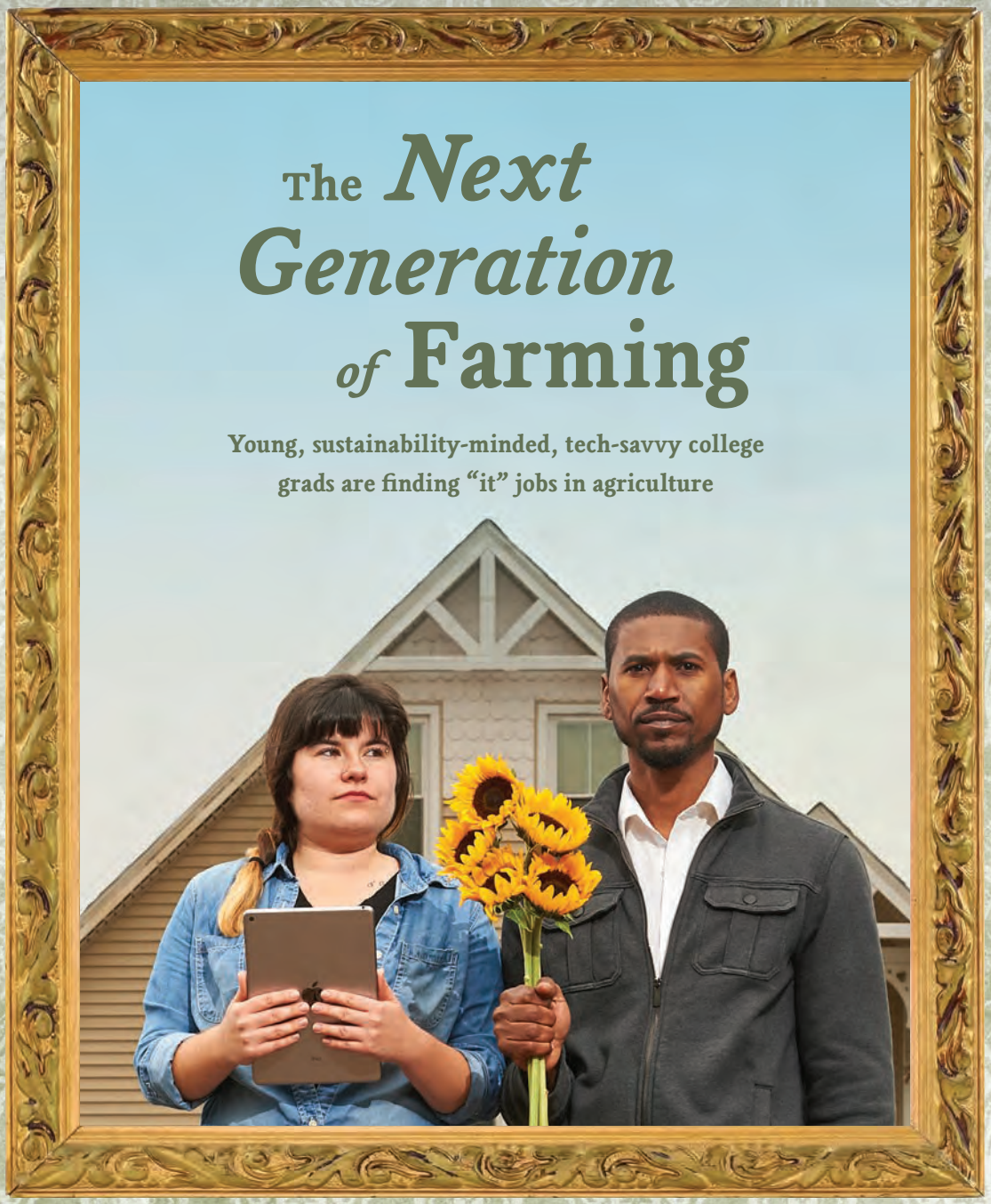
HER HERO DOCTOR // FROM RUSSIA TO STORRS // PENDERS' PLAYBOOK

UCONN MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2017



The *Next Generation* of Farming

Young, sustainability-minded, tech-savvy college grads are finding "it" jobs in agriculture

SNAP!

The Clothes Make the Ogre

At the Connecticut Repertory Theatre (CRT), UConn's dramatic arts students get the chance to act alongside professionals. During costume tests for CRT's "Shrek the Musical," which ran in April, Broadway's Will Mann is fitted for his Shrek ears with Donkey aka Scott Redmond '17 (SFA). This season CRT welcomes three-time Tony Award-winning actor Terrence Mann as the new artistic director of the Nutmeg Summer Series. Find out more at crt.uconn.edu. —Matthew Pugliese '04 (SFA), photo by Sean Flynn.

SNAP!

Color the World

Students celebrated the Hindu spring festival of Holi on Saturday, April 8. Holi, also known as the festival of colors or the festival of love, is celebrated in India and Nepal. It signifies the victory of good over evil, the end of winter, and the arrival of spring. “Every year, my temple at home hosts a Holi event, and I loved celebrating that with my family. Now I celebrate it with my UConn family,” says Rishita Jani ’17 (BUS), pictured here. Photo by Ryan Glista ’16 (CLAS).

FEATURES

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WEB EXCLUSIVES

magazine.uconn.edu

ARE TATTOOS TOXIC?
Check into our video for a front-row seat in the “Coveted Class” during which Pharmacy Professor David Grant reveals just how harmful the toxic metals in tattoo ink are when injected into a human body.
s.uconn.edu/tattoos

COACH PENDERS CONFIDENTIAL
Take a 360-degree interactive, annotated look inside the popular baseball coach’s Gampel office.
s.uconn.edu/penders

THE UNSINKABLE MOLLY QERIM
A Q&A with **Molly Qerim ’06 (CLAS)**, who holds her own with passion and aplomb, amid some super-opinionated fellow hosts on ESPN’s “First Take.”
s.uconn.edu/qerim

DAIRY BAR TESTS ITS CHIPS
How do you decide which chocolate chip is the best? Taste tests with students of course. See how it’s done.
s.uconn.edu/chips

Cover photo illustration by: Peter Morenus and Christa Tubach

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FROM THE EDITOR:

Confession: I enjoy watching many sports and playing far fewer, but I must admit to some unattractive internal smirking whenever members of my cheering section start high-fiving and chest-bumping and yelling, “We did it!” Maybe it’s the literal nature of an editor, but I can’t help but think, “What’s with the *we*? *You* didn’t make that tackle or drain that three or block that puck.”

Yet I fell totally and madly into the spell of *we* with this year’s women’s hoops team.

I watched every second of play in previous years and cheered wholeheartedly for the teams. But this particular group stole my heart in a more thorough fashion.

Saniya’s quiet ferocity and seeming reticent delight at finally being a deserving center of attention. Gabby’s pogo sticking, yes, but also her pleasure in the vinyl records experience. Katie Lou’s contagious joy and the toughness behind the giggles (what’s her puke-bucket-to-triples-bucket ratio?). Butler on the glass,the wisdom of Kia Nurse, the tenacity of Dangerfield, the sheer beauty of Pheesa’s offense and Geno’s purported shock and awe at her accomplished defense. I thrilled with the crowd at every off-bench minute from Lawlor, Bent, and Irwin.

Still, I could have weathered all that individual wonder and not succumbed to the *we*. It was this team’s togetherness that got me. I felt inexplicably honored to be tied however peripherally to this soulful group’s generosity toward, and obvious joy in, one another.

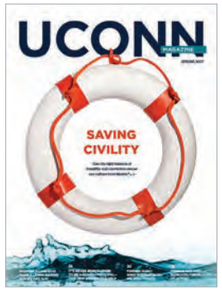
They wouldn’t buy into the “rebuilding year” noise they heard early on and insisted on winning, time and time again. Until they didn’t — and the problem with falling for the *we* meant feeling a tiny modicum of their pain. Peripheral pride kicked in again watching them be as united and gracious following that defeat — one that should define them far less than their previous 36 wins. Congrats, women, on getting the program to that record-breaking 111.

I can’t wait till we start playing next year! I mean, until *they* start playing.

Lisa Stiepock
lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu

Bob Stowell

From left: Katie Lou Samuelson ’19 (CLAS), Napheesa Collier ’19 (CLAS), Gabby Williams ’18 (CLAS), Kia Nurse ’18 (CLAS), and Saniya Chong ’17 (CLAS) cheer on teammates (not pictured) Molly Bent ’20 (ACES), Natalie Butler, Crystal Dangerfield ’20 (ACES), Kyla Irwin ’20 (CLAS), and Tierney Lawlor ’17 (CAHNR) during their Elite Eight defeat of Oregon.



LETTERS

Michael Lynch's cover story struck a nerve with many of you. Most pledged to use this as a wake-up call to listen to the opinions of others. A few, however, championed divisiveness as necessary to discourse. A sampling is below, along with feedback on other stories from our Spring issue.

Have something to tell us? We'd love to hear it! Email the editor at lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu or post something on our website at magazine.uconn.edu.

Saving Civility

What a great subject! I'm a Democrat and guilty of the intellectual snobbery to which you refer in your article. I think by my liberal posts on social media I've made a lot of Facebook friends; however, we all think we are right 100% of the time! I hope to get updates on the project!

Susan Williams '77 MD
Danielson, Connecticut, via our website

This research is very important. Reading your essay urges me to be more receptive and tolerant to the viewpoints of others. I'm a very liberal person, but I realize that I'm too quick to contradict and search for a reason to refute the other person. You've provided me with much to think about and process. Meantime, I'm listening and keeping my mouth shut. Thanks.

Virginia Arlene Cheatham '78 (CLAS), '80 MPA
Clemson, South Carolina, via our website

Listening takes time and patience. Time is something we have too little of these days in our fast-paced, instant-gratification society. So it is much easier to just impose our own ideas with a like-it-or-leave-it attitude and move on. Time saved! Nothing accomplished. I applaud you for addressing this important issue of intellectual humility. Our society needs your work to bring us back together again. Only by working together will our society as a whole survive. Thanks.

Winifred Schroeder '65 (NUR)
Bradenton, Florida, via our website

New Research Proves that Some Kids "Grow Out" of Their Autism Symptoms

The treatments that are being described and the effects on brain pathways and activation areas demonstrate the effects of "mediated learning experiences" that are at the core of learning social skills. Adults and older children are intentional sources of modeling, and directed mediation can help autistic children (and others with various forms of brain damage) develop new pathways of learning when traditional, haphazard methods are ineffective. This study shows the new pathways that are developed, which is very encouraging evidence of real changes in the brain.

Robert Kirschenbaum '72 (CLAS),'78 MA,'82 Ph.D.
Tacoma, Washington, via our website

The Voice of Women's Ice Hockey

Nice to see women's ice hockey getting the attention it deserves! Kailey may have let a bit of sexism slip with the comment that hockey is "such a masculine sport." I was a member of the team from 1977–1979 with my very lovely and feminine friend Ann Wassel Hughes '78. And I was a home ec education major.

Linda LaFrance Garvey '79 (ED)
Groton, Massachusetts

Tom's Trivia

I love trivia. What a great way to learn about the important history and traditions of UConn in a fun way! Keep up the good work on the magazine. I actually read much of the magazine — I am an alum of UMass and also receive its magazine, which I promptly toss due to lack of interest.

David Adams, '71 Ph.D.
Hadley, Massachusetts, via our website

Show Him the Money

Go Greg! Great article. I was a season ticket holder, and I enjoyed Greg's hustle and overall play.

John E. McGinn, '69 (CLAS)
Sandwich, Massachusetts, via our website

All Dressed Up

It's been many years, but I wonder if hidden somewhere in the deepest recesses of your storage warehouse there might be lurking a lizard costume. It would be from the summer of 1978. The production was Edward Albee's "Seascape." Two such costumes were created, one for me and the other for Marta Urrutia. Continue the great work.

Luke Lynch '79 (SFA)
Milford, Connecticut, via our website

Costume Shop Supervisor Susan Tolis replies: *I'm sorry, but I don't believe that we have any lizard costumes in stock. Lots of times these things get transformed into something else for a new production.*

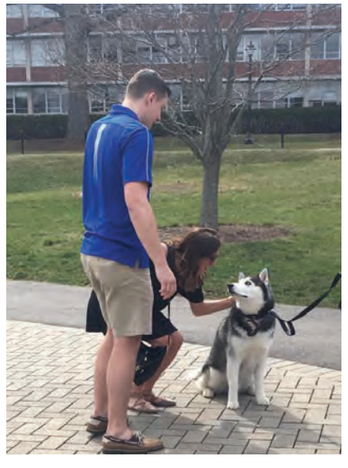
"Hey, I know that lady!" Baby-Q reading up on his mama in #uconnmagazine 📷 Caitlin Oswald '09 (ENG) @caitlin oswald

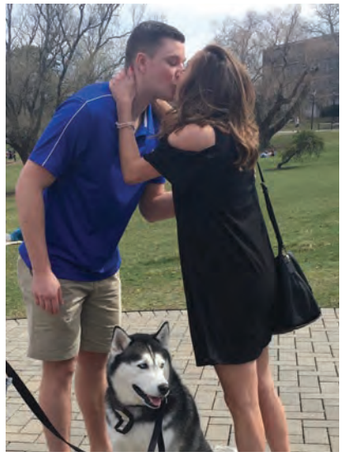
Peter Morenus

REMEMBER THIS?

CAPS AND GOWNS NOW IN UCONN BLUE (ALMOST)

The traditional black robes in use since the University started using caps and gowns, in 1907, have been replaced with robes of navy blue. The gowns also have a "green" aspect to them, as they are made from recycled water bottles — about 23 bottles per gown. They are lighter weight and wrinkle-resistant, but ironing, for obvious reasons, is not recommended. After graduation, the gowns can be recycled — a good thing considering that UConn conferred more than 9,000 degrees in 2017, the most in its 136-year history.





BLISS

Daniel Bronko '15 (ED) recruited Jonathan XIV to help with his marriage proposal to **Holly Korona '13 (ED) '14 MA**. He asked Jonathan's handlers to "happen by" as the pair walked near Mirror Lake while (ostensibly) on campus to visit Bronko's brother **Jordan '18 (CAHNR)**. When Korona kneeled to pet Jonathan she found a ring box attached to the husky's collar. How could she say no?

Schwartz at the Seaport District site (below) and a rendering (above) of what the finished project might look like during NYC Fashion Week. Find more renderings and photos of the developing site at South Street Seaport at s.uconn.edu/seaport.

Anthony Nelson (left); rendering provided by The Howard Hughes Corporation

CHECKING IN WITH...

ANDREW SCHWARTZ IS REVAMPING NYC'S SEAPORT DISTRICT

Not long after getting communications and marketing degrees at UConn, **Andrew Schwartz '00 (BUS, CLAS)** cold-called Glenn Adamo, who had listed an open position in the office of the New Jersey Devils NHL hockey team.

"He said, 'Well, I'm very busy, Andrew. Can you tell me a little about yourself over the phone?'" Schwartz remembers. "I said, 'Sure. As you know, I just worked at the NHL. Before that, I was at the University of Connecticut.' He said, 'You went to UConn? So did I. Can you come in today?' I put on my dad's suit and went in that afternoon. He hired me on the spot."

Schwartz has worked for several of the coolest organizations in entertainment, sports, and business: the NHL, Major League Baseball, SiriusXM, the Brooklyn Nets, the 19,000-seat Barclays Center, and his current position as senior vice president of Strategic Partnerships at the Howard Hughes Corporation, a real estate development company. But the Fair Lawn, New Jersey, native's journey began at UConn. On a campus tour "I was standing in the co-op looking at all that navy blue and said to my mom, 'You know, I think I could be in navy blue for the next four years,'" Schwartz recalls. "The school spirit had captured me even before I had been to a game at Gampel Pavilion, even before our team had gone to Division 1-A football."

By senior year, he was head coach of the women's ice hockey club team as it transitioned to Division 1-A for the next season. He was handling all the purchasing, scheduling, traveling, and liaising with Pat Babcock, the then-associate director of athletics for the transition from club team to 1-A while also getting credits for his bachelor's degree. "Two days a week we had practice at the rink at 5:30 a.m.," says Schwartz. "I'd be a leader, and a few hours later I'd be sitting side by side with some of the players as peers."

Ice time

After graduation, Schwartz landed a position with the events and entertainment division of the NHL, then the New Jersey Devils.

"It was one of the best hires I ever made. One of the prerequisites was the ability to skate, as there were occasions when this position would also act as the mascot," says his boss at the time, the aforementioned **Adamo '78 (ED)**, now president of Ivanhoe Media & Entertainment.

"Well, Andrew fit the position and more. He brought an incredible work ethic, maturity, sense of branding, and sponsorship that really made the staff respect and look to him for his creative ideas."

Play ball

Schwartz swapped sports, landing a job at Major League Baseball, helping with the World Series, All-Star Game, and Hall of Fame events before switching to corporate sales and multimillion-dollar sponsors.

Along the way he coached the New York Sled Rangers, part of a sled hockey program for the physically disabled.

If you build it...

Since August 2015, Schwartz has been senior vice president for strategic partnership at the Howard Hughes Corporation, a national real estate development company with properties in 16 states. It is currently leading the revitalization of the Seaport District, aka South Street Seaport, the oldest neighborhood in New York City, home of the original Fulton Fish Market and Pier 17.

The district will include some 300,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space, including a new eatery from celebrity chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten and a rooftop performance venue.

Schwartz and his high school sweetheart Jennifer have been married for 10 years and have two young children.

"I've been extraordinarily fortunate," he says. "I've been to 9 World Series, 12 All-Star Games, NBA finals, Stanley Cup finals, met Hall of Famers, met President George [H.W.] Bush in Houston in 2004 at the MLB All-Star Game."

Asked if his New York City real estate experience might prepare him for a potential presidential run, Schwartz replies, "I'm bald, so I don't have anything to worry about from a comb-over perspective."

—JESSE RIFKIN '14 (CLAS)

UCONN TALKS

On pot & peppers:

“A common link between chili peppers and marijuana has implications for how we treat diabetes and colitis, as well as other conditions in the digestive tract.”

Huffington Post on a study by Immunology Professor Pramod Srivastava, April 26, 2017

On the lack of physiological proof that men’s flu symptoms are worse than women’s:

“MAYBE MEN JUST GET WHINIER.”

Laura Haynes, immunologist, in STAT, March 2, 2017

On cellphone addiction:

“People are carrying around a portable dopamine pump, and kids have basically been carrying it around for the last 10 years.”

David Greenfield, assistant clinical professor of psychiatry, in *The New York Times*, March 20, 2017

On the fact that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens:

“IN A RECENT POLL, 41 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS SAID THEY DID NOT BELIEVE THAT PUERTO RICANS WERE U.S. CITIZENS, AND 15 PERCENT WERE NOT SURE.”

Charles R. Venator-Santiago, associate professor of political science, in *Time*, March 5, 2017

On predicting the future using cliodynamics:

“My model indicated that social instability and political violence would peak in the 2020s.”

Peter Turchin, professor of ecology and mathematics, *Daily Mail*, Jan. 5, 2017

On checking heartrate data from an exercise monitor:

“She may have died if she hadn’t checked her Fitbit.”

Dr. JuYong Lee, UConn John Dempsey Hospital, on NBC’s “Today Show,” April 6, 2017

On more E.R. visits tied to energy drinks:

“. . . energy drinks are highly marketed to adolescent boys in ways that encourage risky behavior, including rapid and excessive consumption.”

Dr. Jennifer L. Harris, UConn’s Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, in Reuters, April 26, 2017

On creating fake news:

“DENIAL ALWAYS STARTS WITH A CADRE OF PSEUDO-EXPERTS WITH SOME CREDENTIALS THAT CREATE A FACADE OF CREDIBILITY.”

Seth Kalichman, professor of psychology, in *New Scientist*, March 23, 2017

On treating a broken heart:

Believe it or not, Broken Heart Syndrome is a real phenomenon . . . it presents similarly to a heart attack . . . and often is precipitated by an emotionally or physically stressful life event, such as a loss of a loved one.

Dr. Sara Tabtabai, Pat and Jim Calhoun Cardiology Center at UConn Health, *Health News Digest*, Feb. 9, 2017

On vending machines programmed to promote healthy snacks:

“There is a risk that people would get upset with the delay because people know it’s just to influence their behavior.” Marlene Schwartz, director of the Rudd Center, on NPR, March 31, 2017

Jerauld A. Manter, University of Connecticut Archives

TRADITIONS

WE ALL SCREAM!

This photo of students processing ice cream at The Creamery predates the opening of the Dairy Bar in 1955, says Sara Putnam, director of communications at the College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources. UConn has been processing milk in one way or another since the early 1900s.

Recently the Dairy Bar released two limited flavors: Avery Point Coastal Crunch, a blue-tinted vanilla with chocolate chips and graham cracker swirl in honor of the campus’ fiftieth anniversary, and the Senior Scoop: Berry Happy Husky, black raspberry with dark chocolate chunks and raspberry swirl.

How does the Dairy Bar test chocolate chips? Watch at s.uconn.edu/dairy.

IN DEVELOPMENT

A UCONN ENGINEER IS HELPING NASA GET TO ALPHA CENTAURI — AND BEYOND

Exploring beyond our solar system requires traveling enormous distances. The nearest star system to ours — Alpha Centauri — is 4.37 light years away, or 25 trillion miles; and distant star systems will take hundreds or thousands of years to reach, even in the best of circumstances. So scientists who want to send unmanned probes to another star system must create some innovative technologies that can outlive them.

UConn researcher in the School of Engineering Seok-Woo Lee, who recently received an Early Career Faculty grant from NASA, is working on one such technology. In collaboration with researchers at Iowa State University and Ames Laboratory and Colorado State University, he has developed a shape memory material (called ThCr2Si2-type intermetallic compounds) that can help in deep space travel by changing shape at low temperatures. Shape memory materials can be deformed, but return to their original shape when exposed to a specific temperature, usually at high heats. Lee’s material, a solution-grown crystal, works at colder temperatures.

Once a vessel leaves our solar system, the temperature drops below 50 kelvins, which will cause the shape memory material to deform and activate an actuator, which in turn will power down the vessel. With minimal gravity in deep space, the vessel will continue in a set direction for hundreds of years, slowly making its way to its target while depowered. If the vessel arrives at a new solar system, even the very distant heat at the edges of a star’s reach will activate the shape memory material, which would return to its original shape.

The shape change would push the actuator, which would power up the vessel and allow it to begin recording and transmitting data back to Earth — long after the scientists who launched the vessel are gone. —*JOSH GARVEY*

For more, go to s.uconn.edu/space.

Peter Morenus

David Grant at Shamrock Tattoo Company in West Hartford, Conn. One of his most popular lectures is on the toxic heavy metals in tattoo ink.

COVETED CLASS

PHAR 1001: TOXIC CHEMICALS AND HEALTH

The Instructor:
"Everything is toxic," David Grant likes to tell students early on in his time with them. He will say it matter-of-factly and then pause, contentedly watching the wheels turn with the processing of unexpected and perhaps unsettling information.

As a mind-bending example, Grant, professor of pharmacology and toxicology in the School of Pharmacy, cites a hazing incident at a California university a decade ago in which a fraternity pledge was forced to drink a massive amount of water. This triggered hyponatremia, an abnormal drop in the body's sodium level. The student died from too much water.

"It's all about the dose," says Grant, who loves hitting his students with surprising answers. He uses iClickers so students can answer his questions by clicking in, game show style, and the congregate answers appear on a board at the front. Much of the time, their assumptions prove widely held — and wrong.

Often it's due to the all-about-the-dose maxim, which holds true, Grant points out, when it comes to many substances we generally think of as toxic. Cancer rates spike among populations exposed to radiation from a nuclear reactor meltdown, for instance, but one can undergo an X-ray without a significant health risk. "If I smoke a cigarette once in my life, it's not going to hurt me," he says. "Smoke two packs a day, that's a different issue. Everything will kill you if you take in too much of it. Everything."

Class Description:
Toxic Chemicals and Health is a freshman-level lecture course that addresses the risks to human health posed by exposure to various chemicals.

Most of his teaching is with upper-class science majors, so Grant was excited when the opportunity came to teach this introductory course for non-scientists. A good many of the university's athletes enroll, and Grant finds they often are among the best students in the class. "That makes sense to me," he says, "because high-level athletes tend to be interested in understanding their body's interactions with supplements and substances that enhance athletic performance." For one lecture, Grant brings in an emergency room physician who also happens to be a triathlete.

Grant's Teaching Style:
In the Toxic Chemicals and Health classroom, Grant says he's been learning as much as teaching — learning, that is, what can be toxic to a large lecture environment. After spending two semesters trying to hold the interest of 175 students, he's decided to no longer allow open laptops.

"It's not just that I'm annoyed when students are paying attention to something else," he says. "I've done some research, and several publications support the idea that people are distracted by multitasking." Grant believes there's also a benefit in taking notes longhand, "because you cannot simply type everything the instructor is saying — you have to summarize, which helps you learn. It's been scientifically shown."

But don't confuse Grant for a technophobe. His students all use the high-tech iClicker. With one of those devices in the hand of each student, and a wireless receiver on the podium beside him, Grant can make real-time assessments of how well his lectures and other class materials are being received.

"I can get a sense whether they're understanding the concepts," he says, "or even paying attention."

Grant also invites students to text him with questions during the break halfway through the 75-minute lecture. He addresses some of those questions in the second half of class. "I've told other faculty I do this," he says, "and they look at me, like, 'Are you crazy?'" However, any fears that he'll be flooded with texts at all times have not come to be. For Grant, the texting option simply casts a wider net for student questions. "Those who are hesitant to speak up in class, for fear of looking stupid," he says, "now get their questions answered."

When and Where:
The course is taught each spring in Storrs.

Why We Want to Take It Ourselves:
"Bioterrorism agents," Grant says brightly. He's just been asked what topics are most popular with students, and this is the first thing to come to mind.

That may not be the most uplifting conversation piece, but it's certainly a concern for many in today's world, and Grant keeps Toxic Chemicals and Health fresh by shaping lectures around current issues. In a talk about food additives, for example, he delves into organic food — the science and the media hype. "It turns out there's no nutritional difference between organic foods and conventional foods," he says. That there's an unquestioned fear of chemical additives among health food shoppers, says Grant, points to our culture's shaky relationship with science. "We look for evidence to support our beliefs, and we find it, because there's so much out there," he says. "But we don't look beyond what we want to find."

This year, for the first time, Grant will address the use of animals in scientific research. "A lot of people think scientists abuse animals," he says. "So we'll talk about how we are allowed to utilize animals — how the process works, and how we have to guarantee humane treatment."

When discussing environmental pollution, Grant cites the dredging project under way on the Hudson River in New York and the infamously lead-contaminated drinking water in Flint, Michigan.

Another topic that hits home for students today is his tattoo lecture. Some tattoo inks, Grant points out, contain relatively high concentrations of heavy metals that are known toxins. So he asks: Does that make tattoos dangerous?

Once again, the answer doesn't align with what a student might have heard from his or her mother after casually mentioning at family dinner an intention to get a tat.

"You're getting such a small amount of toxic material," says Grant, "it doesn't matter, probably." Probably?

"Well, it's very hard to determine cause and effect, with so many variables," says Grant. The concentration of toxins in tattoo ink will vary, as will the size and internal makeup of people being inked up. "So we just don't know for sure," he says. "And I know that 'we don't know' is an answer that can cause some angst. But it's honest, and that's what I want students to take away from this class."

—JEFF WAGENHEIM

Are tattoos toxic? Go to s.uconn.edu/tattoo to watch Grant pose that question to his class — and explain the answer.

Go to s.uconn.edu/bears for more, including a link to UConn's Center for Land Use Education and Research's interactive website, where you can see a town-by-town record of bear sightings in Connecticut.

THIS JUST IN

THESE BLACK BEARS CHOOSE SUBURBIA

UConn wildlife biologists tracking Connecticut's growing black bear population say housing density is the most significant factor influencing where the bears are choosing to live and roam. New data shows that the state's black bear population is highest in the state's outermost suburbs. These exurban areas are attractive to bears because they provide both the refuge of large hardwood forests and a scattering of homes just dense enough that a tasty snack from a garbage can or backyard bird feeder is only a short distance away. The highest concentrations of bears are in areas where housing density is between 2 and 20 homes per square mile, researchers found.

"With low-density housing, we are actually creating a habitat that bears are using," says Tracy Rittenhouse, an assistant professor of wildlife ecology in UConn's Department of Natural Resources and the Environment. As lead scientist on the study, Rittenhouse spent four years gathering and analyzing black bear data with Ph.D. student Mike Evans and wildlife biologists from Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

The results were a little surprising. Most existing research about American black bears indicates they prefer rural areas, and it's the amount of forest in those regions that determines the bear population density. But that literature is generated largely in western states like Colorado and Wyoming. This new information shows that Connecticut bears — and likely bears throughout the more heavily populated Northeast — are different. They are adjusting to living in a habitat shared with humans.

Looking at the study results, the vast majority of the Nutmeg State is bear habitat, says Rittenhouse. "The bear population is expanding, essentially moving south and east from the north and west," Rittenhouse says. "People generally think that there are enough people along the coast that the bear population won't expand that far, but our models indicate there is enough forest for the bear population to extend all the way to the coast."*—COLIN POITRAS '85 (CLAS)*

TASTE OF STORRS

UCONN'S TOP CHEF

Alongside mac & cheese and chicken parm Rob Landolphi is dishing up vegan crab cakes and crepes to order

Peter Morenus

TOP 10 BEST SELLERS

1. Mac & Cheese, Union Street Market
2. Chicken Parmesan, Dining Halls
3. Buffalo Chicken Wrap, South Grab and Go
4. Mediterranean Salmon Salad, Chuck and Augie's
5. Trumbull Smoked Turkey Sandwich, Dining Cafés
6. Crepe Station, North
7. Chicken Apple Chipotle Burger, One Plate, Two Plates
8. Garlicky Cheesy Pull-Apart Bread, The Beanery
9. Cubano Sandwich, Gelfenbien
10. "Not So Crabby" Vegan Crab Cakes, Putnam

In a windowless kitchen on the third floor of UConn's Student Union, Rob Landolphi carefully plates a serving of his award-winning Vegan Crab Cakes *(above)*. The culinary operations manager of campus dining services enjoys his job — and it's a big one.

Landolphi oversees the feeding of what amounts to a small city of about 30,000 people. Under his direction, eight dining halls and assorted campus food venues, including eight cafès, a food court, a food truck, and Chuck & Augie's restaurant, serve well over 200,000 meals a week. Annually, his department dishes up nearly 5.8 million meals in Storrs alone, making UConn's dining plan one of the largest in the country in terms of meals served.

Palate Palette

Coming up with dishes that appeal to the diverse palates and dietary needs of such a large campus community is a never-ending process that is equal parts art and science. In formulating recipes, Landolphi and his team factor in sales and meal plan data, on- and off-campus culinary trends, feedback from student focus groups, food allergies, and ethnic dishes for the growing number of international students.

"Kids are more discriminating about food than they have ever been," he says. "We're all about seasonal, sustainable, locally sourced food that's as clean as possible, and bigger, bolder flavors."

Recently his team ran the numbers to find the ten best sellers across all campus venues. Not surprisingly, students went for comfort and convenience first: the top three sellers are Mac & Cheese (made with organic milk, butter, and Cabot cheese), Chicken Parmesan, and Buffalo Chicken Wrap. But crepes and Cubanos also made the list. The days of cafeteria menus featuring liver and onions, tuna casserole, and chicken à la king — three dishes Landolphi found on some old UConn menus — are long gone.

Greenery

This spring UConn became one of a select few public universities in the U.S. to achieve the nonprofit Green Restaurant Association's "green" certification for every dining hall on campus, based on practices used at each site to promote environmental sustainability.

That's not enough for Landolphi. He is part of a nationwide effort to expand the number of plant-based dishes on campus menus. As a member of Menus for Change, UConn has committed to increasing the number of fish- and plant-based offerings by 20 percent this year while reducing the amount of meat on the menu by 10 percent. This year Dining Services also began serving a blended burger that adds mushrooms to reduce fat and calories.

Even with all this innovation, some student habits stay tried and true. "I love the jalapeño poppers," says **Courtney Dawless '18 (ENG)**.

Keyion Dixon '20 (ED) says he enjoys a bowl of Fruity Pebbles every night after studying, "It's fast and easy."

"Last night, I had French toast for dinner," says **Sara Nelson '18 (ENG)**. "Sometimes I have pancakes. It's college. Anything goes." —*LORETTA WALDMAN*

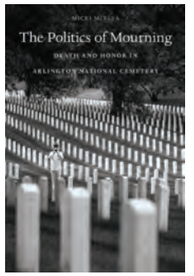
For more of this story and all ten recipes, go to s.uconn.edu/topten.

Peter Morenus

ON CAMPUS

AVERY POINT LIGHTHOUSE

In early spring, Penny Vlahos, associate professor of marine sciences, replaces a seasonal cartridge on an air sampling device attached to the Avery Point Lighthouse. The samplers are changed every 3 months and analyzed for persistent organic and emerging pollutants. UConn Avery Point is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.



KUDOS

MICKI McELYA A PULITZER FINALIST

Associate History Professor Micki McElya's book, *The Politics of Mourning: Death and Honor in Arlington National Cemetery* (Harvard University Press), was named a 2017 Pulitzer Prize finalist for General Nonfiction. In its citation, the Pulitzer Prize committtee called her work "a luminous investigation of how policies and practices at Arlington National Cemetery have mirrored the nation's fierce battles over race, politics, honor, and loyalty."

In the book's introduction McElya writes, "Approaching Arlington National Cemetery as a site that is inclusive of all the nation's stories, the wonderful, the messy, and the terrible, the awe-inspiring and shameful, the achingly beautiful and the devastatingly sad, is an opportunity to expand the countours of the honorable and brave, not diminish them."

THE WHOLE TRUTH

ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS THE SECOND COMING OF ENRON?

In a research paper that's spurring a national conversation, Preston Green III and co-authors outline the many parallels they see between today's charter school systems and the early days of the subprime mortgage crisis, when aggressive business practices and unchecked growth created a national housing bubble that threw the country into deep recession.

Green, professor of educational leadership and law in the Neag School of Education, is concerned that, as with the subprime crisis, insufficient regulation could result in the formation of charter school bubbles: a concentration of poorly performing schools in urban African-American communities. Despite his concerns, Green remains a believer in the charter school concept. He insists that the paper he authored is not meant to be an attack on charter schools but rather an exposé highlighting issues of concern.

"What we are saying is that there should be a deliberative and thoughtful process in overseeing charter schools to make sure that the choices of parents and children are honored and, in the end, meaningful," he says. The flip side of that scenario is daunting. "If charter schools aren't sufficiently regulated," Green says, "we could see a proliferation of poorly monitored schools in these communities. The proliferation of these poorly regulated schools could gather such momentum that it could be a while before people start to realize there are problems, and by then, it will take some time to dismantle all that." —*LORETTA WALDMAN*

For more of this story and a link to the source paper, go to s.uconn.edu/charter.

Peter Brandon

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

SHAY SUBRAMANIAN '18 (CLAS)

This finance student from Trumbull, Connecticut, by way of India, lives his life in leaps and bounds

What exactly is parkour anyway? And how is it different from free running?
Parkour is the practice of getting from point A to point B as efficiently as possible. Free running, then, is more of a sister sport. It covers a lot of the elements of parkour, but with an emphasis on moving creatively over obstacles. In parkour, you may jump quickly over three walls, whereas for free running you might take the time to do flips in between. It wouldn't get you over faster, but it's more expressive of your creativity.

How did you get started in the sport?
I saw a documentary about parkour on the Discovery Channel when I was in tenth grade and I thought it was so cool. It was basically my childhood dream of becoming a superhero. I went outside and started jumping off picnic tables, small stuff like that.

Were you good at it right away?
There's definitely a learning curve! When I started, the community was small. It's really blown up since. I didn't know anyone who was training when I started. I looked at videos online and went to gymnastics gyms in my area and eventually found other people who trained. We built our community from scratch. It was hard when I was learning by myself; finding a community helped me get more serious about it.

Do they have parkour gyms in the U.S.?
Yes; they are actually gaining in popularity. There's a couple in Connecticut. A new one just opened up in West Hartford.

Have you lived in Connecticut your whole life?
Well, as long as I can remember. I was born in India, and then I lived in the Middle East for a few years because my dad had a job there. I moved to the United States — to Stamford, Connecticut — when I was three. Then we moved to Trumbull right before high school.

Why UConn?
I got into a bunch of schools — UConn was actually supposed to be my safety school. But I ended up really liking it here. I'm glad it turned out this way!

You're featured on UCTV doing parkour around campus. What's your favorite spot to train Parkour?
Right behind Homer Babbidge Library. It's a surprisingly iconic spot in the Northeast for parkour, and people travel just to train there. We host a gathering once a year, and we've had people come from Montreal just to train for the weekend.

You're also the president of UConn Parkour. Do you take in beginners?
Of course; that's what the community is all about. It's the best community I've been a part of because everyone's so open to teaching everyone. We started the UConn Parkour Club because we wanted to get more people on campus to start training. There's a huge emphasis on helping each other learn and grow together. Parkour can be dangerous at times if you don't know what you're doing or you're not training safely. It's all about progression.

Do you feel like UConn supported you in pursuing this?
UConn encourages anyone to make a club; it's so much easier compared to other schools. I know friends at other schools have had a lot of trouble starting a parkour club because people are afraid that it's too dangerous or a liability. But UConn really supported us and gave us a chance.

You studied abroad in Singapore for a semester. Why did you choose there?
The National University of Singapore is the best university in Asia and one of the best in the world. The business program is amazing. But Singapore also has a pretty awesome Parkour scene. It hosts an event called Lion City Gathering once a year and people fly in from all over the world to go and luckily, I was able to live there while it was happening.

Favorite class you've taken here?
Environmental Conservation. We had this amazing final project where our professor drove us out into the woods and split us up into groups. He gave us a tracking device and told us to find an object in the woods. We finally tracked it down after an hour or two. It was a stuffed animal, and he was waiting for us in the spot.

What is your ultimate career goal?
Right now I'm looking toward getting a finance-related job after graduation. And maybe in a couple years open a gym.

Do you plan to keep parkour in your life after graduation?
I don't see myself ever stopping parkour because, contrary to popular belief, you don't have to be doing massive jumps in order to train. You could do it in really small ways, like practicing balance. Whether you're 5 years old or 80 years old, there are ways to challenge yourself through movement. *—NICOLE HAIBER '17 (CLAS)*

To see Shay in motion, go to s.uconn.edu/shay.

Tanya Miller '20

Left: Subramanian in Minnewaska State Park Preserve in Ulster County, New York, last fall and, above, studying at the Homer D. Babbidge Library in Storrs.

The *Next Generation of* Farming

Conventional wisdom be damned — young people are embracing farming. But we're talking hydroponics, heirloom tomatoes, and small-batch goat cheese. Also, you're as likely to find them on a laptop as a tractor.

by: Sheila Foran '83 (BGS) '96 Ph.D.
photo art by: Peter Morenus & Christa Tubach

If you thought farming was dead, consider this. The three-year-old *Modern Farmer* magazine has a digital reach well beyond a million and some 100,000 print subscribers. If you Google "how to start a farm" you get more than 3 million hits. And at UConn's College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources (CAHNR), enrollment has risen 80% in the past decade.

It's clear that a lot has happened since the Storrs Agricultural School was founded in 1881. For one, women were officially admitted in 1893 (there was a department of home economics) and in that same year the school — by then the Storrs Agricultural College — was granted land-grant status under the auspices of the Morrill Act, which had been passed by the U.S. Congress in 1863 to promote the teaching of practical agriculture, science, military science, and engineering.

Today, UConn is one of 106 land grant colleges and universities that produce outstanding agriculture scientists and teachers, that lead in the study of biotechnology, and that have made countless advancements in scientific research in animal sciences, horticulture, nutrition, agricultural economics, environmental sustainability, and more. In Connecticut alone, the annual economic impact of agriculture, commercial fishing, forestry, and related businesses is about $4.8 billion dollars.

Still, why this remarkable surge in applicants? Cameron Faustman '82 (CAHNR), interim dean and director of CAHNR says that in his 28 years on the faculty at UConn he's seen a real evolution in the way students relate to the environment. Current students have dramatically more interest in being directly involved with local food systems. They have a curiosity about where food comes from and a genuine commitment to sustainable food production out of concern for the environment. He also believes that some of this interest comes from "quite frankly, the birth and growth of the Food Channel."

However, the one constant Faustman sees in UConn students who are choosing careers in agriculture these days is a serious commitment to the environment.

The New Faces of Farming

While the time-honored model of passing on the hundred-acre family farm from one generation to the next has continued to fade, in its place is a new face of agriculture. These days you're just as likely to see a beginning farmer on a smartphone or laptop as seated on a tractor. And, locally, the harvest varies from traditional crops such as potatoes, apples, and milk to products like honey and goat cheese, maple syrup, and eggs from heirloom poultry.

Faustman says that enrollment in CAHNR has continued to prosper even as the number of students following a traditional route to family farming has declined. "Students come to us to study natural resources because they are interested in the environment, and they end up becoming backyard vegetable farmers as a hobby because that's a personal way of living a sustainable lifestyle. They come to us to study the biochemistry behind food production. They may be pre-vet students whose ultimate goal is working in the pharmaceutical industry. They may study soil science and put their knowledge of chemistry to use to develop lawn care products that are safe for the

Agriculture students Marisa Kaplita and Macario Rodrigues pose "American Gothic" style at UConn's Spring Valley Farm.

"While food production has benefited from the technology revolution, people's greatest satisfaction still appears to come from being intimately connected with the land."

At UConn's Spring Valley Farm, students grow vegetables to sell to the community.

environment. There's no simple answer to why students come to us, except to say that much of what we do is interwoven with the things they are already committed to."

How someone defines farming, says Faustman, is up to the individual; the paths that eventually lead to agriculture — either as a vocation or an avocation — are as varied as the people making the journey. "While food production has benefited from the technology revolution," he says, "people's greatest satisfaction still appears to come from being intimately connected with the land."

Many CAHNR students join the learning community EcoHouse, which provides a culture of sustainability for students who are passionate about environmental issues. A select group of students has the opportunity to live at the student-run Spring Valley Farm, which is a collaboration among EcoHouse and First Year Programs, Dining Services, Residential Life, CAHNR, the Office of Environmental Policy, and the Office of Public Engagement — a true cooperative where students sell the produce they grow to the community. Many who live there do so because they do not come from families or communities that farmed, and this is their first taste of the real thing.

More and more, farming is being done by young people and not-so-young people with no prior experience in agriculture — folks with a desire to get out from behind a desk and into the fresh air. They believe in a quality of life that includes caring about the environment. They want to be self-sufficient and give back to the planet — more than they take from it.

With sustainability as their mantra, these beginning farmers embrace the high-tech alongside the low-tech, using digital irrigation systems and advanced hydroponics to grow the strawberries, melons, and lettuce they place in crates and cart in pickups to the neighborhood farmers market.

"There is a market for all types of ethnic foods from bok choy to lemongrass and okra to tofu made from organic soy beans, that we're beginning to see at farmers markets everywhere," says Faustman. It helps counteract the inherent challenge of farming in a place like New England, where land is at a premium and populations are dense. "If a new farmer can find a particular niche, then high demand can make up for less land and lower production," says Faustman.

Finding land is one of the biggest challenges in starting out in farming without a family farm to take over. But there are many more. UConn's Department of Extension has a series of programs aimed at helping new farmers overcome those hardships.

A Leg Up

Say you're not a CAHNR graduate; you're simply one of those people who has strolled through your local farmers market and picked up some sun-ripened tomatoes. Goat cheese. A couple of pints of low bush blueberries and a homemade biscuit for your dog. And as you pulled your car onto the road, you thought to yourself, "I could do that! I could grow vegetables, set up a roadside stand, maybe buy some dairy goats and make cheese. I could quit my desk job and get close to the land, maybe even live off the grid."

Before quitting your job, trading in office attire for blue jeans, and Googling "how to start a farm," you might want to have a talk with Jiff Martin and her cohorts.

Martin is the Sustainable Food System associate educator of UConn's Department of Extension, which is part of CAHNR. In 2015, she was recognized by the White House as a Champion of Change for Sustainable and Climate-Smart Agriculture, one of only 12 people in the country selected for the honor. So she's got the credentials to administer a $600,000 USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Grant to support, with training and technical assistance, those who have farmed or ranched for fewer than 10 years.

The Department of Extension's Solid Ground Farmer Trainings include classes in such diverse subjects as soil health and management, tractor safety and maintenance, and how to lease farmland and negotiate tax regulations.

"Young people pursuing farming today tend to be very debt averse," says Martin, "which is contrary to the typical financial model for farming."

That can be a challenge when one of the first major hurdles is securing suitable farmland. For those wanting to grow vegetables, it's difficult to find land not filled with rocks or overused by growing hay or silage crops. It's tough to find a parcel big enough to yield enough produce to support a family.

That's why many farmers start out literally in their own backyards, Martin says, and why partners or spouses often need to maintain off-farm jobs that provide a regular income and health insurance.

While there's not necessarily a typical profile of the new farmers who are attempting to make a living off the land, Martin says they tend to share certain traits, desires, and needs.

"These new farmers are really drawn to agriculture because they are concerned about sustainability. Many of them are drawn to feeding their neighbors and feeding their community. They like the idea of a different type of lifestyle instead of going to work and sitting in front of a computer."

Charlotte Ross and Jonathan Janeway of Sweet Acre Farm

UConn Extension programs that help new farmers, whether they are alums or not, were key to helping Charlotte Ross and Jonathan Janeway grow Sweet Acre Farm.

The two had been working a series of jobs since graduating from college and noticed a pattern.

"We started having bigger and bigger gardens wherever our jobs took us," says Ross. "Finally, we made the decision to intern at a 12-acre organic vegetable farm in Maine, and that's when we knew for sure what our future would be."

Both are from Connecticut and wanted to return to the state to start a farm. They knew, however, that finding land would be a hurdle. Indeed, for several years they leased land in Mansfield and Hampton before finding the six acres they now own in Lebanon.

Among the assistance provided by UConn Extension has been advice on irrigation systems, organic pest control, soil assessment, and access to legal assistance when they were closing their real-estate transaction. In their third season of farming, while on rental land, the couple took advantage of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Grant administered by Martin.

Now firmly established, produce from Sweet Acre Farm can be found at the Willimantic Food Co-op and several local restaurants and farmers markets. And Ross now works with UConn Extension helping others get their farms off the ground.

UConn's New Faces of Farming

Gabriel DeRosa

DeRosa '17 (CAHNR) had a lot of friends who lived on farms when he was growing up in Bethany, Connecticut. And despite the fact that some of those farms had livestock, he was always drawn to working with his buddies when they tended vegetables and other crops. Taking a year off after high school, he worked doing landscaping jobs in order to help fund his education, and his attraction to plant life continued.

When he arrived in Storrs, DeRosa decided to major in horticulture, a choice he calls "the best decision I ever made." He joined EcoHouse, but his first trip to Spring Valley Farm was the result of his bragging about his Italian culinary skills. A friend invited him to the farm to make pasta sauce, and they went out into the field to pick fresh tomatoes. The sauce was a success, but even more important was the impression the farm made, and in the spring of his sophomore year, he moved in.

He and a friend applied for an Idea Grant to build a greenhouse there using aquaponic techniques. "We got the grant, and with the help of the Facilities Department, the greenhouse was built," he says. The plan is to provide UConn's Food Services with lettuce and herbs year-round.

DeRosa thinks grad school might be in his future, with a possible career in plant research. But then he pauses and speaks wistfully about meeting volunteers on Friday afternoons on the student farm. "I would gather a group of people from all areas of the University, tell them what we were working on, find their strengths and weaknesses, and put them to work in the gardens. That was the most rewarding experience, ever."

Tierney Lawlor

Lawlor '17 (CAHNR) grew up in Ansonia, Connecticut, and worked at a horse boarding facility during high school. "I was bitten by the bug," she says.

She came to UConn as a civil engineering student but switched to CAHNR after her first semester. "I knew right away I needed my animals."

Fitting in the necessary labs was a challenge for Lawlor, however, who played on the women's basketball team (she is pictured above, front, giving teammate Katie Lou Samuelson '19 (CLAS) a tour of the UConn Dairy Barns). The college worked with her to create an individualized major: sustainable farm and ranch management, which would mix economics and agriculture courses.

"My long term goal is to have my own farm, my own business," she says, adding that after graduation she plans to head out west for some hands-on experience where the land is bigger, more spread out. She did summer internships in the barns here and favored working with the cattle.

"I like working with cows. They're just laid back; they like doing what they do — they eat grass, they sunbathe.

"We need the younger population to come in and start farming, producing," says Lawlor.

"I think people today are more concerned with where their food is coming from, how it's grown. This younger generation understands this concern and wants to produce food to satisfy consumer needs in a more sustainable way."

Nick Laskos

Laskos '15 (RHSA) had set his sights on a career in agriculture by the time he graduated from the vocational/agriculture program at Trumbull High School. His original plan was to major in horticulture in CAHNR, but the benefits of the two-year program offered by The Ratcliffe Hicks School of Agriculture — with its emphasis on hands-on-learning and an extensive network of internships — led him to change course just a bit.

Laskos worked a number of internships, including one in the R&D section of the hydroponic grow room at FarmTek in South Windsor. The technology is promising, says Laskos, "because it allows higher efficiency and production with fewer or no pesticides or synthetic fertilizers. And you can grow 365 days a year — a plus in New England."

Now, just two years after he earned his degree, he has founded Gigafarm in East Windsor, Connecticut, where he plans to grow vegetables and herbs to sell to local restaurants. There's also the potential to grow hops (*Humulus lupulus*) in support of the state's burgeoning microbrewery industry.

The property Laskos purchased is the site of a former tobacco field that had become overgrown. Now cleared and ready for planting, his ultimate goal is to have a vertically integrated company that will blend hydroponics and conventional agriculture.

Marisa (left) & Macario (right), our Modern American Gothic.

Marisa Kaplita

It is not often that we think of 11-year-olds as having epiphanies, but that's more or less what happened to Branford, Connecticut, then-sixth-grader Marisa Kaplita '17 (CAHNR).

"I was writing an article for the school paper on broiler chickens and how they are slaughtered. That turned me into a vegetarian. Then my earth science class introduced me to environmental issues, and I was hooked. I knew then and there that one day I would go to college and study environmental science," she says.

True to her word, Kaplita graduated in June as an environmental science major with a concentration in soil sciences. Her passion for sustainable living translated to a commitment to EcoHusky, the student group associated with UConn's Office of Environmental Policy that is dedicated to making campus more environmentally friendly, and to EcoHouse, the learning community associated with Spring Valley Farm.

Kaplita lived and worked on the farm during her last six semesters on campus. Her duties ran the gamut from planting seeds and weeding the plots of vegetables to harvesting the produce and preparing it for market. She is keenly aware of global issues surrounding food production and is particularly sensitive about decreasing the amount of food waste in the U.S. and other developed countries.

Her immediate plans include a stint in the Peace Corps. After that, she says, "I would love to eventually work with farmers, restoring underutilized land for agricultural purposes and helping to create sustainable local farms."

Macario Rodrigues

As a youngster growing up in the Cape Verde Islands, Rodrigues '17 (CAHNR) took for granted that all food was local. He couldn't have imagined anything else.

At 16 he moved to Massachusetts with his family and graduated from Brockton High School. A nine-year career in the U.S. Navy's submarine service included a stint in Groton, where he set his sights on someday attending UConn. He says he found his major in sustainable agriculture by accident when a first choice fell through.

"It's the best thing that ever happened to me," he says, "because I discovered I have a passion for growing things. My courses and the people I've come into contact with have taught me that the choices we make about our food — from how we grow it to how we transport it to how we handle waste management — has important implications for our future."

Rodrigues' goal is to have a farm and grow vegetables. And he'd like to use his knowledge to help others here and abroad establish sustainable agriculture programs that use the emerging technologies his grandparents couldn't have imagined.

"When I was a kid I took my grandparents' efforts for granted," he says. "They grew everything they needed for the family without benefit of electricity or anything remotely modern. It was simply how things were done. Now, when I go back to Cape Verde and visit my 84-year-old grandfather, I have a real appreciation for the sacrifices he made."

And then he adds with a smile, "I realize that finding my major in sustainable agriculture was a foregone conclusion. I'm pretty sure that genetically I'm a farmer."

Anthony Chiozzi

Chiozzi '17 (CAHNR) is from the shoreline town of Guilford, Connecticut. There's no farming in his background, but he developed a keen interest in the environment during high school.

Chiozzi joined EcoHouse as a freshman, started volunteering at Spring Valley Farm, and soon got a job there 10 hours a week during the school year and full time in the summer. In his final semester, Chiozzi interned at Sweet Acre Farm in Lebanon, Connecticut. It was eye-opening, he says, to work with people whose livelihood is farming. "I learned things about planning and budgeting and really got a sense of what it takes to be a successful farmer," he says.

As for the future? "Making a living by farming is kind of counterculture, I guess. It's putting a way of life ahead of economics. It's caring about the environment, having a voice politically, reducing the carbon footprint, educating kids. A lot of things that some people overlook but that are important to me."

While not sure whether he will make his living with a position in natural resources or by farming, the soil is in Chiozzi's blood. "Whatever I end up doing, I will always garden. Once you've grown your own food, it's really hard to spend money in the produce section of a grocery store."

From left: Peter Morenus, Courtesy of HBO, Courtesy of Nick Laskos, Courtesy of Marisa Kaplita, Sheila Foran, Courtesy of Anthony Chiozzi

SCIENCE TO STARTUP

A Connecticut company plays the startup game in the land of innovation.

BY COLIN POITRAS '85 (CLAS) ILLUSTRATIONS BY KATIE CAREY

Biochemist Mark Driscoll is trying to crack open a stubborn microbe in his lab at UConn's technology commercialization incubator in Farmington, Connecticut.

He needs to get past the microorganism's tough outer shell to grab a sample of its DNA. Once he has the sample, Driscoll can capture the bacterium's genetic "fingerprint," an important piece of evidence for doctors treating bacterial infections and scientists studying bacteria in the human microbiome. It's a critical element in the new lab technology Driscoll and his business partner, Thomas Jarvie, are developing.

But at the moment, his microbe isn't cooperating. Driscoll tries breaking into it chemically. He boils it. He pokes and pushes against the outer wall. Nothing happens. This drug-resistant pathogen is a particularly bad character that has evolved and strengthened its shell over generations. It isn't giving up its secrets easily.

Stymied, Driscoll picks up the phone and calls Professor Peter Setlow at UConn Health. A noted expert in molecular biology and biophysics, Setlow has been cracking open microbes since 1968.

A few hours later, Driscoll jumps on a shuttle and takes a quarter-mile trip up the road to meet with Setlow in person. He explains his predicament. Setlow nods and says, "Here's what I would do."

And it works.

BREAKTHROUGH

That brief encounter, that collaboration between a talented young scientist and a prominent UConn researcher working in Connecticut's bioscience corridor, not only results in an important breakthrough for Driscoll's and Jarvie's new business — called Shoreline Biome — but also leads to a proposal for more research, a new finding, and at least one patent application.

In a broader sense, it also exemplifies the collaborative relationships that UConn and state officials hope will flourish under the University's Technology Incubation Program (TIP), which provides laboratory space, business mentoring, scientific support, and other services to entrepreneurs in Connecticut's growing bioscience sector. At incubators in Storrs and Farmington, TIP currently supports 35 companies that specialize in things like health care software, small molecule therapies, vaccine development, diagnostics, bioagriculture, and water purification.

The program has assisted more than 85 startup companies since it was established in 2003. Those companies have had a significant impact on Connecticut's economy, raising more than $50 million in grant funding, $80 million in debt and pay equity, and more than $45 million in revenue.

"This is not a coincidence," says Driscoll as he recounts his microbe-cracking story in a small office across the hall from his lab. "This is what government is supposed to do. It's supposed to set up an environment where these kinds of things can happen."

BOLD MOVES

Driscoll and Jarvie, a physical chemist and genomics expert, arrived at UConn's Farmington incubator in June 2015 with a bold business concept but virtually no idea of how to get it off the ground. Both had worked in the labs at 454 Life Sciences in Branford, Connecticut, one of the state's early bioscience success stories that ended up moving to the San Francisco area.

Driscoll and Jarvie decided to stay in Connecticut. They had talked about starting a business based on new technology that would more quickly and precisely identify different strains of bacteria in the human microbiome, the trillions of good and bad microorganisms living in our bodies that scientists believe play an important role in our health and well-being. The study of the microbiome is a rapidly growing area of biomedical research. There are currently more than 300 clinical trials of microbiome-based treatments in progress, according to the National Institutes of Health, and the global market for microbiome products is estimated to exceed $600 million a year by 2023.

"It's the most frightening thing I have ever done," says Driscoll with a chuckle. "As scientists, we know that 9 out of 10 new companies fail. That sound you constantly hear in the back of your head is the hiss of money being burned. The pressure is intense. You have to reach the next level before your money goes to zero because when the money's gone, you're done."

Fortunately, Driscoll and Jarvie's decision to launch a bioscience company came at a time when Connecticut and UConn were committing resources to strengthen the state's bioscience research sector.

As part of Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's Bioscience Connecticut initiative approved in 2011, Connecticut's legislature allocated $864 million to efforts that would position the state as a leader in bioscience research and innovation. That initiative included the expansion of UConn's technology incubator site in Farmington, the opening of The Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine (JAX), and major upgrades at UConn Health to boost its research capacity.

Those resources were tailor-made for a fledgling bioscience company like Shoreline Biome. Driscoll and Jarvie remember the early days when company "meetings" took place at a local Starbucks, their official address and warehouse was Driscoll's garage, and they didn't even have a lab.

But they did have a vision of what Shoreline Biome could be. They knew that George Weinstock, one of the world's foremost experts in microbial genomics and one of their customers at 454 Life Sciences, had just arrived at JAX. They reached out to him with an offer to collaborate. Weinstock not only agreed; he became their principal scientific advisor.

About the same time, Driscoll and Jarvie began exploring the possibility of renting space at TIP in Farmington because of its proximity to people like Weinstock and Setlow. "If you're looking to start a bioscience company, in some parts of the state the cost for commercial space is going to be more than your will to live," says Driscoll. "But here, the rent is graduated. So we were able to stay here in the beginning for just a few hundred bucks a month."

The pair also obtained $150,000 in pre-seed funding from Connecticut Innovations, the state's quasi-public investment authority supporting innovative, growing companies; and a $500,000 equity investment from the Connecticut Bioscience Innovation Fund (CBIF).

Along with the pre-seed investment funds, CBIF's staff helped guide Driscoll and Jarvie through the early stages of business development and introduced them to the investment community. And CBIF member Patrick O'Neill took a seat on Shoreline Biome's board. O'Neill's business savvy has been crucial to the company's early success, says Driscoll.

UNKNOWN UNKNOWNS

Shoreline Biome also benefits from the internal camaraderie and technical expertise provided through TIP.

"If we were on our own in Wallingford or Branford, there would be no place to go to ask questions," says Driscoll. "But at TIP, you can wander around and just ask people. Companies that are ahead in the process are mentoring those just starting. They can help if you have questions about finding a patent attorney, or writing up a workplace-hygiene plan, or getting business insurance. Even if they can't give you an answer, chances are they know someone who can."

As part of its services, TIP holds monthly business meetings at its incubators where CEOs can exchange ideas, ask questions about anything from accounting practices to business law, and hear presentations from different state agencies and research departments at UConn that might be able to help them.

"To channel [former Secretary of Defense] Donald Rumsfeld, there are things that you know, things that you don't know, and things that you don't know you don't know," says Jarvie. "This environment is the type of place where you can find out what those unknown unknowns are and start to address them."

Outside investors also are invited to visit with startups and learn more about them. The fact that CBIF had other scientists and business professionals screen and approve Shoreline Biome's new technology and business plan prior to making its investment bolsters the company's standing with potential investors.

Using the TIP location also allowed Driscoll and Jarvie to save money on purchasing high-end lab equipment. When they need to run a DNA sequencing test on a bacteria sample, they just walk down the hall to a UConn researcher's lab. Located in UConn's Cell and Genome Sciences Building, TIP shares space with the University's Stem Cell Institute.

"We need certain types of equipment to process our samples, and they have one of those up the hall," Driscoll says. "They use it maybe once a day, and the rest of the time it sits there. So we asked if we could use it for like five minutes a day, and they said, 'Sure, just pay us a little bit of money to help keep it maintained, and we'll let you do that.' They get a little bit of cash in the door, and we get access to a machine we couldn't possibly buy ourselves."

TRACKING THE BAD GUYS

The lab kit Driscoll and Jarvie are currently testing is a low-cost, off-the-shelf tool that replaces hours of painstaking hands-on processing of patient samples for bacteria DNA testing. It's about getting DNA out of the bacteria from a complicated environmental sample — and doing that in a fast, cheap, and comprehensive way, explains Jarvie.

Researchers and medical professionals have previously relied on targeted testing and laboratory cultures to identify different bacteria strains. But many bacteria species are hard to grow in the lab, making identification and confirmation difficult. Even when scientists can confirm the presence of a bacteria such as salmonella in a patient sample, the findings are often limited, which can impact diagnosis and treatment.

"The DNA fingerprint region in a bacteria is about 1,500 bases long," says Jarvie. "Most of the sequencing technologies out there are only getting a fraction of that, like 150 bases or 10 percent. It's like relying on a small segment of a fingerprint as opposed to getting the entire fingerprint. You can't really identify the organisms

"YOU CAN SIT AROUND AND HOPE THAT COMPANIES FORM, OR YOU CAN TRY TO MAKE YOUR OWN LUCK."

that well."

Jarvie describes the difference this way. Say you are running tests for mammals on three different samples. Current sequencing technology would identify the samples as a primate, a canine, and a feline. With Shoreline Biome's technology, the results are more definitive. They would say you have a howler monkey, a timber wolf, and a mountain lion.

That level of specificity is important to researchers and medical professionals studying or tracking a bacteria strain or disease. Driscoll says the kit is not limited to identifying harmful bacteria like salmonella, listeria, or MRSA. It also can assist researchers investigating the microbiome's role in maintaining the so-called good bacteria that keeps us healthy as well as its role in other ailments such as diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and even mental health disorders like schizophrenia.

For example, the kit easily enables a researcher to compare 50 bacteria samples from individuals with multiple sclerosis against 50 samples from individuals who don't have the disease to see whether the presence or absence of a particular bacteria in the microbiome plays a role in impacting the body's nervous system.

"If you don't make it cost effective, if you don't make it practical, people won't do it," says Driscoll. "It's like going to the moon. Sure, we can go to the moon. But it takes a lot of time and money to build a rocket and get it ready. With our kit, all that stuff for the moon shot is already premade. We provide the whole system right off the shelf. You don't need to know how to extract DNA fingerprints, or use a DNA sequencer, or analyze DNA. All you have to do is buy our kit and turn the crank."

As part of its product testing, Shoreline Biome is working with researchers at UConn Health and JAX to learn more about a particularly toxic and potentially fatal intestinal bacterium, *Clostridium difficile*, otherwise known as *C.diff*.

"People who track this disease, especially in hospitals where it is a problem, want to know how it gets in there," says Driscoll. "Does it come from visitors? Does it come from doctors? You have all these spores floating around. You can answer that by looking at the bacteria's genetics. But if you can't get to the bacteria's DNA, you can't identify it.

"Our tool cracks open the microbes so you can get at their DNA and fingerprint the bugs to see what you have," says Driscoll. "It lets people see everything. And we've simplified the software so you don't have to be a skilled microbiologist to do it. A person in the lab can sit down and with just a few clicks, all of this stuff comes up and tells you these are the bad guys, the infectious organisms that are present, and these are the good guys."

DEER IN THE HEADLIGHTS

While their focus is certainly on growing Shoreline Biome, Driscoll and Jarvie also have come to appreciate Connecticut's broader effort in building a strong bioscience research core to help drive the state's economy. Providing scientist entrepreneurs with an affordable base of operations, working labs, access to high-end lab equipment, and a cadre of science peers ready to help takes some of the pressure off when launching a new company.

"This is all part of a plan the governor and the legislature put together to have this stuff here," says Driscoll. "You can sit around and hope that companies form, or you can try to make your own luck. You set up a situation where you are likely to succeed by bringing in JAX, opening up a UConn TIP incubator across the street, and setting up funding. Is that going to start a company? Who knows? But then you have Tom and me, two scientists kicked loose from a company, and we notice all these things happening here. We could have left for California or the Boston-Cambridge research corridor, but we decided to stay in Connecticut."

Mostafa Analoui, UConn's executive director of venture development, including TIP, says the fact that two top scientists like Driscoll and Jarvie decided to stay in Connecticut speaks to the state's highly skilled talent pool and growing innovation ecosystem.

"Instead of going to Boston or New York they chose to stay in Connecticut, taking advantage of UConn's TIP and other innovation programs provided by the state to grow their company, create jobs, and benefit society with their cutting-edge advances in microbiome research," says Analoui.

UConn provides critical support to ventures at all stages of development, but it is especially important for startups, says Jeff Seemann, vice president for research at UConn and UConn Health.

When asked if they still have those moments of abject fear that they aren't going to make it, Driscoll and Jarvie laugh.

"Every day is a deer-in-the-headlights moment," says Driscoll. "Even when things are going well, it's still a huge risk."

"It never goes away," agrees Jarvie. But during a recent visit to the Shoreline Biome lab, both men are in good spirits. The company met the 12-month goals set in its CBIF funding agreement in just six months. For that effort, Driscoll and Jarvie received another $250,000 check, the second of their two CBIF payments.

In the world of business startups, however, there is little time for extended celebration. The two scientists mark the milestone with smiles and a fist bump, then turn around and get back to work.

Free to Be **Imperfect**

A beloved doctor's patients convince him to move to UConn Health — where he plans to cure a rare liver disease

By Julie (Stagis) Bartucca '10 (BUS, CLAS)
Photos by Peter Morenus

Imagine not being able to fall asleep watching your favorite movie because you might not survive the night. Or waking up every 90 minutes to make sure your daughter's feeding pump is keeping her sugar stable enough that she won't slip into a coma. Or dropping everything 16 times a day to test your blood and drink a formula that's the caloric equivalent of half a pound of pasta. Or feeling hopeless about keeping your newborn twins alive because they can't process food and no one can help.

Gayle Temkin, a mom of two from West Hartford, hasn't slept more than two hours at a time for 11 years. Her daughter, Alyssa, stops what she's doing — dancing, guitar lessons, acting in a play, playing on her school's basketball team — every 90 minutes to test her blood sugar and drink a special formula.

For more than a year after giving birth to her twin boys, Kathy Dahlberg waited for liver transplants that could save them.

Not long ago, a 13-year-old — who we won't name to protect his family's privacy — fell asleep in front of the TV, missed his therapy, and died.

All are victims of Glycogen Storage Disease (GSD), a rare genetic liver disorder that leaves patients slaves to the clock because the only known treatment is taking a cornstarch mixture every few hours or less, depending on the patient. It's a world where one mistake can be fatal.

GSD affects only 1 in 100,000 people worldwide and long was considered a childhood illness because patients did not survive into adulthood. The life-saving cornstarch treatment that was discovered in the 1970s changed that, yet little progress in treating the disease has been made since. And then Dr. David Weinstein entered the picture.

Weinstein, who in January moved his world-renowned GSD program from the University of Florida to UConn Health

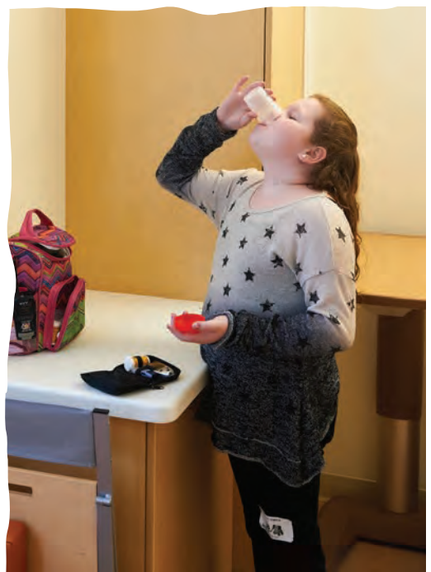
Alyssa Temkin, age 11, pauses in the middle of a school basketball game to test her blood sugar.











and Connecticut Children's Medical Center, has spent the past two decades researching the disease. He's the only doctor in the world dedicated to the illness, and is so beloved that his patients nominated him for the Order of the Smile, an international humanitarian award he shares with the likes of Oprah and Nelson Mandela. And now they have more reason to applaud him: He's closing in on a cure.

Weinstein and his team are on the verge of testing in a human clinical trial the first GSD gene therapy, which has worked for canines and mice with the illness. For the patients and their families who live in a constant countdown to the next feeding, the new therapy would mean freedom. A normal life, where mistakes can be made. Where they no longer have to be perfect.

Fatal Mistakes

"The problem with this disease is that people need cornstarch every four hours. People have died because their parents overslept," says Weinstein. One missed alarm and a patient could die. A malfunctioning piece of medical equipment could mean a dangerous seizure.

In a healthy liver, excess sugar from food is stored as glycogen and released into our bloodstreams when we need it as glucose. For those with GSD, the liver fails to convert glycogen into glucose, causing the body's blood sugar levels to drop dangerously low, which can lead to seizure or death.

"One of the parents was giving a talk recently and said, 'Do you know what it's like to have to be perfect all the time?'" Weinstein says. "And that's what these families live with. It's extreme stress."

Weinstein and his team have made great strides. When he started studying GSD, the only long-term treatment was a liver transplant to combat complications. Now, patients are doctors, athletes, mothers — more than 50 babies have been born to mothers with GSD since the first in 2003. But they still live under constant pressure. The disease is relentless, unforgiving.

When Gayle and Steve Temkin brought baby Alyssa home from the hospital at three days old, Gayle knew something was wrong with her daughter. By the time they got to a hospital that night, Alyssa was in full liver and renal failure. Her sugars were undetectable. Without intervention, she wouldn't survive an hour, doctors said.

It was six months, several hospitals, countless invasive tests, and second and third opinions before Alyssa was diagnosed with GSD at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City.

Alyssa is now 11, a smiling, soft-spoken sixth-grader who enjoys playing sports, acting in plays, and learning to play guitar and dance. She gets good grades and loves her friends. But every 90 minutes, every single day, she must check her blood sugar and drink Tolerex, a special formula that keeps her sugar up. Alyssa is the only known GSD patient who can't tolerate cornstarch, and Tolerex doesn't last as long, so the time between her treatments is even shorter than it is for most GSD patients.

While the Temkins do everything they can to make Alyssa's life normal, there are constant reminders that it is anything but.

During the night, a pump attached to a feeding tube in her stomach feeds Alyssa dextrose (which is less filling than Tolerex, but metabolizes faster). Her parents wake up every 90 minutes to check her sugar, but her feeding is done automatically through the pump.

Gayle spends every day at Alyssa's school. For years, she would go into the classroom to feed Alyssa, first through her feeding tube and, more recently, with a drinkable formula. This year, Alyssa has gained some freedom. An Apple Watch reminds her when it's time to test her blood and drink, and she reports her sugar level to her mom via a walkie-talkie. Gayle, a former social worker, stays close, just in case.

If Alyssa's sugar gets too low, she doesn't feel it. Unlike most people, GSD patients don't feel shaky or get headaches when their sugar drops — at least not until it's too late. By then, they could be

> "There was no research going on anywhere in the world on this disease. **And if there's no research, that means there's no hope."**

For Alyssa and mom Gayle (top left and middle), a typical day of trying to be as normal as possible involves Gayle at school in a room near the office, staying in touch with her daughter by walkie-talkie. Alyssa tests and doses herself in class, gym, and while playing on the school's athletic teams. But GSD patients don't feel the effects of low blood sugar until they are moments from a seizure, so Gayle stays close around the clock. Lily, 9, likes to tag along to appointments with Weinstein. "He's her hero — he saved her sister," says Gayle.

Dr. Weinstein has treated Alyssa since she was six months old. The Temkins were instrumental in bringing him to Connecticut, where he is about to begin human clinical trials of a gene therapy they all hope will lead to a cure.

moments from having a seizure.

"I sit in her school all day," says Gayle. "I have a master's. I'm a social worker. But I do what I have to do."

Because she knows too well what can happen.

In February 2015, the family had returned from a trip to Italy and decided to "camp out" together in the same room. As Gayle and Steve dozed off, Lily Temkin, 9, stayed up, reading, unable to fall asleep.

"I hear Lily saying, 'Alyssa, come on, want to play with me? Alyssa, you want to read with me? Alyssa, Alyssa.' And then, screaming," recalls Gayle.

Alyssa's pump had stopped working. She was having a seizure and remained unconscious at the hospital.

"David [Weinstein] stayed on the phone with us the whole time," says Gayle. "He was booking a flight to Connecticut. We really thought he was going to be coming for a funeral.

"There is nothing about this disease that's forgiving. It doesn't matter what regimen you're on; it could be a bad batch of something. We think we're doing everything right, and the pump malfunctions."

Research = Hope

Weinstein had no intention of dedicating his life to curing GSD. As a young physician at Boston Children's Hospital specializing in sugar disorders in 1998, he was caring for just two patients with GSD when he was invited to a national conference of the Association for Glycogen Storage Disease.

"I showed up at this meeting and was shocked by what I saw," he says. The conference started with a moment of silence and a reading of the names of all the children who had died from GSD that year. The research presented was decades old. And the only treatment option being discussed was liver transplantation to combat complications from the disorder.

"There was no research going on anywhere in the world on this disease," Weinstein says. "And if there's no research, that means there's no hope."

A conversation with a mother there changed the course of Weinstein's life.

Knowing no one at the conference, he sat down for lunch next to Kathy Dahlberg, who had one-year-old twin sons already on the liver transplant list. She told Weinstein how sick her children were, and that her only hope was that they'd live long enough to get their liver transplants. Weinstein had a son at home a month younger than the twins.

"Over lunch at that conference, I decided that somebody had to care about these children. The children shouldn't have to suffer just because it was a rare disease," Weinstein says. "The world didn't need another diabetes doctor. This is where I could make a difference."

As soon as he returned to Boston, Weinstein shifted his research focus to GSD and built the program there before moving it to the University of Florida in 2005 in order to work with the veterinary program. He has successfully treated dogs with his gene therapy, turning a fatal disease into one where dogs born with GSD are thriving.

Today, Weinstein sees 500 patients from 49 states and 45 countries. With help from Alyssa's Angel Fund — started by the Temkins when Alyssa was a baby — and other charities, he has established centers all over the world.

> "The world didn't need another diabetes doctor. **This is where I could make a difference."**

All the Way

It was in her "little room" at Alyssa's school that Gayle Temkin started toying with an idea.

Sure, the charity her family started had enabled 100 patients to see their hero doctor. It had sent supplies to those in need and helped Weinstein establish centers to see patients and train doctors all over the world.

But to accomplish the grand goal, to cure GSD, Temkin thought there was another thing she could do.

She wanted Weinstein to come to Connecticut.

Early last year when Weinstein was in the state for a speaking engagement, Gayle brought together a group in her family room that included prominent Hartford-area philanthropists Alan Lazowski, Eric and Jessica Zachs, and Pia and Mickey Toro. A 2012 fundraiser hosted by Lazowski had raised $470,000 in one night to support Weinstein's research, and she wanted to provide an update on the work and how close the gene therapy was to being a reality. But the group also had come on board to push Gayle's idea of having the doctor move to Connecticut.

It became "almost like an intervention," she says with a laugh. "We gave him a safe space to talk about what was working, what needs to be different, and what he thinks he can do with the program. We really wanted him to see what it's like to have a community really embrace him. We made him understand this is where he needs to be."

The group tapped into connections at UConn and Connecticut Children's. Within hours, Weinstein was on the phone with UConn School of Medicine Dean Dr. Bruce Liang. From there, the wheels were set in motion.

In January, the GSD lab moved to UConn Health's Farmington campus. At the same time, a clinical and research unit supported financially by the Temkins and other local philanthropists opened at Connecticut Children's. Gayle Temkin, Alan Lazowski, and Barry Stein are the trustees for the Global Center for Glycogen Storage Disease, and through the new organization will continue to raise money to support Weinstein's program. They are working to set up other forms of assistance for patients and their families, including a closet with free supplies at the clinic, and support programs for families once the clinical trials start.

Because GSD patients are now surviving well into adulthood, the partnership between the two institutions makes great sense. "We're much stronger working together," says Weinstein.

Although Weinstein is the only doctor in the world dedicated to curing GSD, he says he's not doing it alone — far from it.

"I've never seen a program like ours. I only do one disease. Everybody on my team does just one disease," he says. "This is personal. Most people have a connection to the condition, and so they'll work until everything's done. It's just a dedication that I've never experienced anyplace else."

The bulk of Weinstein's Florida team came to Connecticut with him. His team includes GSD patients and parents, including several who have called him out of the blue to tell him all they want is to work with him.

One, who moved to Connecticut from Minnesota to join the new center, is Kathy Dahlberg, the mother who changed Weinstein's course all those years ago. Her twins are now sophomores in college.

And, after nearly two decades of dedicated research, Weinstein's next step is the one he's been working toward all along. Human safety trials of his gene therapy, in conjunction with Dimension Therapeutics in Cambridge, Mass., are expected to start this year. UConn will coordinate the trials with collaborating centers all over the world. Full-treatment trials should start in 2020.

The ultimate goal for the gene therapy, according to Weinstein, is to prevent low blood sugars, eliminate the dependence on cornstarch, and give patients normal lives where oversleeping isn't a worst-case scenario.

"If we can accomplish that, we've come all the way," he says.

"He knew he could do this," says Gayle. "It's all of the pieces falling into the puzzle in the right direction; it's really like a miracle.

"When we first brought Alyssa to him, he said, 'By her bat mitzvah, by the time she's 12 or 13, we should be able to cure her.' And she's 11," she says. "We're almost there."

"In Russia, you simply couldn't be a writer if you were Jewish"

Associate professor and acclaimed novelist Ellen Litman talks about her childhood in Russia and her life in Connecticut

by Katharine Whittemore
photo by Peter Morenus

"I'm interested in the intersection of the historical and the personal," says Ellen Litman, a Russian-born novelist, short story writer, and associate professor and associate director of creative writing in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. No wonder she's interested in that intersection: she's sitting here in a Starbucks in Storrs instead of heating up a samovar in a Soviet-style flat in Moscow.

And all because of one historical moment that changed her life forever.

It was 1990, and the heady reforms of Perestroika had begun to brew up a backlash. One night, a prominent general went on state television to call for new pogroms against Soviet Jews, darkly insisting that Russia should be for Russians only. "The Chechen war hadn't started yet," recalls Litman, who is Jewish. "The Chechens would soon replace Jews as the main enemy. But at the time, Jews were still being watched."

Her parents decided it was no longer safe to stay, and began the arduous process of applying to emigrate. In 1992, when Litman was 19, her family of four finally arrived in Pittsburgh, where an aunt already had settled. That raw, traumatic, sometimes bleakly funny adjustment period informs Litman's debut book, *The Last Chicken in America: A Novel in Stories* (Norton, 2007).

The book's linked stories thread through one main character, teenage Masha, and those who share her Squirrel Hill neighborhood in Pittsburgh. *The New York Times Book Review* positively clucked about *Chicken*: "It's warm, true and original, and packed with incisive, subtle one-liners." In 2008, Litman was a finalist for the New York Public Library Young Lions Award, given to promising writers under age 35.

In 2014, her second book came out, also from Norton: *Mannequin Girl,* a sharp, poignant coming-of-age novel that reads uncannily like a memoir, since it's about a young Russian Jewish girl who has scoliosis (or curvature of the spine, as Litman has) and must attend a government boarding school for others similarly afflicted (as Litman did).

Several novelists showered praise on it: Margot Livesey called it "entrancing and evocative" and Lara Vanpyar called it "beautiful and tender." Wally Lamb '72 (CLAS), '77 MA called Kat, the protagonist, "the kind of character I love: an endearing, flawed, vulnerable young person who can be cruel one moment, compassionate the next, haughty in her insecurity; hormonal and humane in equal measures."

Today, Litman lives with her husband and two young daughters in Mansfield. Last semester, she taught two classes in Storrs: Graduate Creative Writing, which studies works that overlap in genre, such as graphic novels or prose laced with poetry, and Honors I: Literary Study Through Reading and Research on immigrant narratives. That second one, of course, hits close to home.

We caught up with Litman one snowy day this past winter at the Starbucks on Storrs Road, chatting against the din of competing student conversations and coffee beans in mid-grind. She wore a quintessentially American fleece jacket but also fur-lined boots right out of "Doctor Zhivago." The sun streamed over her wheat-colored hair as she sketched out, in a lyrical Russian accent, her personal history.

Q: Let's start with your neighborhood in Moscow. Was your world "orderly, like a sheet of ruled paper, like hopscotch squares," as you write in *Mannequin Girl?*

Litman: All the apartment buildings were identical. Tall cement boxes, light gray, built in the '60s and '70s. We lived in the northwest of Moscow in one of the new neighborhoods. Outside every apartment building entrance, a group of grandmothers would sit, socializing. They minded your business and always told you what you were doing wrong!

Q: Your father was a chemical engineer and your mother taught math. Your sister has worked in IT for Amazon and Microsoft. You went to the Moscow Institute of Electronics and Mathematics, got a B.S. in information science from the University of Pittsburgh, and had a career in IT in the U.S., too. Your whole family was good with numbers — but you ended up making a living from words. How did that happen?

Litman: In Russia, you simply couldn't be a writer if you were Jewish. You couldn't aspire to certain things. We were taught very early that you have to work twice as hard as others to get things. I kept a journal and wrote poetry, but there was no way to "be a writer."

You have to understand that Russian

Jews were never considered Russians. On my passport under nationality, it said "Jewish," not "Russian." Being Jewish affects a lot of things, unofficially and officially. Which college you can attend, which job you can get. Some colleges won't accept Jews because "they have bad vision." Others admit under a quota from the local party district.

Q: In *Mannequin Girl,* you write this of Kat: "She's scared of changes ... they're almost never good. They start with this thinly veiled secrecy — a dismissal, a smile, a cryptic hint — only to explode in your face, breaking your life into bits, scattering them without a second thought." Like Kat, you were diagnosed with scoliosis as a little girl, had to wear a brace until you were a teen, and had to go to a special school. How did the diagnosis change your family's story?
Litman: It transformed our whole life. I was 3, and would start school when I turned 5. We had to move to a new neighborhood closer to the Number 76 School, which treated children with scoliosis. In Russia then, you couldn't just move and buy or rent another place. You had to go to an exchange bureau and organize a swap, our apartment in our neighborhood for someone else's apartment in another neighborhood. My mother quit her job in order to work at my school.

In the world we lived in, we did not know about bad illnesses or situations, so we didn't know what to do when we learned I had scoliosis. A lot of things were kept out of the society. If a child had limitations, that child was hidden from the world, sent to a special school.

When we first immigrated to Pittsburgh, I wondered why there were so many disabled people on the streets, on the bus. Then I realized that it wasn't that there were no disabled people in Russia. They were just hidden away. In America, they were visible.

Q: Was it hard to leave Russia?
Litman: When we decided to go, I was destroyed. In Russia, you never expect to move. There are not equal opportunities in other cities within Russia, so hardly anyone leaves the place where they were born. You expect to stay in the same neighborhood and have the same friends forever. Everything my life was built on was disappearing. It felt unimaginable to leave.

Q: How does your scoliosis affect you now?
Litman: It doesn't affect me too much. Oh, it can be hard to find clothes that fit properly. There's on and off pain, especially in winter, and if I stand on my feet more than 20 minutes, it takes its toll. I don't do physical therapy any more, but I do a lot of swimming.

Q: Growing up in Russia, what was your impression of America?
Litman: In the early '90s, they allowed one week of American TV per year. You could see "The Flintstones" and "Beverly Hills, 90210" and "Dallas." It was kind of like, wow, there was this bright and shiny gloss on everything in that world. I was very much aware I cannot have that gloss, and did not know how to get that gloss.

> **"I realized that it wasn't that there were no disabled people in Russia. They were just hidden away. In America, they were visible."**

Q: What was it like to be an immigrant, and start over in a new country?
Litman: *The Last Chicken in America* was about the initial immigrant experience. Immigration is really hard on your ego. Even the simplest conversation is hard. My English was barely serviceable, but it was the best in the family, so I had to make appointments and ask directions. Your whole sense of self and identity changes. It was incredibly hard on my parents. It felt like everything was breaking apart in various ways. Nothing felt normal.

Q: After college, you worked a number of IT jobs, in Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Boston. Were you also doing creative writing on the side?
Litman: Not at first, but I started taking writing classes at night at Cambridge Adult Education and then GrubStreet [a 20-year-old Boston-based creative writing center]. Julie Rold [a fiction writer and liberal arts professor at the Berklee School of Music] was the first person to say I had real talent. It was one of those moments that changes everything.

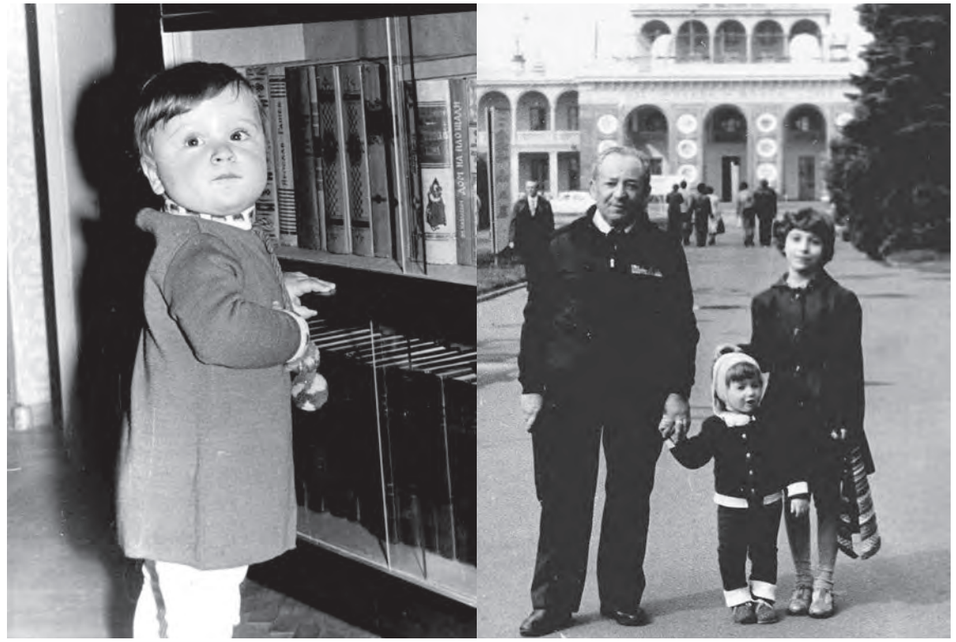
But writing was always a spare-time thing. I thought that maybe, if I got lucky, I could write part-time and do computer work part-time — but the value of what I was doing was edging out the computer stuff. And I was getting a lot of encouragement from teachers like Steve Almond [author of 10 books, including 2014's *Against Football: One Fan's Reluctant Manifesto*]. He's wonderful. And so I decided to give myself a few years to really work on writing, and I applied to graduate programs.

Q: You attended the MFA program in creative writing at Syracuse University, studying with such luminaries as Gary Lutz, the poet and short story writer; and George Saunders, the MacArthur "Genius" Award winner and author of this year's acclaimed *Lincoln in the Bardo.* How was that experience?
Litman: I got incredibly lucky! George Saunders became my thesis advisor, and he was generous to me, and to all his students. I learned a ton from his literature classes, and I learned how to teach creative writing classes too. He had a very intuitive approach to responding to students' work, and to the energy of a class. He always talked about having respect for the reader. Think of your writing as if you're driving a motorcycle, he'd say, and the reader is in the sidecar right next to you. You don't want to condescend. The reader is an equal.

Half of us were doing traditional writing, half were more experimental. I'm more traditional. Gary Lutz approached language like a poet would. And the teachers all offered gentle encouragement if something could be improved in your writing, if each word was the best possible choice. I wrote the bulk of the stories for *Last Chicken* at Syracuse, and had the manuscript by the time I finished.

Q: How did you end up at UConn?
Litman: After I taught some workshops at Syracuse, I taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and also at Babson College in Wellesley, Massachusetts. After Norton published *Last Chicken in America*, I thought I'd see where it took me. The poet Penelope Pelizzon [associate professor, Department of English] was on the search committee at UConn. She was the one who really loved the book. She's been my champion and mentor and supporter ever since. We went on to co-direct the Creative Writing Program in the English Department. It's a really great program. It's not a big program, but it's found a lot of people whose work I admire.

I started here in 2007, before I had kids. And then when I had kids (Polina, 7, and Olwen, 3), I have found it to be a really supportive family-friendly environment. I love this place.



A young Litman in her family's apartment in the Moscow neighborhood of Kuzminki, where she lived until age 5. And with her younger sister and her grandfather in Rechnoy Vokzal or River Terminal — where they were forced to move so that Ellen could attend the Number 76 School, which treated children with scoliosis. Her mother quit her job to stay with Ellen.

Q: Speaking of family, let me mention your husband, Ian Fraser. He's a native of Johannesburg, South Africa, and was a playwright, fiction writer, and standup comedian there. How did you two meet?
Litman: On the T! We were on the Red Line in Boston. We both got on at Park Street and got off at Harvard Square. He was visiting America and asked if he was on the right platform, which started a conversation, and he asked if I'd like to go out on a coffee date. I said yes.

He left for home the next day, but we emailed and Skyped, met in London, and were married six months later.

Q: In the book, Kat's parents are dissidents. Were your parents dissidents, too?
Litman: No. My parents were part of a generation that had experienced many hard things, and they did not want to be involved. They were very cautious and needed to be cautious. It was ingrained in me, too, to be cautious.

But I did have these two charismatic literature teachers in my life, who I just adored. Anechka and Misha [Kat's parents in the book] were a product of that. But once I had these characters, I couldn't rely on my own experience so much. I was more well-behaved than Kat. My eldest daughter is very self-confident and will debate her teacher and ask for help. And I'm this mouse!

Part of it is that my daughter's a product of where she was born, and I'm still a product of where I was born. In Russia, in my brace, I had to brace myself. I was pointed at. And anyone, at any time, a neighbor, a clerk, will yell at you for no good reason. In my day, rudeness was just part of the reality in Russia. Everything is state-run. There was no competition. Why be nice? It's not like you'll go to a different store.

Q: What are you working on now?
Litman: I'm in the middle of three different projects. One is a sequel to *Mannequin Girl,* with some of the same characters, set in the late perestroika years. Having lived with perestroika, I'm very much interested in how it shaped one's political sensibilities.

But of course, corruption set in after perestroika, and eventually this led the way to Putin. In America, people may believe in a leader. I don't think many Russians have that idealism.

In my Immigrant Narrative class now, we talk about how America is supposed to be the land of immigrants. But it's never been equally accepting to immigrants, letting in European immigrants but not Asian immigrants in the past, for instance. My students can find this a revelation. With what's going on in the news with immigration, every day, it all completely resonates with them now. And with me.

The Quiet Genius of

COACH PENDERS

Cold-weather baseball teams aren't supposed to have the kind of success Jim Penders has had in his 14 seasons as head coach of the Huskies. It's in his DNA, other coaches insist – and they may be right.

By Kenneth Best
Photo By Peter Morenus

From top, photos Penders keeps on his desk: Dad Jim E. '66 (ED) and Uncle Tom '67 (BUS) on the Huskies' 1965 College World Series team; Grandfather Jim coaching Stratford High; maternal Grandfather Sal Cholko.

Baseball is in the blood of UConn Huskies baseball coach Jim F. Penders '94 (CLAS), '98 MA — not just figuratively but also, one may argue, literally.

His father, Jim E. '66 (ED), a four-time championship high school baseball coach and national coach of the year at East Catholic High School in Manchester, Connecticut, and his uncle, Tom '67 (BUS), who would coach four different Division I teams to the NCAA Basketball Tournament, played together on the Huskies' 1965 College World Series team. His paternal grandfather, Jim W., was the longtime championship baseball coach, with four state titles, at Stratford (Connecticut) High School, where the playing field at Longbrook Park now bears his name. In the 1930s, Coach Penders' maternal grandfather, Sal Cholko, was a catcher for the state's American Legion Baseball championship team and later played in the Bridgeport Industrial League. And his brother, Rob, serves as the baseball coach at Division II St. Edwards University in Austin, Texas.

This impressive lineage makes Jim F. Penders a lifer, a characterization considered high tribute in a sport that began in its modern form in the mid-19th century and was described by the poet Walt Whitman as "our game – the American game."

Now in his 14th season as the Huskies' head coach, Penders will have been part of UConn baseball for 25 of the past 27 years — as a student-athlete, assistant coach, or head coach. He is a four-time conference Coach of the Year who has led the Huskies to 30 or more wins in 11 of 13 seasons, while developing 39 players either drafted or signed by professional baseball teams — including nine who have won All-America honors.

In 2016, the Huskies won their first American Athletic Conference title and made their fourth NCAA Tournament appearance in the last seven seasons despite being a cold-weather team competing against conference opponents based in primarily warm-weather locations. Penders' record of 479-338-4 (at press time) is second only to that of his mentor, Andy Baylock (556-492-8), who coached all of the Penders men during his long career as Huskies head coach.

Drawn into coaching

Penders' earliest memory is, naturally, one of baseball. He was 3 years old, and his father's East Catholic team had just won its first state championship at Yale Field in New Haven. Someone boosted young Jim over the fence so that he could run to hug his father, but by the time he was over the fence, the team had hoisted the elder Penders up in celebration and was carrying him away. "I was crying my eyes out, wondering where they were taking my daddy," he says. "It was traumatic, and I remember it clearly."

Better memories began to take shape as Penders started to play the game himself. He and his younger brothers, Mike and Rob, organized neighborhood Wiffle ball games in the backyard of their home in Vernon. They made a field by putting up fences, foul lines, and a scoreboard, even improvising a public address system to announce the game using walkie-talkies. After East Catholic games, where they served as batboys, the Penders boys would quickly move onto Eagle Field and run around the base path while their father took down the American flag before speaking with news reporters.

And though there were always used bats, balls, and gloves around the Penders house, the coach living there never put pressure on his boys to play the sport.

Penders doesn't remember his father giving him any instruction in the game of baseball until he was his player as a freshman in high school.

"He made his sons seekers by not shoving it down our throats. We always emulated him, wanted to please him, but it was never that push. He told us to study and do well in the classroom. That's where he pushed us, but never in athletics," says Penders.

He says he couldn't help but want to pursue the game, because his dad's former players would show up at their house. "I think that drew me eventually into coaching."

A greater baseball influence on the 8-year-old Jim would be his grandfather, Sal Cholko, whose photo — in a catcher's crouch holding up a glove — sits on Penders' desk alongside images of the elder Penders men during their playing days, surrounded by baseball memorabilia on the walls and shelves in his office. During summers when the Penders boys visited their grandparents in Stratford, there would be a game of catch in the backyard; Cholko would turn young Jim's hat around, as a catcher would do in order to put on a mask. Later, when the young Penders tried out for an instructional league team, one of the coaches asked who wanted to be a catcher. "No hands went up," Penders recalls. "I figured I'd get to play if I raised my hand. I liked getting dressed in the gear."

An all-state catcher at East Catholic, where he also served as senior class president, Penders went on to become a four-year letter winner for the Huskies and a co-captain for the squad that won the Big East Conference tournament. He played in the NCAA championships his junior and senior years and earned First Team All-Northeast, All-New England, and All-Big East honors during his senior season, when he hit .354 with seven home runs and 46 runs batted in.

Between his junior and senior years, Penders served as an intern for U.S. Rep. Sam Gejdenson of Connecticut and, after graduating with a degree in political science, he returned to Washington, D.C., to work as a political fundraiser for U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa. During that time he met President Clinton. However, he soon found himself thinking about baseball.

"I was feeling a pull to do what my dad did," says Penders. "I always use the line from 'Godfather III': 'Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in.'"

He called his former coach, Baylock, asking whether he could be a graduate assistant coach. Baylock knew the family coaching history, had coached Penders' father and uncle, and recognized Penders' commitment to academics. "On my teams, if you made dean's list, you got a steak dinner at my house," Baylock says. "He was always at the dinner table."

The timing turned out to be right, as part-time UConn assistant coach Marek Drabinski '90 (BUS), '94 MA, who played two years in the Atlanta Braves organization, had just been hired as head coach at Brown. Penders returned to Storrs as a graduate assistant coach while pursuing a master's degree in education. Two years later, he became the Huskies' first full-time assistant baseball coach.

For the next seven years, Penders recruited student-athletes, served as hitting coach, and worked with catchers and outfielders. When Baylock decided to step down as head coach in 2003, Penders moved to the next seat over on the dugout bench.

"Like they say, moving over 12 inches on the bench is a giant leap — realizing you don't know everything that the head coach does until you had to do it," Penders says. "That first year, in December, I'm thinking, what am I supposed to be doing today? It was trial and error, having to have my antenna up on everything, realizing the buck stops with you."

A winning philosophy

He knew there would be mistakes to learn from, none more memorable than in Jacksonville, Florida, during one of his first road trips as head coach. Preparing to play against Ohio State, a Top 25 team that year, Penders set his two lineup cards — one for a right-handed pitcher, one for a left-handed pitcher. Former Huskies baseball player Delroy Parkinson '87 (BUS), '93 MBA, who lives in the area, stopped by for a short chat, just before Penders learned that the Huskies would face a right-hander. Penders gave a lineup card to the umpire, and the game started.

The Huskies scored on a two-run double in the first inning when the Ohio State coach walked out to home plate and began talking with the umpire. Penders had handed the umpire the batting order for the left-handed pitcher, sending up batters in the incorrect order according to the official lineup card. The runs would not count, and the inning was over. The Huskies quickly took the field so that Ohio State could bat.

"I learned in that instance: You have to be accountable," Penders says. "I felt as alone as I've ever been in the dugout while our players ran out on the field. I gathered the team as quickly as possible, looked them all in the eye, and said, 'I really screwed up. It's all my fault. It will never, ever happen again.' They said, 'We got your back, Coach.' We lost in the 10th inning, but after that, we won eight straight, and it finished a great trip. To this day, I'll go over the lineup line by line in the dugout."

Penders has turned such hard-won les-

"Jim has coaching in his DNA"

Nancy Stevens, Hall of Fame field hockey coach

“I think Jim might be the best coach working at UConn”

Geno Auriemma, Hall of Fame women’s basketball coach

sons into a coaching philosophy his student-athletes know as ACE — Attention, Concentration, and Effort — that has resulted in five former Huskies currently on the rosters of Major League Baseball teams and five in the minor leagues.

“When Jim talks to a player, it’s not just to make him feel good today. If he thinks the player is slighting himself, he lets them know,” says Josh MacDonald ’06 (CLAS), Huskies pitching coach and recruiting coordinator since 2012. “We don’t have palm trees up here, and we play in one of the toughest conferences in the country. I think that’s why you see our guys doing really well.”

“Jim is a program builder. He wants the student-athletes to understand that the program is bigger than them,” adds Justin Blood, who spent six years as the Huskies pitching coach under Penders before moving on to become head coach at the University of Hartford. “The kids hear the same message from him over and over again. They respect it and live by it.”

The motivational speeches Penders delivers also can result in some memorable events, such as the one several former Husky players recall taking place in Florida during the Big East Conference tournament after Penders was named Coach of the Year. As the team bus was heading back to the hotel, the head coach told the driver to stop on the small bridge they were crossing. He stood in the front of the bus, holding up the trophy he had just received, and said, “I don’t give a [expletive!] about this award! I want the trophy that says we won the tournament!” He then got off the bus and threw the trophy into the water, filling the bus with laughter.

“There was always an expectation to win and to give everything you had,” says Matt Barnes ’11 (CLAS), now a pitcher for the Boston Red Sox. Barnes is one of several former Huskies who returned to Connecticut for the annual preseason baseball dinner in January to talk with current members of the team about their shared experience under Penders. “We adopted the philosophy of paying attention to the little things; that’s what separated us from a lot of people. It wasn’t just on the baseball field. It was in the weight room, running, making sure you had everybody’s back. Doing things the right way and working hard. Those were the ingrained philosophies.”

Adds Willy Yahn ’18 (CLAS), third baseman and a co-captain for this year’s squad: “You know they appreciate what Coach Penders and the program did for them, not just as baseball players but as men. He always talks about how you can’t fool the man in the mirror. You’ve got to be doing the right thing at all times.”

The bond shared among current and former Huskies is strengthened on yet another level — that is, practicing at J.O. Christian Field in Connecticut’s frigid weather in preseason when it is possible, and moving indoors when there is snow on the ground, doesn’t slow them down. In recent years, during extended travel for the American Athletic Conference, UConn vies with competitors who primarily practice in warm-weather climates. “We can hang with all these other teams and beat them while they’re down south working out all the time,” says senior co-captain and second baseman Aaron Hill ’17 (CLAS). “Coach Penders tells us there are no excuses. Having to deal with all those different elements, I take pride in that.”

‘A Real History’

Huskies field hockey coach Nancy Stevens and women’s basketball coach Geno Auriemma, both Hall of Famers in their respective sports, have observed Penders as he has taken the baseball program toward higher levels of success and national recognition.

“Jim has coaching in his DNA,” says Stevens. “His coaching staff and players always represent the university in the best manner possible and continue to bring pride and honor to the Department of Athletics. Jim does a terrific job of honoring his former coach and mentor, Andy Baylock, through competing for conference championships and post-season success. He is a valued colleague and friend.”

Says Auriemma, “I think Jim might be the best coach working at UConn over the past 15 years when you consider the resources he has and the challenges that inherently exist in this part of the world. To be able to consistently, year after year after year, put together a great baseball program and to produce the number of major leaguers they have, that’s the kind of stuff that’s done in warm-weather states where they play year-round.”

Penders embraces the responsibility of being part of the legacy of both Connecticut’s baseball history as well as the state’s flagship university. That was evident in 2010 following a loss to the University of Oregon in the first round of the NCAA baseball tournament, which included the Huskies’ first NCAA post-season win since 1979. He began his press conference talking about the history of baseball in Storrs and the brothers who donated their farmland to begin the agricultural school that would evolve into the University of Connecticut.

Stephen Slade

Penders led the Huskies to their first-ever American Athletic Conference crown last season, finishing 38–25 en route to their fourth NCAA Tournament appearance in the last seven seasons. Four Huskies were drafted to MLB teams in 2016, including All-American Anthony Kay, who went 31st overall to the New York Mets. All told, Penders has had 39 players drafted or signed by professional baseball clubs.

“We’re just trying to outwork the opposition,” Penders had said. “We have won more games [48] than any other team that has worn the uniform since 1896. Nobody can take that away. I talked to the guys about Charles and Augustus Storrs. They just wanted to be better farmers. That’s where it started. That’s what it’s got to be about. We’ve got to outwork everybody.”

Penders’ insistence on hard work and accountability is not just for his players; it also is for his coaching staff and, most important, himself. He says there is a reminder of that expectation each day when he puts on his baseball uniform, No. 16, to coach his team. Most college athletes choose a uniform number worn by a parent or older sibling, a favorite professional athlete in the sport, or the number they wore in high school. As a UConn freshman, Penders asked to wear No. 15, the number worn by New York Yankees catcher Thurman Munson, his favorite player growing up. Learning it belonged to another Husky player, he asked the veteran equipment manager for any odd number — but nothing with the No. 6, a number he disliked. The next day, he found a uniform hanging in his locker with No. “16” on it.

“The next year, you get to change the number,” Penders says. “I’ve kept it because it’s a daily reminder: Don’t take yourself so seriously; you’re not that important. The program, the university, are a hell of a lot more important than you’ll ever be. My father playing here, my uncle playing here, there’s a real history that’s important to me, and I try not to screw it up. I wear it as a constant reminder of that. No matter how many games we win, you’re still wearing 16, and you’re still that clueless freshman.”

Turn to page 50 for information about the new baseball facility planned for these Huskies.

And go to s.uconn.edu/penders for an annotated, narrated tour of the myriad paraphernalia in Jim Penders’ Gampel Pavilion office.

Courtesy of UConn Cares

For information about alumni happenings in your neck of the woods, visit uconnalumni.com/events.

UConn Nation Gives Back

The first UConn Cares event kicked off this April, with alums volunteering across America. The program exceeded all expectations, says Jodi Kaplan, senior director of Alumni Relations. With 22 events nationwide, more alums in L.A., San Francisco, Austin, Chicago, Tampa, Hartford, and many other locations volunteered at food banks, animal shelters, soup kitchens, and coastal and park cleanups to name a few. The purpose of UConn Cares, says Kaplan, is for alumni to join together to volunteer for causes that are meaningful and beneficial to their own communities.
—EMMA CASAGRANDE '18 (CLAS)

Clockwise from top left: In Philly, alums spent a day working on a small urban farm with Urbanstead, an organization that uses urban farming to empower Philadelphia's vulnerable youth; in Boynton Beach, Florida, alums sorted goods for Feeding South Florida, which gives food to local soup kitchens, food pantries, homeless shelters, and day cares; in Chicago, alums put their creativity to use making cat wands and dog tug toys for the Anti-Cruelty Society; and San Francisco alums volunteered with Habitat for Humanity in the Park Beautification project.

CLASS NOTES

1950s

Everett Hyland '52 (CAHNR), a Stamford, Conn., native and survivor of Pearl Harbor, reports that he is living in Honolulu, Hawaii. At age 93, he is still an active volunteer at the Memorial. He has fond memories of his four years in Storrs, where he attended the School of Agriculture and was a member of Kappa Sigma fraternity.

Norman Freyer '58 (CAHNR) was recently awarded a lifetime membership in the Citrus Watercolor Society. He is a past president of the society and the only lifetime member. He is also a member of the Nature Coast Painters art critique group and The Art Center of Citrus County, and is an associate member of the Florida Watercolor Society. His work can be seen on his website, norman-freyer.artistwebsites.com

1960s

Theodore Pisk '65 (CLAS) and his father, Stan Pisk, were inducted into the Connecticut section of the Professional Golfers' Association of America's Hall of Fame in November during a ceremony at Foxwoods Resort Casino. Stan Pisk, a WWII vet who fought in the Normandy invasion and Battle of the Bulge, was awarded posthumously. Both Pisks worked for many years as golf professionals at the A.W. Stanley Municipal Golf Course in New Britain. Ted Pisk, who majored in political science and minored in economics at UConn, did not play on the University's golf team because he was already a professional golfer by then.

John Strom '65 (CLAS), '76 MA published a new book, *Maximizing Your ROPI—Return on Your People Investment*. It focuses on how to attract and retain the "best people" by creating the "best job" in the "best organization," says Strom, who has more than 30 years of experience in management training, coaching, and consulting. He was sports editor and editor-in-chief of the *Connecticut Daily Campus* when he was an undergraduate.

John Harrington '66 (CLAS) published a novel in 2016 with Archway Books, *The Year of the Lieutenant*. He wrote it in the mid-'70s, then rewrote it in recent years. He tells us it is the story of United States Air Force personnel serving in Thailand during the time of the Vietnam War.

Robert Nicoletti '67 MA, '68 Sixth Year reports that his book *Parenthood : A Life Sentence? A Journey from Womb to Tomb* has been released by Outskirts Press. Nicoletti is a retired school superintendent and is currently on the faculty in the Graduate School of Education at Quinnipiac University.

Carol Milardo Floriani '68 (NUR) reports that she is currently "retired" in Easley, S.C., but continues to work as a hospice nurse, visiting patients in their homes. Her previous careers were in nursing education and management of hospices and home health agencies in California. "I am ever grateful for Dean Widmer and Jo Henderson for my great UConn education!" she says.

Arno Zimmer '68 (CLAS), of Bridgeport, Conn., has released *Return to Parlor City,* the sequel to his first 1950s mystery novel, *The Parlor City Boys*. The novel follows a master con artist on the run who can't resist the opportunity to return to the scene of his earlier crimes. Zimmer also has written three children's books and a business textbook.

1970s

Getulio P. Carvalho '71 MA, '76 Ph.D, a member of the board of directors for the Government Accountability Project (GAP), has funded the Carvalho Fellowship for International Research, which will be awarded each summer. The GAP is a nongovernmental organization and law firm in Washington, D.C., that works to protect and defend whistleblowers in the U.S. and around the world. The 2016 fellow is Keith Henderson, who teaches law at American University and specializes in whistleblower-protection legislation.

Ann I. Weber '74 (CLAS), '85 JD, of Shatz, Schwartz and Fentin, was recently selected to the 2016 Massachusetts Super Lawyers List in the field of elder law. Weber, who lives in Granville, Mass., concentrates her practice in the areas of estate planning, estate administration, probate, and elder law.

Arthur Horwitz '76 (CLAS) was elected in February as board chair of Detroit Public Television, the 10th largest PBS affiliate. He recently concluded a four-year term as commissioner and chair of the nonpartisan Michigan Civil Rights Commission, which in 2016 received more than 2,000 claims of housing, employment, and public accommodation discrimination and completed an extensive investigation into alleged civil rights violations centered on the Flint water crisis. He is president of Renaissance Media. His wife, **Gina Wesler Horwitz '78 (CLAS)**, is a senior major gift officer for Wayne State University in Detroit.

Gregory S. Woodward '77 (SFA) has been named the new president of the University of Hartford in Connecticut effective July 1. Woodward, who graduated magna cum laude from UConn with a bachelor of music, becomes the sixth president of the liberal arts school, which houses The Hartt School of music. Woodward, a composer, musician, scholar, and athlete, has been president of Carthage College in Kenosha, Wis., since 2012 and was formerly dean of the school of music at Ithaca College. He grew up in West Hartford, Conn., and attended Hall High School.

Paul Agrimis '79 (ENG), of Portland, Ore., recently received the Distinguished Practitioner award from the Oregon Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Clifford A. Lange '79 (CLAS) was recently promoted to executive vice president-chief financial officer and chief actuary of Boston Mutual Life Insurance Co. in Canton, Mass. Lange and his wife, **Cindy Lange '87 (CLAS)**, moved to Mattapoisett, Mass., in 2016 now that their three daughters have "grown up and left the nest." In 2016, Lange completed 120.7 miles in a three-day footrace called "Across the Years" in Glendale, Ariz. In 2015, he completed 61.1 miles in a 24-hour footrace called "24 Hours Around the Lake" in Wakefield, Mass.

1980s

Chris Gedney '81 (ED) was hired by Arizona State University (ASU) after receiving her Ph.D. in social work from the University of Utah in May 2017. Gedney was the first UConn women's basketball scholarship athlete and retired from the Air Force with the rank of lieutenant colonel. Her dissertation, the first randomized controlled trial of a military sexual assault intervention, revealed major shortfalls and significant areas for improvement. She presented her findings to

KUDOS

Former women's basketball star and current ESPN analyst **Rebecca Lobo '95 (CLAS)** talks with ESPN's Jay Bilas about being named to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. The first UConn player to win the honor, she joins UConn coaches Geno Auriemma and Jim Calhoun. Lobo helped bring UConn its first national championship during the undefeated 1994-95 season.

several members of Congress and is currently developing curriculum for a military social work concentration at ASU. **LeeAnn (Landrigan) Coleman '83 (BUS)**, controller of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, was promoted in 2016 to deputy director of financial services. She was honored by Boston Mayor Marty Walsh as an Innovation Excellence Award winner, which recognizes innovative ideas, hard work, and commitment by Boston city employees. Her team was selected for the role they played in launching the Authority's new web-based Property Management Solution to proactively manage its commercial real estate portfolio.

Eric T. Johnson '84 (CLAS), of Pomfret Center, Conn., recently published a book, *From Park Ranger to Conservation Police Officer*, which chronicles his career in conservation law enforcement. **Susan Brillhart '84 (NUR)**, of Hoboken, N.J., a pediatric nurse practitioner for 30 years, was recently honored for her commitment as a volunteer for neglected and abused children in the Hudson County court system. She was given *New Jersey Monthly* magazine's Seeds of Hope Award for her commitment as one of the state's most dedicated volunteers. Flutist **Suzanne Bona '85 (SFA)** was the featured guest performer in a chamber music concert Oct. 15, 2016, at the University of Guam in Mangilao. She also gave a master class for flute students. Her nationally syndicated radio program, "Sunday Baroque," is broadcast via KPRG, the local public radio station in Guam. **Leslie Imse '87 MA**, chair of the music department for Farmington public schools, was presented the Departmental Arts Program Excellence Award by the Connecticut Arts Administrators Association. "My education at the University of Connecticut has served me well in the field of music, and I am a proud Husky!" she said. **Heather Sherman Somers '88 (CLAS)** was elected to the Connecticut State Senate in November 2016. **Sharon Buchta Rizzo '88 (SFA)** is a professional cellist and music educator in Big Bear Lake, Calif. She is responsible for the first strings program in the community and founder of MountainTop Strings of California, a youth orchestra and camerata that plays throughout the region. The camerata performed March 13, 2017 at Carnegie Hall as part of the National Youth Concert.

Dr. John Thomas Marcoux '89 (CAHNR) of Sudbury, Mass., a foot and ankle surgeon practicing as program director for podiatric medicine and surgery residency at St. Elizabeth's Medical Center in Brighton, Mass., received the 2017 American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons' Distinguished Service Award, one of the college's highest honors. He was presented with the award at the ACFAS Annual Scientific Conference in Las Vegas in February 2017.

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or via snail mail to
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UConn Foundation
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Submissions may be edited for clarity or length.

1990s

Don Langer '90 (BUS), the CEO for the UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Texas, has been elected to the board of directors of Special Olympics Texas. **Erin Sherman Pezqueda '91 (CLAS), 6th Year** recently received her UConn Administrator Preparation Program diploma from UConn. **Kathleen (Szewczyk) Kenney '93 (ED)** received the 2016 Pennsylvania State Association of Health Physical Education Recreation and Dance Professional Honor Award. **Jessica McCauley '97 (BUS)**, of Monroe, Conn., was recently named a partner in the accounting firm of Beers, Hamerman, Cohen & Burger. McCauley joined the firm in 2006 and specializes in providing accounting and auditing services to a variety of organizations including not-for-profits, manufacturing companies, and employee benefit plans. Outside of work, she serves as treasurer and board member of the Monroe Travel Basketball League and is a member of the finance and investment committees of the Kennedy Center.

Maura A. Power '94 (CAHNR), a PE teacher and running coach at Trinity Catholic Academy in Southbridge, Mass., ran her first marathon, in Clonakilty, Ireland, in December. She says it took her six hours and was hard mentally in the middle of the trek, from miles 13 to 18. Her trip was sponsored by Vibram, an Italian company that produces rubber outsoles for footwear, and Team Hoyt Running Chairs, which makes running chairs for people with disabilities. **Jennifer Monahan '95 MBA** recently released her first book, *This Trip Will Change Your Life: A Shaman's Story of Spirit Evolution*, which was selected as a finalist in the 2016 USA Best Book Awards in the Spiritual-Inspirational category. **Cheryl (Dyson) Stephenson '99 (CAHNR)** was recently promoted to controller of MetroHartford Alliance.

2000s

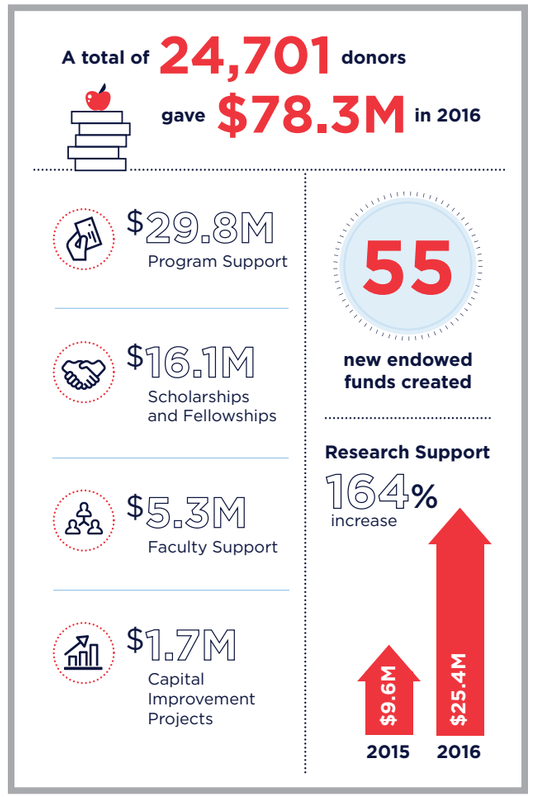
Danielle (Beil) Nartowicz '03 (BUS) recently was promoted to Group Vice President of Financial Planning at Macy's. She has been with the company for more than 10 years. **Rebecca J. Pirozzolo-Mellowes '04 JD** has been elected to the partnership at Foley & Lardner's Milwaukee office. **Jill (Curtis) Heslin '04 (CLAS)** and **Kevin Heslin '05 (CLAS)** welcomed their first son, Brian Curtis Heslin, in October 2016. They were married in 2009. **Brian E. Tims '05 (BUS), '08 JD,** an attorney at Halloran & Sage LLP, was selected for *The Connecticut Law Tribune*'s "New Leaders in the Law Class of 2016." A panel of judges chose him based on his efforts and achievements in development of the law, advocacy and community contributions, service to the bar, and peer and public recognition.

2010s

Barbara Jean Beck Beeching '10 Ph.D. reports that she published a book, *Hopes and Expectations: The Origins of the Black Middle Class in Hartford*, through SUNY Press in January 2017. She earned her first degree in journalism in 1950 at the University of Missouri and returned to academia later in life, earning a master's in American studies at Trinity College in 1996 and a doctorate in history at the University of Connecticut in 2010. **Ron Ciak '11 (CLAS, ENG)** married **Collyn Seeger '08 (CLAS), '09 MS** on Oct. 16, 2016, in Groton, Conn., at the Branford House on the grounds of UConn Avery Point. **Jordan Bennett '11 (CLAS)** recently took a job as senior public relations manager at The Berman Group, a marketing, public relations, and event-planning firm in New York City. Prior to that, he was a member of Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign's rapid response communications team and previously was associate director of communications for Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser. **Kelcie Reid '13 (CLAS), '16 JD, '16 MPH** has joined the law offices of John Q. Gale in Hartford as an associate attorney. She was admitted to the Connecticut Bar Association in November after earning her law degree and a master's in public health degree from UConn in May. **Bayla Ostrach '14 Ph.D.**, published a book, *Health Policy in a Time of Crisis: Abortion, Austerity, and Access*, in January 2017. **Shane Kelly '14 (ENG)**, who is currently working on his doctorate in physics at the University of California Riverside, was selected as an inaugural recipient of the UC-National Lab In-Residence Graduate Fellowship. He'll conduct research and get training at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in a project titled "Strongly Coupled Atomtronics."

BY THE NUMBERS

UConn Foundation thanks you for your generosity in 2016.



Source: The UConn Foundation/www.foundation.uconn.edu

IN MEMORIAM

Please visit **s.uconn.edu/june17obits** to find obituaries for alumni and faculty. And please share news of alumni deaths and obituaries with *UConn Magazine* by sending an email to alumni-news@uconnalumni.com or writing to Alumni News & Notes, UConn Foundation, 2384 Alumni Drive Unit 3053, Storrs, CT 06269.

Alum James Gagliardi is a supervisory horticulturalist at the Smithsonian Gardens in Washington, D.C.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

GREEN THUMB, BLEEDS BLUE

James Gagliardi '05 (CAHNR) has an encyclopedic mind for all things ecological, a fact quickly apparent on a tour of his gardens — which happen also to be every U.S. citizen's gardens. Gagliardi is a supervisory horticulturalist at the Smithsonian Gardens in Washington, D.C.

As we saunter along the grounds of the Mary Livingston Ripley Garden, I request a fun fact. He glances at the plant directly to our right and says, "This species was discovered in Georgia in the 1780s by the Bartrams. They brought the seeds to Philadelphia and named the tree after their good friend Benjamin Franklin." Pointing to a label reading simply *Franklinia alatamaha*, he adds, "They were never found in the wild again."

Gagliardi has helped select, plan, and maintain the natural variety around some of the world's most visited museums, tying each garden to the accompanying museum's theme. "Outside the Sackler Gallery are Asian plants, going back to a Ming Dynasty aesthetic," he says. "Outside the African Art Museum is more of an Alhambra aesthetic. Outside the American History Museum is a Victory Garden," named for the gardens planted by millions during the world wars to ease constraints on the public food supply.

Gagliardi entered UConn as an undeclared major but had always enjoyed gardening, selling cut flowers out of his 1780s colonial home in Berlin, Conn. He joined and eventually became president of the Horticulture Club and ran its annual on-campus horticulture show. A junior year internship at Polly Hill Arboretum on Martha's Vineyard solidified his decision to enter public horticulture for its combined focus on education, sustainability, and creating respites for people. He graduated with a major in horticulture and minors in business administration and landscape design.

Afterward, Gagliardi received his master's in public horticulture at the University of Delaware. He joined the Smithsonian in 2011.

Last summer he transformed the popular butterfly garden to a broader "pollinator garden." Filled with placards about the 230 plants within, he calls it "the first true 'exhibit' within the Smithsonian Gardens." Inside you'll learn, for instance, that some bumblebees buzz at the piano equivalent of a middle C note, hummingbirds consume up to 12,000 calories per day, and there are four times as many species of beetles as animals with backbones. Gagliardi notes one downside of appealing to the Snapchat generation: "We used to put 200 words on a panel. Now we're down to 50 or so."

Next on Gagliardi's to-do list is an "evolution garden," with plants dating back to the dinosaur eras, including ginkgos, bald cypress trees, and various ferns.

"Thirty million people come through our gardens each year, and UConn has had an influence on all these landscapes," he says, and he's not exaggerating. Horticulture professor Mark Brand bred and patented a switchgrass called ruby ribbons, which begins with blue-green foliage but turns red weeks earlier than similar switchgrasses. Gagliardi planted it between the Natural History and American History museums — right in the heart of our capital. —*JESSE RIFKIN '14 (CLAS)*

All photos courtesy of Smithsonian Gardens

Gagliardi, weeding below right, notes that with no visiting hours, guards, or gates, the gardens are the only Smithsonian properties open 24/7/365. "Instead of approaching a sterile government building, you get something both aesthetically beautiful and educational," he says. Center left he and staff of Smithsonian Gardens and the National Museum of Natural History discuss an upcoming exhibit in the Pollinator Garden on Biocubes—the life in a cubic foot of soil or water over one day. Top is the Smithsonian Castle and below left, the Castle seen from the Moon Gate Garden, inspired by the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, next to the Sackler Museum housing Asian art.

ONE YEAR OUT

Ryan Glista

Khadijah-Hajdu takes a break at Dog Lane Cafe in Storrs Center in between working the campus job fair for her new employer and attending a graduate class in electrical engineering.

JACQUELYN KHADIJAH-HAJDU

Almost a year after graduating, **Jacquelyn Khadijah-Hajdu '16 (ENG)** found herself in Storrs for the annual spring semester Career Fair — except this time she was collecting resumés rather than handing hers out.

She says she felt an unfamiliar sense of disconnect from the students approaching her table, despite having walked in their shoes less than a year ago. "It's hard to use words to describe how different it is," says Khadijah-Hajdu, who is from South Windsor, Connecticut.

After graduating with a degree in electrical engineering, she spent her first year out in the "real world" working for Applied Physical Sciences Corporation (APS), even though working wasn't originally part of her post-grad plan. Khadijah-Hajdu says she had planned to focus solely on pursuing a master's degree, but when she received the job offer from APS, it was too good to pass up. And the best part? Her employer is paying for her to pursue her master's in electrical engineering at UConn.

Khadijah-Hajdu says she owes at lot of her ease in finding a job to UConn's research opportunities. She worked with her professors on research projects and participated in a senior design project where her group created a product that measured the strength of a military dog's bite. "It helped a lot," she says. "That was what attracted [my employers] to me. They were like, 'You're doing a lot of research as an undergraduate. We think you'd be good here.'"

Adjusting to work life wasn't entirely easy for Khadijah-Hajdu. On top of adapting to 40-hour weeks, she was thrown into an in-progress project without a clue about what was expected of her. "Sometimes they'd be like, 'Oh you need to make sure the compass works.' And I think, 'Okay, what is the compass? Where is the compass? What do I need to make sure works about it?'" she explains. "I talked to a couple of people and they told me, 'You have to get used to that. That's how it is here.'" Now she says she is much more confident in her abilities to take initiative in a project.

Looking back, Khadijah-Hajdu says she probably put more pressure on herself than her employers put on her. "You wonder if you are meeting the expectations people had when they hired you, catching on fast enough, et cetera," she says. "But there is a period of training and catch-up time, and even though I've been working for about a year, I still have some catching up to do." —*EMMA CASAGRANDE '18 (CLAS)*

Peter Morenus

CALLING UCONN NATION

IF WE BUILD IT . . .

UConn Athletics wants all student-athletes to have world-class facilities. Fields of dreams in the planning for baseball and softball would have three-sided stadiums with restrooms and concessions, lighted artificial-turf competition fields, locker rooms, dug-outs, batting tunnels, home and visitor bullpens, and press boxes.

For a peek at these and other athletic facilities in the works, and to contribute to making them happen, go to s.uconn.edu/facilities.

Photos courtesy of Michael Zacchea

Zacchea (left) with Abdel-ridha Gibrael (in beret) at Kirkush; Gibrael secretly fed information to Zacchea about the Iraqi officers. Right: Soldiers from Fifth Battalion are packed into a Marine Corps amphibious assault vehicle minutes before the breach of Fallujah in November 2004.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

MICHAEL ZACCHEA WAS THE FIRST U.S. MILITARY ADVISER TO THE IRAQI ARMY AFTER THE FALL OF SADDAM HUSSEIN

In the wake of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, **Michael Zacchea '12 MBA**, director of the School of Business' Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities (EBV), eagerly accepted his assignment to build, train, and lead an Iraqi army.

In his just-released book, *The Ragged Edge,* Zacchea talks about the staggering hardships and unique challenges he faced and details the insurgent movement that ultimately gave rise to ISIS.

The recipient of two Bronze Stars, the Purple Heart, and Iraq's Order of the Lion of Babylon, Zacchea describes not just the physical and tactical challenges the U.S. faced but also the physical and psychological toll war takes on a military leader.

And he shares the powerful saga of personal bonds of friendship with Iraqis, the importance of investing the time to develop an understanding and appreciation of another culture — and an assassination plot meant to kill him.

"The thing that saved me was the trusting relationship I had developed with the Iraqis. They watched out for me; they protected me. Absent that, I think it would have been a very different outcome," says Zacchea.

He describes his mission in Iraq as like "trying to build an airplane in mid-flight." Supplies were scarce or non-existent, from food to functioning toilets to beds, boots, radios, and vehicles. And beyond those basics were the obvious cultural and religious divides that challenged the development of a cohesive, respectable, accomplished battalion ready to battle the insurgents.

"Our military unit included Zoroastrians that the Iraqis called 'fire worshippers'; Yazidis, whom the Iraqis referred to as 'devil worshippers'; and various other ethnic and religious groups, many of whom had a long-standing hatred toward each other," says Zacchea.

On top of that, he says, Iraqi soldiers were free to resign whenever they wished. "We never knew how many military personnel we'd have on any given day."

The Iraq War was incredibly complex because of brutal combat, says Zacchea, but also the challenges of language, religion, propaganda, and culture.

"Some of these people in the Iraqi army had fought against U.S. forces — or against each other. It was a crazy situation. I'm not aware of any other advisory mission where they took warring factions and tried to make a cohesive army out of them."

Zacchea says his time there taught him many lessons, chief among them the importance of "political vigilance."

He recounts how the Iraqis' first election in January 2005 saw an estimated 70 percent turnout.

"I think about that versus how only one-third of Americans are willing to vote. They say things like, 'Oh, I didn't go because it was raining.'

"Americans don't risk their lives to vote. We often take that privilege for granted. People need to be politically involved." —*CLAIRE HALL*

For more on Zacchea, his program, and the EBV, go to s.uconn.edu/zacchea.

Melissa Rawlins / ESPN Images

JOB ENVY

For most citizens, political debates are all about assessing the candidates. But not if you're **Molly Qerim '06 (CLAS).** "I pay a lot of attention to the moderators," she told *UConn Magazine* while sitting outside a TV studio at ESPN headquarters in Bristol, Conn. "I want to see how they craft their questions, how they follow up."

Qerim's a moderator of a different sort as the host of "First Take," ESPN's fiery sports debate show starring the emphatic duo of Stephen A. Smith and Max Kellerman (on the set with Qerim above). "They definitely have strong opinions," says Qerim, "and it can be challenging to keep the conversation moving along, especially when the guys are having a heated debate. You don't want to move on, but we have to. There are other topics we need to get to."

When Qerim landed in Bristol in July 2015, it represented a full-circle return to ESPN, where she had started as an intern a decade earlier while a communications student at UConn; she then had worked in the company's digital media and on the TV side before moving on. Now she's back, and her dream job of hosting "First Take" doesn't even feel like a job. "You're talking about things you'd be talking about anyway in your free time," she said. "We're all big sports fans."

Qerim grew up in Cheshire, Conn., in a family of Husky fans. Her father and an older sister went to UConn as undergraduates, and her mother earned her master's degree here. The family has had season tickets to men's and women's basketball since even before Gampel Pavilion opened in 1990. "I've been going to games my whole life," she says. "I was the little girl with Husky tattoos on my chubby cheeks." —*JEFF WAGENHEIM*

For more of our interview with Qerim, go to s.uconn.edu/qerim.

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TOM'S TRIVIA

CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO TOM'S TRIVIA!

Go to s.uconn.edu/june17trivia to see if you know as much as King of UConn Trivia and University Deputy Spokesperson Tom Breen '00 (CLAS).

1. **In May 1970, hundreds of students occupied the ROTC hangar on campus and staged a "paint-in" because they wanted the building converted to what?**

   A: A center for peace studies
   B: A day care facility
   C: A student recreation center
   D: Communal housing for male and female students

2. **The UConn men's basketball team made its first NCAA tournament appearance on March 20, 1951, in a game that had so many UConn students in attendance a special train from Willimantic to New York was chartered. Who defeated the Huskies on that occasion?**

   A: St. John's
   B: Georgetown
   C: Boston College
   D: Syracuse

3. **The Josephine Dolan Collection at the School of Nursing includes everything from period medical uniforms to a 500-pound iron lung. Who was Josephine Dolan?**

   A: UConn's first dean of nursing
   B: An alumna of the nursing school
   C: The first nursing instructor at UConn
   D: A Connecticut nurse who traveled the world collecting medical artifacts

4. **Between the end of World War II and the mid-1950s, an area on the north side of campus became known as "Oil Can Alley." What was this area used for?**

   A: The university motor pool
   B: Experiments by the School of Engineering
   C: Construction equipment storage
   D: Faculty housing

Nursing students in a dissection course circa 1946. The program is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary.