TO LEAVE THINGS BETTER THAN THE WAY THEY WERE

The tenure of retiring president Tony Waldrop marks pivotal time in South’s history.
SOUTH Magazine is a publication of the Office of Alumni Relations and the USA National Alumni Association. It is intended to inform alumni and friends of current USA events and issues.

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As the spring semester ends and the weather turns hot and humid, I find myself reflecting on trials of the past year while optimistically looking forward to a brighter future.

On April 26, we held our first in-person event at the MacQueen Alumni Center—the MAC—in more than 13 months. “Son of the South at South” featured civil rights activist Bob Zellner and was one of, hopefully, many more speaker-series events to be held at the MAC.

Throughout the past year we have cherished the moments spent with our alumni—albeit virtually—and are enthusiastically planning for the return of in-person events this fall.

After a brief summer hiatus, we will kick off the fall semester with Takeover Tuesday at the MAC in August. We are excited to be able to share the alumni center with many of you who have not yet had an opportunity to visit.

On Sept. 4, we will host our first tailgate party at the MAC before the Jaguars take on Southern Mississippi at Hancock Whitney Stadium. We hope to see all of our alumni fans before each home football game this season.

After a one-year delay, we will host our first in-person Alumni Reunion Weekend Sept. 30 – Oct. 3. We’re planning a full weekend of activities including class reunions, campus tours, tailgating and, of course, the South Alabama vs. Louisiana football game. Mark your calendars now!

On May 6-8, we welcomed more than 2,100 new graduates into the alumni family. These students weathered unprecedented circumstances to achieve their goals.

I hope you know how much we appreciate all of our dedicated alumni who have stayed engaged, supportive and enthusiastic throughout these challenging months. We cannot wait to see you soon. Until then, Go Jags!

Karen Edwards ’80
Executive Director
USA National Alumni Association
McGhee elected to Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian Board of Trustees

Robert R. McGhee ’93 was elected in April to the board of trustees of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian.

McGhee is vice chairman of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians Tribal Council. He previously worked at the Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Indian Affairs, the U.S. Senate and Troutman Sanders LLP—Indian Law Practice Group. He currently serves on the boards of the National Indian Child Welfare Association, Children First Alabama, the Center for Native American Youth and is a member of the National Alumni Association Board of Directors.

Thanks to donations from the Alabama Power Foundation, Hancock Whitney Bank, AT&T Foundation, Regions Bank and many individuals, the new Leadership in Social Justice and Perseverance Scholarship fund has raised more than $140,000. With dollar for dollar matching through the Mitchell-Moulton Scholarship Initiative, the endowed scholarship totals close to $300,000.

The 100 Black Men of Greater Mobile established the Leadership in Social Justice and Perseverance Scholarship in 2020, in partnership with the University, as a way to remember all of those who have fallen to systems of oppression and injustice. Scholarships will be awarded to rising seniors who are underrepresented in the student body at South Alabama and who demonstrate leadership, and a commitment to social justice and perseverance characteristics.

ALUMNI REUNION

Alumni Reunion Weekend scheduled

The first in-person Alumni Reunion Weekend is scheduled for Sept. 30 – Oct. 3, 2021. The weekend will include class reunion parties, keynote speaker John Quiñones, tours of Hancock Whitney Stadium, tailgating and the Jaguars vs. Louisiana football game.

“We are thrilled to be able to invite all of our alumni and friends back to campus for an in-person reunion,” said Margaret Sullivan, vice president for development and alumni relations. “After postponing the live event in 2020, we cannot wait to visit with our alumni and welcome them back to their alma mater. It’s going to be an exciting and fun-filled weekend.”

Visit southalabama.edu/alumnireunion for more information.

Jaguar Memoirs archive alumni stories

This spring, the USA National Alumni Association launched Jaguar Memoirs, an initiative that collects the oral history of our alumni from their time at South Alabama. Throughout the summer, our partner company, PCI, will be contacting Jaguar alumni to record their inspiring, funny and heartwarming stories from their time as students.

“Our alumni family consists of more than 87,000 people from across the country and the world,” said Karen Edwards, executive director of the USA National Alumni Association. “We all have stories about our experience as a student, from a favorite professor to meeting your significant other. No matter when you attended South, we want to hear your South memories.” For more information about the oral history project, Jaguar Memoirs, contact the alumni association at alumni@southalabama.edu.

Corporate leaders invest in social justice scholarship

Margaret Sullivan, vice president, development and alumni relations at USA; Patrick T. Murphy Jr., vice president, Alabama Power, Mobile Division and Dr. Andre Green, associate vice president of academic affairs at USA and president of 100 Black Men of Greater Mobile.
Dr. Martin J. Heslin named director of the USA Health Mitchell Cancer Institute

Martin J. Heslin, M.D., MSHA is a renowned surgical oncologist and former associate director of the O’Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He served as executive vice chair of the department of surgery and was the chief of the medical staff at UAB Hospital.

“Dr. Heslin’s skills and vision will build upon the great foundation of the Mitchell Cancer Institute as it continues to evolve as the preeminent academic cancer center in the region,” said John V. Marymont, M.D., MBA, USA vice president for medical affairs and dean of the USA College of Medicine.

Heslin has extensive training in hepatobiliary, pancreatic and colorectal surgery, and maintains a clinical interest in gastrointestinal cancers including liver, pancreas, stomach, colon and rectum malignancies. His research has focused on a variety of topics from surgical outcomes to physician management.

Civil rights activist speaks at MacQueen Center

Prominent civil rights activist Bob Zellner, a native of Mobile, spoke at the MacQueen Alumni Center on April 28 about his life’s work of fighting for justice in the freedom movement with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks and many others.

As a young man growing up in the Port City, Zellner understood and knew he had to fight against Jim Crow segregation and did so as he continued his education at Huntingdon College.

While studying in Montgomery, he met King and Parks, who left an indelible mark on his life. He became the first white southerner to join the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, known as SNCC. He worked as a field secretary, recruiting white students into the civil rights movement. Until 1962, Zellner was SNCC’s only white field secretary.

Zellner also discussed his autobiography, “The Wrong Side of Murder Creek: A White Southerner in the Freedom Movement,” that was recently made into the motion picture film “Son of the South.” The film has been released on Amazon Prime and Apple TV.

USA Giving Day raises $95,585

The University of South Alabama community gave more than $95,000 for the University and USA Health during its fourth annual USA Giving Day on April 22. During the 24-hour online fundraising drive, 234 donors supported South’s priorities including scholarships, student emergency funds, social justice initiatives and USA Health programs.

Margaret Sullivan, vice president for development and alumni relations, said she is grateful for the community’s ongoing support, especially during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

“The past year has been extraordinarily difficult for everyone, including our alumni, faculty, staff and students,” Sullivan said. “Their continued support and investment in the University’s and USA Health’s programs is incredibly generous and inspiring.”

Priorities highlighted on USA Giving Day included Where the Need is Greatest, the Mitchell-Moulton Scholarship Initiative, South CARES, College of Medicine CARES, Jags Unite for student-athletes, USA Health Fund for Excellence, and the Leadership in Social Justice and Perseverance Scholarship.
South launches School of Marine and Environmental Sciences

The University of South Alabama begins a new era of coastal education and research with the newly created School of Marine and Environmental Sciences within the College of Arts and Sciences. Plans call for new undergraduate and graduate programs to complement the existing degrees that have been offered by the department of marine sciences.

“We can make a much larger impact by developing younger scientists,” said Dr. Sean Powers, director of the School of Marine and Environmental Sciences. “We can use the draw of the marine world to attract good students to South.”

South is the only four-year state university in Alabama that is near the Gulf of Mexico. Many of its marine science faculty members are also senior marine scientists at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, which offers marine programs for 23 public and private colleges.

New interdisciplinary Ph.D. program begins in the Fall

The University of South Alabama will begin a new interdisciplinary Ph.D. program in chemical and biomolecular engineering in fall 2021. The Alabama Commission on Higher Education approved the program in March.

“The University of South Alabama is committed to providing our students with the most current and cutting-edge educational opportunities,” said Dr. T. Grant Glover, associate professor of chemical engineering.

Jaguar Marching Band plans new facility

Plans are underway to build an innovative complex for the Jaguar Marching Band that will include an indoor rehearsal facility and adjacent practice field. The 24,700-square foot facility will house an ensemble rehearsal hall, drum line rehearsal studio, color guard rehearsal studio, dressing rooms, offices, a music library and essential storage space. Additionally, the complex will include a full-size practice field that will be identical to Abraham A. Mitchell Field at Hancock Whitney Stadium.

For more than a decade, the Jaguar Marching Band has provided the soundtrack for South Alabama student and fan experiences. The JMB is currently 250 members strong and performs at a wide variety of events on campus, in the Mobile community and throughout the Gulf Coast region.

To learn more about the planned Jaguar Marching Band facility, contact Anna Parks at aparks@southalabama.edu or call (251) 460-7676.
“Her Majesty and I strongly recommend the necessary rules and regulations to remove violence from this breed and all other competitions involving the horses we love.”

After graduating from the University of South Alabama in 2003, Marty Irby worked in real estate and won equestrian world championships before becoming president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association.

When he went public with criticism of “soring,” which uses pain to train horses in a distinct walking style, his career in Tennessee was over.

“I felt a lot of backlash – it was very ugly,” said Irby, a 42-year-old native of Mobile. “People stopped doing business with me. I had a development and construction company at the time, and most of my clients were horse people, so our business went under. I was getting all kinds of death threats and terrible things.”

He fled to Washington, D.C., and wound up starting a second career as a press secretary and legislative aide for a Kentucky congressman. Irby became “the horse guy” in Congress. Then he worked as a lobbyist and helped start the Animal Rights Action organization.

Now he lives in a 650-square-foot apartment three blocks from Capitol Hill. He jokes about being a meat-eating Republican in a political movement dominated by what he calls vegan leftists.

That’s his niche.

“There’s no one like me – I’m it,” he said, laughing. “Actually, there is one other Republican animal rights lobbyist, and I’m the one who hired her.”

Irby’s success in lobbying has been noted by The Hill newspaper in Washington, D.C. His animal rights activism was honored by Queen Elizabeth II in 2020. Celebrated horse trainers joined in her praise.

“Marty Irby is our hero and has paid a huge price in his own life in the interest of being fair to the horses,” said Monty Roberts, founder of Join-Up International. “Along with thousands of supporters, Her Majesty and I strongly recommend the necessary rules and regulations to remove violence from this breed and all other competitions involving the horses we love.”
“There’s no one like me – I’m it,” he said, laughing.
Irby grew up in Mobile and attended the UMS-Wright Preparatory School. At the age of four, he became a competitive equestrian. He won his first world championship at the age of 24.

At South, Irby went to school while working full-time in his family’s real estate business. It took him six years to earn a degree in communications, but he says that training has been valuable in business and politics.

“My writing skills, that’s something I use every day,” Irby said. “At Animal Rights Action, I don’t have a communications director. I do my own press work. I’ve had articles published in all kinds of national publications.”

During his time at South, Irby joined the Sigma Chi fraternity and served as president of the Young Republicans of Mobile. In that office, he followed Clay Barclay, executive director of BAC Adjusting in Mobile, who became a business partner and political ally.

Irby’s lobbying career came as a surprise to some of his friends.

“It was different – I didn’t expect it – but he found a passion,” Barclay said. “When he finds something he has a passion for, he attacks it like crazy. He’s probably been the most effective animal rights activist ever. He got President Trump to sign, what, seven bills?”

Irby says it was six bills, actually, ranging from the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act to the Rescuing Animals with Rewards Act. He lobbied Lara Trump, the president’s daughter-in-law, suggesting that animal rights were a good political issue with suburban voters.

In 2019, he was invited to the Oval Office, where President Trump signed the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act.

“It was surreal, completely surreal,” he said. “We were the last group of the day and he spent like an hour with us. Kellyanne Conway was there and Pam Bondi – she’s a good friend and animal person. And then he’s like, ‘where’s Lara? She’s not here. Let’s get Lara on the speaker phone.’ He’s sitting there at the Resolute desk, and I’m short, so I’ve got my right hand on the Resolute desk during this whole deal, and I got to say my little piece on national television.”

Irby says that bill signing will be a good story for a book about his experiences in Alabama, Tennessee and Washington. He has about five chapters written. His working title is “Crazy Animal People.”

“I think it’s catchy,” he said. “I bought the website and applied for the trademark.”

Irby returns home to Mobile about four times a year. He visits his grandmother and catches up with old friends. He likes to eat at Morrison’s Cafeteria and the Big Time Diner.

Alabama politics is one of his passions. He’s considered running for office. He talks about moving home to South Alabama.

People kept telling Irby he needed a hobby, so he began collecting rare coins during the coronavirus pandemic. He also adopted a rescue dog named Spencer.

“I am not a swamp rat,” he joked. “I’ve lived here eight years, but I feel like I’m pretty in touch with people outside the Beltway. I’m very anti-establishment.”
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Everyone 12 years of age and older is eligible.
PLAYING WITH FIRE
As a kid, Freddie Blache loved to play with fire. So it shouldn’t have been a surprise when, after just one elective glassblowing class, he was hooked. Blache returned to South for the spring semester and changed his major from history to art.

WHAT’S IN A NAME?
Imagine musician Louis Armstrong blowing into his trumpet. That’s the same puffed-out cheek—or muffinjaw—look that glass artists have when blowing air into a pipe to create a glass bubble. Blache said the name is also an homage to his father’s childhood nickname.

“He was the one who first pushed us to start selling our work,” said Blache.

STARTING SMALL
Muffinjaw Designs, which consists of Blache, his wife, Caroline Gratton ’17, Gage Nobles ’19 and Tres Johns ’17, began selling their art in January 2016 at a sidewalk table during ArtWalk in downtown Mobile while still students at South.

“Slowly, but surely, we started getting asked to set up booths at different events,” Blache said. Once they started gaining a following, they decided to launch their business.

Five years later, Muffinjaw Designs is available at several local stores and galleries in Mobile and Baldwin County, as well as online.

“We’re slowly trying to expand to the greater Gulf Coast region,” said Blache.

IF AT FIRST YOU DON’T SUCCEED
Blache has some advice for glassblowing students who may want to start their own businesses.

“Spend every waking moment and free time you have in South’s studio.”

He said South gave him the opportunity to learn through his mistakes.

“It emboldened us to get out there, take risks and try new things.”
THE BUSINESS OF HELPING OTHERS
Courtney Dortch’s first love was basketball, but when she started throwing shot put in middle school, she started winning. And winning was fun.

Her athletic talent started her on a path that led to a track and field scholarship at USA. That’s where Dortch learned the benefits of teamwork and building relationships, on and off the track.

Those same lessons spilled over into her academics as a business administration major.

One of her instructors, Dr. Denise McAdory, instilled in Dortch the importance of accountability and credibility in business and in life.

“That’s one of the things that I pride myself on,” said Dortch, “and a tool that I used to construct my business.”

A DIFFERENT PATH
Following a brief stint in the marketing world, Dortch realized she had another calling.

“I’m a caretaker by nature,” said Dortch.

With her student-athlete background and desire to help others, Dortch found her way to massage therapy.

“When I first started massage I was with a franchise, but I decided to branch out because I wanted to differentiate myself from others,” Dortch said. “And the best way to do that was to start my own business.”

FAMILY LOYALTY
Eight years later, not only does Dortch have a loyal client base, she has had the opportunity to work with current student-athletes at South as a massage therapist, something she did not have while in school.

“South has come a tremendously long way from when I was there,” said Dortch. “I enjoy seeing the level of growth, and I’m proud to be a part of South Alabama as an alum.”

She’s grateful to still have the relationships that she created at South.

“South Alabama has that family atmosphere. They make sure to take care of their own.”

Courtney Dortch ’08
OWNER, FROM ME TO YOU MASSAGE THERAPY
MOBILE, ALA.
Brandon Marcus did not plan to study musical theatre at South. He began his college career as a voice and music therapy student at the University of Alabama.

When his father was diagnosed with stage four brain cancer, Marcus returned home to Mobile to spend as much time as possible with his dad. He transferred to South. South doesn’t offer a music therapy program, so he changed his major to musical theatre.

“It opened a completely different world,” said Marcus. “I never thought I’d be working with kids, and now I can’t imagine my life without them.”

REHEARSING FOR A CAREER

Marcus worked with a local children’s theatre company in Mobile while earning his degree. He took that time to explore every nuance of the performing arts, from choreography, costuming and scenic design to artistic and music direction.

Two months after he graduated, he opened The Studio.

What started out in 2013 as a single-room voice studio in Mobile has expanded to a multi-room space in Daphne that serves 100 students, as young as five and as old as 18.

Some of The Studio’s students take classes just for fun. Others hope to pursue the performing arts at the collegiate level and beyond.

“We recently had a student who went to Atlanta to film a Marvel movie,” said Marcus. “Another is auditioning for a Reese Witherspoon movie in Mississippi.”

COMPASSION PLAYS LEADING ROLE

Marcus says he leans on what he learned at South every day.

“My professors pushed me, and I thought it was a little hard,” Marcus said. “But now that I look back, I am so thankful for it.”

Through his own experience, Marcus learned how to work with students.

“At the end of the day, students are human. You have to treat them with compassion. South taught me all of that.”
DRIVEN TO SUCCEED
When Avalisha Fisher received her bachelor’s degree in civil engineering in 1993, there were only four other students who graduated with her in the program. Of those, two (herself included) were women. As percentages go, that’s not bad.

But the field of civil engineering was, and still is, a male-dominated world. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 16% of civil engineers in the United States in 2020 were female. That statistic never kept Fisher from doing what she loves.

“My experience was good in school,” she said. “There were women in other branches of engineering and most of my classes were blended with students in different areas like chemical and electrical engineering.”

After graduating, Fisher worked for a few companies like Gulf States, where she gained not only engineering experience, but also marketing and relationship building. These skills proved to be the building blocks for starting her own business.

BACK TO SOUTH
A couple of years after Fisher launched her company, Driven Engineering, in 2006, she returned to South. Only this time, it was as an engineer for the new football practice fields.

“I’m pleased that they trusted us,” said Fisher. “It was really fun to be on the first design team to have anything to do with football at South.”

The civil design segment of Fisher’s company encompasses the design, construction and maintenance of the human-built external environment, like underground utilities and drainage. As Fisher explains, it’s everything you can’t see.

THE KEYS TO SUCCESS
Fisher says the civil engineering program at South laid the foundation for her career.

“It was a really good program.”

But there are some things you have to learn on the job. “Don’t wait until the last minute, and always follow through,” Fisher said. The most valuable advice she has for students is to work hard on their relationships.

“Relationships are the key—the key to business, and the key to life.”
A PASSION FOR PURPOSE

When he was a teenager, Lorenzo Ferguson lost his grandfather to hypertension and an uncle to Type II diabetes.

He says he didn’t realize it at the time, but that’s when the seed for his business was planted.

“I told myself I never wanted to see anyone else die from those diseases,” Ferguson said.

FOOTBALL TO FOOD TRUCK

Ferguson played on the Jaguar football team as a student-athlete. He says being part of that team helped him with discipline and learning to be persistent.

“All of it transferred over to my business,” said Ferguson. “Now I’m the head coach, and I’m able to delegate to my team.”

And his team is in the business of making healthy, flavorful food.

After graduating from South in 2015 with a bachelor’s degree in exercise science with a health and fitness concentration, Ferguson launched his first FitKit Food Truck in Mobile.

“We make healthy food fun, and it tastes good,” Ferguson said. “Part of my purpose is to help people live longer.”

LOCKED IN AND FOCUSED

Ferguson didn’t study business at South, but he’s always had an entrepreneurial spirit. In high school, he and two friends started a lawn care business. He always knew he wanted to be his own boss.

“When I came to college, I was locked in on my vision and purpose,” Ferguson said. “I got my degree here, which is great because it ties into the health and fitness aspects, but it’s also the place where I got my feet wet with cooking for others and learning to be innovative.”

He says it’s important for students to enjoy their college experiences. But his advice for budding entrepreneurs is reminiscent of that of a coach.

“Enjoy college,” said Ferguson. “But really lock in and focus. See it as a business trip.”
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To leave things better than the way they were

**The tenure of retiring President Tony Waldrop marks pivotal time in South’s history**

Dr. Steve Furr remembers sitting in a room at the Battle House Hotel in downtown Mobile, preparing to interview one of the final candidates for president of the University of South Alabama.

The field was strong, but Furr couldn’t stop thinking about the person who wasn’t there. The one who had been an athlete, researcher and provost. The one who had a background in physiology and briefly led a medical school. The one who, on paper, seemed to be a perfect fit for a university about to make a big move in selecting only the third president in its 50-year history.

A candidate who was a candidate no longer, having withdrawn from the University’s search and two others. Dr. Tony Waldrop was on Furr’s mind, so he picked up the phone.

“I was trying to get him back in the search to see if he’d be interested,” said Furr, a member of the Board of Trustees who helped lead the 2014 search. “Through the whole time, once I had seen his CV I was comparing everybody to him. All the others were great, but they all had that one missing piece. They just didn’t have the diversity of experience.”

As a young athlete at the University of North Carolina, Tony Waldrop was known for his kick – the way he would, near the end of the race, turn on superhuman speed to win. He also was highly focused and self-effacing. The runner who helped lift UNC over rival Duke University for an Atlantic Coast Conference championship while battling amoebic dysentery is the same man who once told a teammate, “I am sure I will come in last. That way if I don’t, I will be more pleased with myself.”
More than 40 years later, Dr. Tony Waldrop again was about to come from behind, and he was running in an all-star meet — two of the other three finalists would go on to lead universities. Waldrop interviewed in Mobile. His credentials, administrative experience and humility were convincing. His wife was, too.

“On the plane flying back,” Waldrop recalled, “Julee said, ‘I like these people. Let’s move there.’”

Five Priorities
Today, the University of South Alabama is once again searching for a new leader, as Waldrop’s retirement date of July 1 draws near. It does so from an enviable position.

During Waldrop’s presidency, the University enrolled its most academically talented classes, significantly increased retention and graduation rates, bolstered study abroad programs, added more than a dozen degrees to its offerings and founded an Honors College. In 2020, for the first time, South surpassed $100 million in research awards.

New and renovated facilities sprung up all over the main campus. Recent construction includes the Camellia Hall student residence hall, the Health Simulation Building serving healthcare professions and the MacQueen Alumni Center. The University capped off a comprehensive campaign that raised more than $160 million. Community
“HE LOOKS AT THE SITUATION THROUGH THE LENS OF A RESEARCHER. HE FINDS OUT ALL THE INFORMATION ABOUT WHATEVER TOPIC OR DECISION IT IS, AND HE WILL TAKE TIME TO CONSIDER IT, CAREFULLY WEIGH IT, AND LET THAT INFORM HIS DECISION MAKING. HE THINKS THROUGH EVERY ELEMENT OF A DECISION.”

engagement was encouraged and supported. In healthcare, USA Health is thriving with an expanding footprint and additional options for primary and specialty care. The new Fanny Meisler Trauma Center went up at University Hospital; a critically needed expanded emergency center is in the works for Children’s & Women’s Hospital; and on the fast-growing Eastern Shore, where the University’s healthcare presence was non-existent, there is a Mitchell Cancer Institute clinic, physicians’ offices and plans for the Mapp Family Campus.

The guide for this transformative growth was unveiled during Waldrop’s inauguration, just six months after he became president. It was then that he announced his five strategic priorities for South: student access and success, enhancement of research and graduate education, excellence in healthcare, University-community engagement, and global engagement.

“That was a pivotal moment in our history,” said Dr. Julie Estis, associate professor of speech-language pathology, who led the procession into the inauguration as president of the Faculty Senate. “There was a lot of excitement and newness around that whole experience of inaugurating a new president. He laid out those five priority areas that really shaped his tenure here at South.

“We can look back and see how each area has grown. There were clear priorities.”

No one could fully prepare for the biggest disruption during Waldrop’s seven-year presidency: COVID-19. The pandemic quickly forced the University and USA Health to change how they operated. Everything, including the institutions’ financial stability, was called into question.

This, of course, was happening at universities and other institutions around the world. At South, Waldrop assembled a committee that included USA Health epidemiologists and infectious disease specialists to determine a path forward. Eventually, Estis was named by Waldrop to lead the group as COVID-19 response coordinator. It is then she got a front row seat to his thought process.

“He looks at the situation through the lens of a researcher,” Estis said. “He finds out all the information about whatever topic or decision it is, and he will take time to consider it, carefully weigh it, and let that inform his decision making. He thinks through every element of a decision.”

**Reaching Full Capacity**

Probably the most recognizable image of Waldrop's presidency, especially to those outside the University community, is Hancock Whitney Stadium. Construction was the subject of rampant speculation before Waldrop even arrived in Mobile, and it only grew.

At a downtown Mobile pep rally in 2015, then-Student Government President Ravi Rajendra teased the crowd with the possibility of an on-campus stadium. Attendees screamed with excitement. “Dr. Waldrop, I think that was pretty clear, so get to work,” Rajendra said from the stage.

That work began just a few years later and finished in 2020. The completion of the stadium was significant for the football program, to be sure – a recruiting tool and a long-term commitment to the Jags. For the University community, it was so much bigger – an enhancement of student life and another reason for alumni to come back to campus. The construction of Hancock Whitney Stadium was arguably the apex of a decades-long transition.
from USA as a commuter school to South as a regional, comprehensive and residential university.

The stadium is symbolic of other initiatives during Waldrop’s tenure. The facility was ready for the 2020 season, but with the pandemic limiting attendance, it has yet to reach full capacity. To appreciate the legacy of Waldrop’s presidency is to understand that the full success of it has not yet been realized.

In many ways, Waldrop has laid the infrastructure for a stronger university. Including literally – more than $20 million of overdue utility repairs and upgrades were made during his tenure.

Take, for instance, the Pathway USA program, which allows students from regional community colleges to automatically gain admission to South after completing their associate’s degree. There are now six participating institutions, and more than 1,700 students have enrolled in the program. Still, Pathway USA remains in its infancy with room for growth.

Dr. Reggie Sykes, president of Bishop State Community College, said he’s been asked at national conferences how he’s able to look past the idea that the local university might be trying to recruit students away from Bishop.

“I said it starts at the top,” said Sykes, who’s served with Waldrop on several community boards. “I have a good working relationship with the president of the University of South Alabama. We understand that we’re in this together.”

Visibly, the addition of diversity and inclusion officers at USA Health and at the University are now playing integral roles as the USA community takes part in a national reckoning on race and systemic injustice. That discussion has sometimes proved uncomfortable. At a recent Board of Trustees meeting, Waldrop walked outside to face students frustrated with the University’s handling of an issue in one of its colleges.

Rajendra said that uncomfortableness is part of a process he learned to appreciate.

“What Dr. Waldrop helped me realize is that sometimes there are situations that make you feel uncomfortable by interacting with someone who’s different from you, and you can learn from them and they can learn from you, and that’s when you’re actually able to impact a community,” said Rajendra. “So that’s the biggest lesson he really taught me. Being uncomfortable, that’s where change is actually made.”

A Collective Effort

For Margaret Sullivan, the University’s vice president for development and alumni relations, Waldrop was a leader willing to tackle tough issues but with a realistic vision of what to expect.

Compromise and contrast follow Waldrop. He’s a first-generation college student who became a University president; a healthy eater who abstains from red meat and orders fruit cups for dessert yet binges on caffeine-free, diet Mountain Dew; a CEO responsible for a $1 billion budget for whom taking credit for anything was like kryptonite to Superman. Asked for this story about his accomplishments, Waldrop swiftly interjected: “That we collectively did. You know I’m always going to say that.”
Waldrop walks quickly and reads fast, but he is also thoughtful in his deliberations. He is a president comfortable in his own skin, yet public speaking is not his strength. It is in one-on-one and more intimate settings – with everyone from students to donors – where Waldrop finds his sweet spot, Sullivan said.

“He’s very authentic, and people get when somebody’s authentic versus when they’re just superficial stuff,” she said. “It’s real with him, and I think that resonates.”

“Running for Fun

Tony Gerald Waldrop grew up in Columbus, North Carolina, south of Asheville in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. His father was an industrial machinery mechanic with a sixth-grade education, his mother a high school graduate and receptionist. He was a star track athlete who attended the University of North Carolina on a full academic Morehead Scholarship.

His speed brought national notice. He was a six-time All-American, a gold medal winner in the 1975 Pan American Games and the world-record-setter in the indoor mile (3:55). Then, as the 1976 Olympics approached, Waldrop knew what he had to do.

“He had a decision to make,” recalled teammate and longtime friend Larry Widgeon. “Do I become a scientist and pursue academic exploits, or do I train for the Olympics?” “So, he just said, ‘I’m not going to run competitively anymore. I’m going to run for fun.’”

And that was it. He got involved in coaching, earned his Ph.D. in physiology and married Julee Briscoe. The two moved around the country for his work: University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, University of Illinois, back to Chapel Hill and then University of Central Florida before landing in Mobile.

Now the couple is returning to North Carolina as Dr. Julee Waldrop takes a job as an assistant dean of the top-ranked Duke University School of Nursing. This time, he follows her.

The goal,” he said, “has always been no matter what the position I had in administration is, hopefully to leave things better than the way they were. I really do think the University is better than what it was when we came here, and that gives me satisfaction.”
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MACQUEEN ALUMNI CENTER
USA Health leads vaccine efforts on the Upper Gulf Coast

When a vaccine to fight the spread of COVID-19 was first approved for use, USA Health was on the front lines of distribution efforts in Alabama, being first in the region to administer doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to healthcare workers at University Hospital on Dec. 15, 2020.

The same can be said for efforts to reach deep into the community with the potentially life-saving shots. Leaning on what was learned during the first year of the global pandemic and the creation of a drive-through COVID-19 testing center, the University of South Alabama’s health system quickly expanded its partnership with the City of Mobile in early 2021 and opened a drive-through vaccine clinic at the Mobile Civic Center Arena. There, thousands of patients, staff and members of the public have received vaccinations for COVID-19.

As volumes increased, nurses came out of retirement to volunteer their time for the vaccination effort. Students from the USA College of Medicine and the Pat Capps Covey College of Allied Health Professions also began donating time, including Saturdays, to offer vaccines and perform other needed healthcare duties at the civic center.

Community Vaccine Clinics

Shortly after launching the vaccine clinic in January, a group of local pastors met with USA Health staff about bringing similar clinics to areas where residents may be at a higher risk for complications from the virus and less likely to get vaccinated.

Momentum for the first community-based clinic began to build after Yorktown Missionary Baptist Church minister, the Rev. Christopher Williams, connected with Natalie Fox, D.N.P., an assistant administrator and chief nursing officer for USA Health Physicians Group, who is also leading the pandemic response team.

With the details set, Williams and his church community canvassed the neighborhood in Africatown, sharing information and urging residents to attend. When staff from USA Health showed up at the church parking lot on a frigid February day, a long line of vehicles awaited them.

Sitting inside his silver truck, Daniel McVay Jr., a kidney transplant recipient in 2015, said he was relieved to get the first dose of the vaccine, noting the convenience of the vaccination clinic so close to his home was a blessing. All told, McVay was one of more than 400 residents who received an injection of the Pfizer-
BioNTech vaccine from USA Health staff members during the first community-based clinic. Since then, thousands more have received the vaccine at similar events throughout Mobile.

“We are proud to continue to lead vaccination efforts on the upper Gulf Coast,” said Michael Chang, M.D., chief medical officer for USA Health. “Part of our role as an academic health system is to train the next generation of healthcare providers on how to best serve our patients, including vulnerable populations. This sometimes includes outreach efforts such as the community-based vaccine clinics held in underserved areas across Mobile.”

“I AM SHOWING MY STUDENTS THAT IT IS SAFE TO TAKE VACCINES,” HE SAID.
“YOU SHOULD TRUST THE SCIENCE, AND YOU NEED TO MAKE SURE YOU ARE MAKING INFORMED AND SMART DECISIONS.”

The community-based vaccine clinics also have included locations such as First Baptist Church in Tillman’s Corner, the Joseph C. Dotch Community Center in Trinity Gardens, Friendship Missionary Baptist Church on Cody Road, L’Arche Mobile, the Learning Tree Group Home, three Mobile public housing senior living complexes and Riverside Baptist Church on Dauphin Island Parkway. Clinics continue to be scheduled across Mobile and Baldwin counties as staff and resources allow.

Focus on Educators
Understanding the public health need to vaccinate people as quickly as possible, USA Health also began working with public school systems in Mobile and Baldwin counties, hosting numerous mass vaccine events to focus vaccination efforts on educators on both sides of Mobile Bay. From bus drivers to cafeteria workers to classroom teachers, the health system’s focus is to provide protection from COVID-19 to those who need it most.

In February and then again three weeks later, USA Health staff and volunteers administered more than 8,000 COVID vaccine doses to teachers, school staff and others who attended mass vaccine events focusing on educators at the Mobile Civic Center and at locations in Baldwin County.

More than 2,200 Baldwin County educators received the second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at the Robertsdale County Coliseum on Friday, March 5. Among those receiving the shot was Baldwin County Public Schools Superintendent Eddie Tyler, who drew applause from those gathered.

“We are giving them the best chance to protect themselves,” said Allen Broome, PharmD, director of health system pharmacy for USA Health, who oversaw the Robertsdale event.

In Mobile on March 6, Mobile County Public School System staff arrived throughout the day at the civic center arena for a drive-through event offering second doses of the vaccine. All told, more than 2,100 injections were given at the clinic where 150 health system and University volunteers pitched in to ensure the best experience possible for those receiving the vaccine.

Among those vaccinated was Sterling Spencer, a teacher at Grand Bay Middle School, who sat behind the wheel of his car that afternoon, grinning as he waited for his second shot. “I am showing my students that it is safe to take vaccines,” he said. “You should trust the science, and you need to make sure you are making informed and smart decisions.”
As the upper Gulf Coast region’s only academic health system, USA Health maintains a three-part commitment to providing excellent clinical care, educating the next generation of physicians and other care providers and conducting research. As an essential safety-net healthcare organization for this region, people rely on the University of South Alabama’s health system for vital specialty services that are not available anywhere else locally.

**Vaccine Education**

USA Health continues to seek innovative and meaningful ways to fulfill its mission of helping people lead longer, better lives. Members of the pandemic response team recently worked with 411 operators and United Way partner agencies, teaching them how to set up vaccination appointments for community members who need assistance.

In the business community, USA Health has partnered with the Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce. On April 8, Chang led a webinar on the importance of vaccinations for small businesses. A similar webinar is planned for the Business Council of Alabama. On April 16, a small business vaccine event for Gulf Coast companies took place at the civic center.

As of mid-May, USA Health had given more than 70,000 vaccines for COVID-19.

A commitment to excellence in patient care continues to drive USA Health staff as they work daily to refine efforts from how patients register online for the vaccine to the most convenient way for motorists to enter the parking lots to where patients wait in their cars inside the civic center arena and at community events.

“It reminds us of why we got into healthcare in the first place,” said Sarah Kahalley, director of clinical resources for USA Health Physicians Group.

“That’s to do the most good we can for vulnerable people.”
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SOUTH | SPRING 2021
From the home office of Owl Peak Labs, the life sciences company he co-founded in Charlottesville, Va., Tim Harvey leads a national team of doctors and scientists working to save lives with technology that could help detect early-stage colorectal cancer.

He takes Zoom meetings in front of a bookshelf decorated with a University of South Alabama football helmet.

Once a Jaguar, always a Jaguar.

“Yes, that’s my helmet – I love this thing,” Harvey said, pulling it down from a shelf. “I have all my jerseys, too.”

In 2009, Harvey played safety for the very first Jaguar football team. He was defensive captain for a squad that went undefeated during his senior year. He remains a South supporter and fan.

“Having the opportunity to build a program and see what’s happening there, to this day, is very special,” he said. “With the company, I’ve been surprised at how often I’ve drawn on my athletic and communication skill sets. The ability to make sure everyone’s speaking from the same platform. It helps a company, it helps a team, move in one direction. You can really accelerate pace, and get things done.”

The mission of Owl Peak Labs is to improve screening for colorectal cancer, the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States. The company hopes to use remote diagnostics to reach patients in underserved communities. Its first product is an imaging pill that can scan a patient’s gastrointestinal tract for polyps and other signs of cancer.

Harvey and his partner at Owl Peak, Dr. Taison Bell, met in the Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia. They hit it off and launched the company even before earning their MBAs.

Since then, Bell has gained fame in public health during the coronavirus pandemic. As assistant director of medical intensive care at UVA Hospital, he’s written and spoken about everything from surges in care to experimental treatments and coronavirus vaccines.
“I’ve been surprised at how often I’ve drawn on my athletic and communication skill sets. It helps a company, it helps a team, move in one direction. You can really accelerate pace, and get things done.”

“Oh, he’s on TV every 12 minutes,” said Harvey. “The pandemic has thrust him into the global spotlight.”

He doesn’t mind sharing attention, especially when it’s good for business. He’s still a team player.

In the athletic department at South, people remember him -- even when they claim they don’t.

“Tim Harvey? Never heard of him,” joked Jinni Frisbey, senior associate athletic director and football chief of staff. “No, no, no — he was everything you’d want from a student-athlete. Super-driven, loved the game, fun guy. He has this charismatic personality and spirit about everything.”

Frisbey was in charge of sports medicine when Harvey was battling knee, thumb and ankle injuries. He went through surgery and rehab several times. If he was told that a recovery might take six weeks, or six months, he would strive to finish in four.

She thought that kind of grit and determination would pay off after college.

“I knew he was very business-oriented, so I wasn’t surprised that’s what he’s done,” Frisbey said. “I knew he was going to be successful at whatever he did.”

Harvey, 33, grew up in Evanston, Illinois, where both of his parents worked in finance. After graduating from South in 2010 with a bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary studies, he returned home for postgraduate work in finance at Northwestern University.

In Chicago, he worked as a commodities trader. In New York, he worked on Wall Street and became executive director of an equity research firm. He has advised several start-up companies, including LostOnes Studio and Digital Direct Infrared.
“Less routine, more rhythm,” Harvey said. “I’m trying to find a balance with work, meetings and workouts.”

These kinds of finance and technology connections led Harvey to Virginia, the Darden School and Owl Peaks Labs. He worked and went to business school at the same time.

“It was tough, it was definitely tough,” he said. “But it’s just discipline, right? There is an extreme level of efficiency, and a lot of it comes down to time, what you’re willing to sacrifice and how you’re determined to get there.”

Harvey lives in Charlottesville near the University of Virginia campus. Work begins with what he calls a morning huddle. His days are long – “I’m a 100-hour-a-week guy” – but he enjoys a flexible schedule.

He runs in the morning, makes time for yoga and saves some exercise or weight training for the evening.

“Less routine, more rhythm,” Harvey said. “I’m trying to find a balance with work, meetings and workouts.”

Harvey often visits the West Coast for meetings with employees, advisers and investors. He enjoys travel with his girlfriend, Miriam, who works as an ICU nurse in Boston.

In pre-pandemic days, he enjoyed visiting Mobile. He stayed at the Battle House Hotel and went to Wintzell’s for roasted oysters. He imagined himself getting ready for a Saturday night game at Ladd-Peebles Stadium.

Harvey hasn’t seen the new Hancock Whitney Stadium on campus, but says he will have to make a trip. He stays in touch with several football players and coaches from South. He still loves the game. He started his college football career at Drake University, a small private college in Iowa, before heading south to join a brand-new program in Mobile.

“We were all new recruits and a bunch of transfer students,” he said. “I was so lucky to be on those teams and have such a blast. It was exciting to see Bama and Auburn fans also become South fans. We didn’t lose, so we set a pretty high standard for everyone to meet.”
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