an 8-1-1 conference mark to earn the Sun Belt regular-season title and the tournament championship, and she was also named first-team all-Southeast Region by the United Soccer Coaches.

The president of South’s Student-Athlete Advisory Committee her final three semesters in college, Morris was named to the Sun Belt Conference Commissioner’s List after her last year in school. She posted a 3.65 cumulative grade-point average in earning her bachelor’s degree in accounting from the University in May.

Former Jaguar striker Briana Morris currently plays with Aarhus Gymnastikforening Kvindefodbold in Aarhus, Denmark.
A new home for Jaguars

After years of dreaming, planning and construction, the USA Jaguars have an on-campus stadium to call home.
Thanks to a generous donation from Budweiser-Busch Distributing Co., the Michelob Ultra Terrace offers an intimate and immersive view of the action near field level. The Terrace also has the ability to transform into large-scale concert staging during the off season.

The Jaguars kicked off for the first time on Abraham A. Mitchell Field on September 12 against Tulane. The game ended in a 27–24 loss, but enthusiastic South Alabama fans gathered to cheer on their team.

“This stadium represents the dedication and loyalty of Jaguars everywhere. It’s a source of pride for our students, alumni and the entire community.”

—Dr. Joel Erdmann, Director of Athletics
More than 600 club seats offer excellent game-day views near the 50-yard line. The Hargrove Club, made possible through a major gift from Hargrove Engineers + Constructors, features an indoor hospitality area.

Mobile County Commission Center for Academic Success
The multipurpose facility is more than just a stadium. Thanks to the Mobile County Commission, more than 380 student-athletes in 15 sports have a dedicated space to focus on their academic goals.

More than 600 club seats offer excellent game-day views near the 50-yard line. The Hargrove Club, made possible through a major gift from Hargrove Engineers + Constructors, features an indoor hospitality area.
The COVID-19 pandemic brought about dramatic changes in your work lives. The compassion you show while providing the highest quality care and service make you our healthcare heroes. We’re grateful for all you do.

THANK YOU TO OUR HEROES
In October 2015, the University launched the most ambitious capital campaign in its history, with a goal of $150 million. On September 30, 2020, the Upward & Onward Campaign was completed, raising more than $160.9 million to launch South Alabama into the next era of academics, athletics and healthcare.

Total Raised

$160,900,915

Exceeded campaign goal of $150 million by 7%

$35,000,000 for scholarships

$17,539,285 matched through the Mitchell-Moulton Scholarship Initiative

Total donors

23,130

First-time donors

15,297

From

50 states

9 countries

From donors

$35,000,000

$17,539,285

$150 million

$160,900,915
Watch the Upward & Onward campaign video now by opening the QR code below on your phone or tablet.

HOW TO SCAN A QR CODE ON AN IPHONE OR IPAD:
• Open the Camera app on your iPhone.
• Point your iPhone at the QR code to scan it.
• Tap the pop-up notification at the top of your screen.

433 NEW OR ENHANCED ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIPS

$176,212 PANDEMIC EMERGENCY FUNDS raised since March

3 NEW AND RENOVATED FACILITIES

8 NEW RESEARCH ENDOWMENTS

9 NEW ENDOWED FACULTY POSITIONS

126 STUDENTS GRADUATED FROM THE HONORS COLLEGE since its establishment in 2017

$11 MILLION TO SUPPORT GRADUATE EDUCATION AND ENHANCE LIFE-CHANGING RESEARCH

$1.2 MILLION TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE IN MEDICALLY UNDERSERVED AREAS OF ALABAMA
“ANGELIA AND I HAVE BEEN HONORED TO SERVE THE UNIVERSITY IN THIS AMBITIOUS CAMPAIGN. USA HAS GIVEN US SO MUCH, AND WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT, BECAUSE OF THE SUCCESS OF THIS CAMPAIGN, MANY MORE STUDENTS AND THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE WILL REAP THE BENEFITS FOR YEARS TO COME.”

Dr. Steve Stokes, Co-Chair
Upward & Onward Campaign

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16 SCHOLARSHIPS ESTABLISHED or enhanced for Study Abroad opportunities

7 SCHOLARSHIPS ESTABLISHED or enhanced for international education

600 STUDENTS IMPACTED through Study Abroad programs and scholarships

STUDENTS EXPERIENCED LEARNING IN 52 COUNTRIES SINCE 2015

4 NEW OR EXPANDED FACILITIES including the Strada Patient Care Center, Fanny Meisler Trauma Center, Children’s & Women’s Hospital Pediatric Emergency Department, and USA Health Mapp Family Campus, Baldwin County.

$5.5 MILLION RAISED THROUGH FUNDRAISING EVENTS

16,000 CANCER PATIENTS TREATED in Mobile and Baldwin counties

11,400+ USA HEALTH EMPLOYEES DONATED TO THE CAMPAIGN

$7.7 MILLION GIVEN BY 6,356 USA EMPLOYEES AND RETIREES

$4.8 MILLION DONATED BY ALUMNI AND FRIENDS to build the MacQueen Alumni Center

$17 MILLION RAISED FOR USA ATHLETICS

5,294 MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

3,600 ALUMNI VOLUNTEERED 10,972 HOURS THROUGH JAGUARSCARE
SERVANT LEADERS
Louis and Melinda Mapp’s legacy of support for those in need
On a glorious fall afternoon — their favorite time of the year — Louis and Melinda Mapp pull up a pair of rocking chairs on the front porch of their Fairhope home.

They sit down to trace a family history that begins with business roots in Mississippi and ends with hospital philanthropy in Alabama. Both of them are volunteers as well as donors. They have the easy rapport of a couple who have been married 61 years. He starts most of their stories. She finishes many of his sentences.

The Mapps are from Hattiesburg, Miss., where his grandfather founded the Faulkner Concrete Pipe Company in 1915. Years later, after selling the family business, Louis started a second career in finance at the company that became Regions Bank.

Since then, he and his wife have shared their good fortune with neighbors in both states. The Mapp Family Foundation has given away more than $6 million. The couple has made several six-figure donations to USA Health Children’s & Women’s Hospital, where Louis has volunteered in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

He’s a certified NICU cuddler, using his body warmth and a gentle rock to soothe premature infants. “To hold one of those babies in your arms,” he said, “is just amazing.”

This summer, the Mapps gave eight acres to USA Health for a Baldwin County medical campus that is proposed to include outpatient surgical care.

“Communities can’t make it without good healthcare,” Louis says. “And it’s needed here. Why should a young family with a critical-need child have to drive to Mobile, when you can have a doctor with a subspecialty right here?”

Owen Bailey, the CEO of USA Health, has known the Mapps for 30 years. They’ve served on local boards and committees. As volunteers, they’ve offered their time as well as their money. “I can’t say enough good things about them,” Bailey says. “They’re kind, caring and selfless. They’ve made a difference in countless lives.”

Years ago, when the Mapps donated to a new heart center in Fairhope, hospital administrators planned the usual ground-breaking ceremony of VIPs with hard hats and shovels. Louis suggested a program featuring local heart patients and their families.

This year, when USA Health was looking at land for a campus near Fairhope, the Mapps owned two suitable tracts. Louis insisted that the hospital group accept the more desirable one, a $2 million corner parcel at the intersection of Alabama 181 and Alabama 104.

Bailey calls him a mentor and counselor who is gracious and humble. “Louis is one of the most talented business people I know, but you would never hear that from his mouth,” he says. “He’s a servant leader.”

SUNSHINE ON THE EASTERN SHORE

For a front porch chat, Melinda Mapp wears dress shoes, black slacks and a matching print blouse. Louis is more casual, in a gray long-sleeve T-shirt and faded blue jeans. He’s taller than his wife. His hair is shorter and whiter. His drawl is more syrupy.

Louis doesn’t jog anymore, thanks to his 83-year-old knees, but he still wears New Balance running shoes. An iPhone peeks from his shirt pocket.


The Mapps have three children, eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Their daughter’s family lives in Fairhope, while one son is in Mississippi and the other is in Florida. “We don’t go to visit much anymore,” Louis says. “They come here.”
Joining the Mapps on their front porch is a five-year-old dachshund. Animal welfare is another one of their interests. Sunshine is part of that story. “She’s a rescue,” Louis says. “Our second rescue dog,” Melinda says. “From ‘The Haven,’” Louis says. “A Fairhope-Mobile animal shelter.”

“We found out about her from a friend,” Melinda says. “We had just lost another dog.”

“I got this e-mail saying ‘you need to go and see this dog,’” Louis says. “Then they brought her to the house.”

“She went through that door,” Melinda says, “like she’d lived here her whole life.” “And the rest is history,” Louis says.

MISSISSIPPI NATIVES

The Mapps knew each other growing up in Mississippi. They started dating when she was a sophomore and he was a senior at Hattiesburg High School.

“He was nice – very nice,” Melinda says. “And my older brother was so particular about who I dated. Mother and dad would always say, ‘Is it OK if she goes out with so-and-so?’ Then they said, ‘What about Louis Mapp?’ And he said sure.”

Louis went on to college at Southern Mississippi, where the football field, Faulkner Field, was named for his grandfather. He was not an academic success, though, and never graduated.

“I didn’t flunk out, but I didn’t do well,” he says with a hang-dog grin, “I enjoyed myself.”

His father told him that leaving school meant that he was either going to work or joining the military. Louis enlisted in the Army – “I was a slick-sleeved private, about as low as you can get” – before marrying Melinda and returning to college at Louisiana State University.

They were big football fans in those days. The Ole Miss and LSU teams were often ranked No. 1 and No. 2 in the nation. In Tiger Stadium on Halloween Night, 1959, they watched Billy Cannon become a legend by returning a punt 89 yards on his way to winning the Heisman Trophy.

“They were playing Ole Miss and I got blamed for it,” Melinda says, laughing. “I had just said, ‘Well, I don’t know what’s so great about Billy Cannon. ...’”

The Mapps returned to Hattiesburg and Louis took over the family business after his grandfather died. He jokes that he earned his MBA on the job. Years later, he took his business experience to the banking industry.

He makes it sound simple. “The basics are the same,” Louis says. “Treat your customers right, treat your employees right, and you’ll be all right.”

A COMMITMENT TO SERVICE

In Baldwin County, the Mapps remain active in the Fairhope Christian Church, where Louis offers computer support. He helped the pastor set up livestreaming so quarantined members can join Sunday services from home. He also took a series of photographs for a church display, using his iPhone as a technical and artistic challenge.

He has a passion for automobiles that is also related to engineering and technology. He loves to drive his Audi Q8, especially at night.

“I’ll tell you what it’s got,” Louis says. “This Audi has night vision with infrared cameras and thermal imaging. If I’m going down the road in the dark and there’s a jogger or bicyclist, they light right up.”

For many years, Melinda volunteered at hospitals in Mississippi and Alabama. She preferred working with staff and patients in the emergency room.

“It was always interesting,” she said. “If there was a family that was worried or distressed, I could run errands or do whatever they needed me to do.”

At USA Health Children’s & Women’s Hospital in Mobile, a tour of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit touched Louis’ heart. Like Melinda, he wanted to work in the busiest wards of the hospital. Last year, he also volunteered to work with the families of patients in the Trauma Center at USA Health University Hospital in Mobile.

“I knew there were some really sick people and they were getting great care,” he says. “I wanted to be a part of that.”

Closer to home is their land grant to USA Health. The couple don’t often lend their names to a project, but this is an exception. They’re invested in the Mapp Family Campus.

They see a need for everyone in Baldwin County, themselves included. “We’re at an age where it’s not so easy to go back and forth across Mobile Bay,” she says. “I’ve had so many people tell me, since the announcement was made, how excited they are to have this in Baldwin County.”
Your Jag pride can turn dreams into reality.

When you purchase a University of South Alabama license plate, 100% of net proceeds benefit USA student scholarships. Since 2013, USA license plates have raised more than $1 million for students to follow their dreams.

Through the Mitchell-Moulton Scholarship Initiative, the proceeds from your Jag Tag are automatically matched.

Get your Jag Tag today!
SouthAlabama.edu/Alumni

MISSISSIPPI ALUMNI AND FRIENDS!

The Mississippi Department of Revenue has approved the University of South Alabama to create a Mississippi Jag Tag. In order to make this tag a reality, USA must pre-sell 300 of the specialty license tags to our alumni and friends.

Reserve your specialty Mississippi/University of South Alabama Jag tag today!
southalabama.edu/msjagtag
This summer, in the midst of a global pandemic and social unrest across the country, Dr. André Green saw a window of opportunity. Shortly thereafter, the University of South Alabama and 100 Black Men of Greater Mobile partnered to establish two scholarships to support underrepresented students.

“The 100 has a great relationship with the University in establishing other scholarships,” said Green, associate vice president of academic affairs at USA. “But this one seemed to be particularly timely in the fact that we wanted to find a way to remember all of those who have fallen to systems of oppression and systems of injustice.” Green also serves as president of 100 Black Men of Greater Mobile.

The first award, named the 100 Black Men USA Scholars of Perseverance and Social Justice, is a full-tuition scholarship for an incoming freshman that will be awarded to one student each year for four years. The organization selected Madison English, a freshman from Mobile, as the inaugural recipient this fall.

The new scholarship opportunity equates to an approximate total investment of $225,000.

“We are honored for the opportunity to partner with 100 Black Men of Greater Mobile,” said Dr. Tony Waldrop, USA president. “Although it is just one step in a long journey, I believe the legacies left by these scholarship students will continue in perpetuity.”

A PARTNERSHIP FOR CHANGE

100 Black Men of Greater Mobile has also established an endowed scholarship fund with USA, named the Leadership in Social Justice and Perseverance Scholarship. The University, in partnership with the 100, is currently raising funds for this initiative that will, ultimately, be awarded to a rising senior at South who demonstrates leadership, a commitment to social justice and perseverance characteristics.

“Both USA and the 100 will raise funds for this scholarship fund, as it is important for so many students,” said Dr. Paul Frazier, chief diversity officer at USA and a 100 Black Men member. “We will be able to support many deserving
students for years to come and that is systemic change at its best—a grass roots approach.”

Contributions to the endowed fund will be matched dollar-for-dollar through the Mitchell-Moulton Scholarship Initiative, with a goal of raising $500,000.

“The 100 is thrilled to partner with the University and President Waldrop to make this scholarship a reality,” said Dr. Michael Mitchell, vice president for student affairs at USA and 100 Black Men of Greater Mobile vice president. “We know they understand this opportunity to make something special happen.”

To be considered for the 100 Black Men USA Scholars of Perseverance and Social Justice, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Minimum high school GPA of 3.0
- Minimum ACT score of 21
- Students with demonstrated financial need
- Students who are underrepresented in their communities

For more information about the two scholarship initiatives, contact the USA Office of Development and Alumni Relations at (251) 460–7032 or development@southalabama.edu.
Keith Griffith made a splash at the University of South Alabama even before he first set foot on campus as a student in 2017. The moment that defined his trajectory at South took place months earlier, when he opened his acceptance letter as his mom, Heather, recorded him on video.

In the video, Keith rips open the envelope and pulls out the letter, smiling in anticipation even before he unfolds it. As she films, Heather reads the letter aloud. “I made it!” Keith exclaims, his smile now twice as broad and lighting up his entire face. He rushes toward Heather and wraps her in a long hug.

That feel-good video has amassed more than 7.5 million views and more than 219,000 reactions in the three years since it was posted on Facebook. It set the stage for Keith’s time at South as a student in PASSAGE USA, the University’s certificate program for students with intellectual disabilities.

“He started the program at a gallop. He was ready for college,” said Abigail Baxter, Ph.D., director of PASSAGE (Preparing All Students Socially and Academically for Gainful Employment) USA. “He really just took this opportunity and ran with it.”

THE EVOLUTION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
PASSAGE USA is relatively new on campus; Keith was a member of its first cohort of students. Baxter and her colleagues started the two-year program with a vision to create a next step in the evolution of services for people with intellectual disabilities.

Baxter has witnessed the evolution of special education throughout her lifetime. She’s seen kids with special needs – especially kids with intellectual disabilities – go from not being able to attend public school, to having access to support services from infancy all the way through high school.

But after high school, all those services stop, and students often don’t have institutional support to help them progress further. Baxter’s goal was to unlock access to higher education, particularly so students could work on skills to help them gain jobs and live as independently as possible, just as any college student.

“We are a program where students are challenged, where they are whole members of the University community. We want them to embrace that inclusiveness and to be ready to make the choices and decisions that go along with that,” said Baxter. “And at some level, just like parents of any kid going to college, parents have to get ready to let go a little bit. And that’s hard when your kid has a disability.”

In addition to PASSAGE-specific classes focused on independent living and career skills, students in the program take regular-ed electives based on their interests. They also have work experience every semester, both on and off campus.

PEER MENTORS
One of the hallmarks of PASSAGE USA is its peer mentorship program, in which South undergraduates support PASSAGE students as they navigate class, work and socializing.
In high school, said Baxter, kids with more significant disabilities tend to be segregated into special-education classes, and their interactions are primarily with adults: the teachers, para-professionals and aides who work with them. They have little contact with their peers.

“What we want our students to do is to learn what’s appropriate for people their age. At 60, I can’t tell them how to be a 20-year-old. Only a 20-year-old can. And that feedback from someone their age that they have a relationship with is probably going to go further than it is from a professor.”

Donavon Dahmer became Keith’s mentor in Spring 2019, as they both embarked on their last semester before graduation.

“They just kind of hit it off,” said Baxter. “And they started doing things like friends do. It wasn’t just when Donavon was here to mentor him; it was nights and weekends.”

“Before COVID, I would take him to my church,” said Dahmer. “He would sing in the choir with me sometimes, and then we’d go out and get tacos.”

Despite challenges – they’ve both graduated, Dahmer is a second-year medical student at South, and COVID has made face-to-face hangouts impossible – they’ve kept in touch during the pandemic over FaceTime.

“Donavon’s one-of-a-kind, let me tell you,” said Heather. “He is a sweetheart.”

Baxter said it’s not just PASSAGE USA students who benefit from the mentorship program; the relationships are a two-way street. “One of our biggest groups of mentors comes from the pre-health professions honors society, so the impact then on future doctors, nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, is just incredible, because they’ve had extended experience with people with intellectual disabilities. And they’ve seen them as a peer, not as a patient,” she said.

“I’ve heard from several people who are on our medical school admissions committee that when they interview people who have been our peer mentors, often that has been a transformative experience that they reflect on.”

GETTING TO WORK

In PASSAGE USA, students typically work on campus their first year. In their second year, faculty pinpoint a career area the student likes and coordinate 15 hours of work per week in that setting – preferably in the community, rather than on campus, to better prepare students for life after they leave South.

The story of how Keith landed a job his second year in the program has become something of a legend at PASSAGE USA. That fall, he decided he wanted to work at Mobile Popcorn. When he told the faculty member who worked on job placements, she said she’d work on it the following week.

“Well, he reported back to her the next day that he had called Mobile Popcorn and told them he wanted to apply for a job,” said Baxter. He’d already handed over his resume and scheduled an interview.

He got the job and worked there the following semester, washing dishes, folding linens, and sometimes popping popcorn or making cotton candy.

Thanks to that resourcefulness, in addition to the overall progress he made throughout the program, he won the Outstanding PASSAGE USA Student award in Spring 2019.

“That really threw me, when he called and told me he won it,” said Heather.

Keith was told he could have a couple of supporters in attendance at the awards ceremony, and in return, he told them he needed 10 to 12 tickets. In the end, his mother and father, aunts and uncles and a family friend were there to cheer him on. “It was a very tearful moment,” said Heather.

AFTER GRADUATION

Keith was excited to graduate, but Heather admits that, for her, the ceremony was a sad occasion.

“He was doing so well, and he was enjoying it so much,” she said. “It’s just a two-year program, but he enjoyed it. It really gave him something to look forward to.”

After he left South, Keith reprised the initiative he showed at Mobile Popcorn by going to the YMCA and getting a job on his own. At the Y, he worked the floor, keeping equipment and floors clean and taking out the garbage.

“Think about how powerful that is – it’s the second job he talked himself into,” said Baxter.

He worked at the Y until the pandemic forced him back home. He’s eager to go back, but he must wait until the health crisis subsides.

“That’s been an unfortunate thing we’ve learned from our first cohort and second cohort of graduates,” said Baxter. “For the most part, they were among the first to lose their jobs because of COVID. And unfortunately, like lots of other people in the service industry, they haven’t been called back.”

“I do think when we get this COVID thing figured out, our students will have better options for employment. I think Keith has demonstrated that when it’s safe for his health to go, he’ll find a job.”
After building a career and starting a family in Mobile, Cassandra Kellum began to take stock of her life. Her two daughters — Jeslyn, 12, and Julia, 9 — helped remind her how much the University of South Alabama meant to her development.

“My oldest already says, ‘I’m going to go to South; I’m going to be like you,’” said Kellum, an instructional specialist at Williamson High School. “I’ve taken them to basketball games and to walk around campus. I’ll say, ‘Look, that’s where Mommy used to live.’”

Thinking about the past and the future inspired Kellum and Les’Lee Gilberry — her South roommate and a fellow track and field athlete -- to start a pair of annual scholarships. The awards will be called SWAG, short for Student With Athletic Grit and based on athletic ability, academic success and community involvement.

Both of them want to share their college experience with young Jaguars.

“Everything at South helped mold me into the woman that I am today,” said Gilberry, an area sales manager with Amedisys Home Health Care. “Being in class, being a student, being an athlete.”

Kellum began considering a scholarship after meeting with Ron Stallworth, a 2003 mechanical engineering graduate who enjoyed a 30-year career at Honeywell. He currently serves on the USA National Alumni Association Board of Directors and encourages former students to become philanthropists.

“A lot of people don’t realize they can do it,” Stallworth said. “That it’s within reach.”
To help donors get started, Stallworth will sometimes provide first-year funding for an endowment. That’s what he’s doing with SWAG, which will begin awarding students in the spring of 2021.

He likes the idea of being a “force multiplier.” He wants to help middle-class people begin a tradition of charitable giving. Then they can set an example for their own children.

Alumni don’t have to be wealthy to begin an endowment, and some employers and foundations will match charitable donations. Even a small scholarship can make a big difference to a student with financial need.

“We don’t need to change the world,” Stallworth said. “We just need to help one or two people at a time. If we do that, things will change.”

Dr. Joel Erdmann, director of athletics at South, said there are many student-athletes with financial needs. A majority of them are not on full athletic scholarships. Many rely on financial aid and partial scholarships.

“We have a variety of scholarships, some of which are endowment-based,” Erdmann said. “This is tremendous, and we’re very grateful.”

RIVALS AND FRIENDS

Kellum and Gilberry were both high school sprinters when they met at the state track and field championships. Neither one of them won the 100-meter dash, but both earned scholarships to the University of South Alabama. The coach who recruited them said they could be roommates.

Kellum came from Madison County near Huntsville in north Alabama. “I had experience with tornados,” she jokes, “and ended up with hurricanes.”

Gilberry grew up in Baldwin County, where her parents live. She would drive home on weekends and bring along Kellum.

During the week at South, they shared workouts, study halls and life in the Delta Residence Hall.

“We stayed in D-2, which didn’t have kitchenettes, so we would go to the room of Chasity Thrash, who did have a kitchen,” Gilberry said. “She would cook chicken and rice, and it was like home.”

For four years, the two of them took classes and ran track. One of their coaches at South was Lee Evans, who remains famous for raising his fist in a black power salute from the victory platform at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City.

“He never bragged about it,” Kellum said, “but he would share his experiences with you.”

FRIENDS AND DONORS

After graduating from South in 2005, Kellum stayed in Mobile. She became a classroom teacher and reading specialist.

Gilberry moved to South Carolina for her healthcare career and then returned to Prattville, Ala. She also has two children – Caleb, 10, and Sydney, 7.

The two women still talk almost every day. Both of them are 38 years old, born just two weeks apart. They’re godmothers to each other’s kids.

And they both liked the idea of starting a scholarship at South.

“It made sense to me right from the beginning,” Gilberry said. “The timing felt right. With the coronavirus pandemic right now, just being able to fill that gap for somebody could be important.”

Kellum stepped up with a name for the scholarship. “Everything kind of fell into place,” she said. “We were trying to think of something and we liked the idea of SWAG. I’m always working on acronyms for our students at school.”

They wanted their money to go to track athletes because they think the sport is often overlooked on campus. Plus, it was part of their experience at South. They welcome donations to their endowment from other alumni who could expand the number and size of the scholarships.

Both of them would like to begin relationships with their scholarship recipients. Mentors on and off the track. Investing their time as well as their money.

“This is just a small contribution, compared with everything Les’Lee and I have gotten from the University,” Kellum said. “We want to develop our relationship with South Alabama.”
WELCOME ADDRESS AND CAMPUS TOUR
President Tony Waldrop kicked off the Alumni Reunion with a welcome address, followed by a Southerner-led tour of South’s beautiful campus.

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS PANEL
This live conversation featured a panel of alumni leaders and the current USA Student Government Association president to discuss how USA can continue to foster and enhance a community for students, faculty and staff that is inclusive and supportive of all members and celebrates diversity.

HANCOCK WHITNEY STADIUM TOUR AND CLOSING ADDRESS
USA athletics director Joel Erdmann, and Southpaw hosted an exclusive, behind-the-scenes look at the newly-opened Hancock Whitney Stadium. Following the tour, President Tony Waldrop closed out the Alumni Reunion with a few remarks.

USA HEALTH CULINARY MEDICINE DEMONSTRATION
The goal of the USA Health Culinary Medicine Program is to motivate individuals to eat more fruits and vegetables and arm them with the cooking skills they need to prepare the meals. Dr. Robert Israel, a board-certified internal medicine physician with USA Health, led participants in creating a meal that was healthy, quick and delicious.

CLASS OF 1970 GOLDEN JAGUARS TRIBUTE
Congratulations to our Golden Jaguars, the Class of 1970, on the 50th anniversary of their graduation from South.

Watch all of the Virtual Alumni Reunion videos now at southalabama.edu/alumnireunion or open the QR code below on your phone or tablet.

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In 2017, after Carlos Moore was sworn in as municipal judge of Clarksdale, Miss., he removed the state flag from his courtroom. “That was my first order of business,” he said. “It was a big to-do for a black judge to take it down.

Moore’s move made national news. So did the death threats he received.

The 1999 graduate of the University of South Alabama argued that if he found the Confederate symbol on the flag offensive, then other black people in his community would, too. He took the lead in his courtroom. In the rest of the state, there was not enough support to remove the flag.

Three years later, after a summer of Black Lives Matter protests that have reshaped the nation, Moore saw change come to Mississippi.

Walmart announced it would no longer sell the state flag. The NCAA said that Mississippi could no longer host post-season sports under the battle symbol. And the state finally decided it would pull down the flag after 126 years and repeated challenges to its embedded emblem.

On July 1, Moore traveled to the state capitol and watched history unfurl. “I felt a chill come down my neck and spine,” he said in a Mississippi podcast. “It was like dreams do come true.”

Moore, 43, grew up in Moss Point, Miss., where his mother worked for the Port Authority and his father was a welder at the Ingalls Shipyard. He earned a scholarship to the University of South Alabama and planned to study medicine. An interest in politics, though, carried him to law school at Florida State and then a legal career in northern Mississippi.
At South, he studied political science, served in student government and worked with Jaguar Productions. Dr. Nola Allen, chair of the political science department, became one of his mentors.

In 2018, Moore became the first president of the Black Alumni Society. Another leadership position. A connection to the past, and a link to the future.

“I think there has been a disconnect for a lot of us," he said. “It was a way to get us back involved on campus and working with students.”

Moore recently co-authored a book, “The Five Brothers: Our Journeys to Successful Careers in Law & Medicine,” which chronicles the obstacles that three attorneys, a judge and a physician had to overcome to get where they are today.

In Mississippi, Moore works as a judge in Clarksdale and Grenada, where he lives. His legal practice is now part of a national organization, the Cochran Firm. In August he was chosen as president-elect of the National Bar Association, the nation’s oldest and largest national association of predominantly African American lawyers, judges, educators and law students.

His political plans include running for Congress or the state Senate. Moore says he would never challenge an incumbent in his district, but one of his representatives is 88 years old. Time is on his side.

Moore is still amazed by the remarkable change this year in American attitudes over racial injustice and police reform.

It began with the video of a Minneapolis policeman kneeling on George Floyd’s neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. In the middle of a coronavirus pandemic, millions of people had time to consider and reconsider what happened and what has been happening across the country.

“I think COVID played its part,” he said. “It slowed everything down and tuned in people. People were just glued to the TV.”

The words “Black Lives Matter” are now seen on street murals and heard from people of all races across the country.

Moore said he is representing a man in a police brutality lawsuit right now in Birmingham. During depositions, he asked officers if they had ever used the “Black Lives Matter” expression.

“Usually, that would set people off, and lawyers would object, but now they say it so easily,” he said. “It’s gone from a despised slogan to a beloved refrain.”

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He considers that progress, but believes there is far more work to be done. Day-to-day concerns in Mississippi include economic opportunity and health disparities for African Americans. As a symbol and statement, he'd like to see Juneteenth, the Black emancipation celebration, become a national holiday.

Moore doesn’t mind campaigning on issues that are not yet popular. Who knows when things will change? The state flag controversy helped teach him that lesson of leadership.

“My place is always at the front of the line,” Moore said. “That’s something my mother always taught me.”
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